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• (1105)

[*Translation*]

Hon. Greg Fergus (Speaker of the House of Commons): I call this meeting to order.

Welcome to meeting number 31 of the Board of Internal Economy.

[*English*]

First on the agenda, of course, are minutes from the previous meeting. Are there any changes to the minutes?

Seeing none, shall the minutes be adopted?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Hon. Greg Fergus: Thank you.

The second item is business arising from the minutes.

[*Translation*]

Is there any business arising from previous meetings? Seeing no hands raised, I will ask that this item be adopted.

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Hon. Greg Fergus: We are moving on to the third item on the agenda, which concerns the possible donation of a table to the Montserrat Legislature.

I'm going to invite Rebekah Kletke to come forward and get ready.

[*English*]

I'll start with a couple of opening comments on this, however.

This is a matter that was raised with me at the 75th Commonwealth Speakers meeting at Westminster. The parliament in Montserrat had been consumed by a volcano. They've moved their capital, and now they're rebuilding their legislature. They had sought assistance from other parliaments to know if they wanted to make any contributions in kind to that effect. I'll ask Ms. Kletke to run us through the proposition.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Rebekah Kletke (Chief Operations Officer): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

[*English*]

Following the request received by the Speaker during the Commonwealth meeting in March of this year, the administration has

taken away the request, and we've done an internal costing with our trades team to provide the board with a broad estimate of what the construction of a table for the Legislative Assembly of Montserrat would cost from a material perspective, using the services of our internal trade services team. We've included in that estimate, as you can see in the note, the potential travel costs.

The table to be shipped to Montserrat would have to be disassembled. This is a table that will be, should the board approve, made by master craftspersons. It requires their technical expertise to reconstruct it once on site. We've laid out what it would cost, and we've also worked with our financial and legal services colleagues on the approval process for these types of donations.

As Mr. Fergus has outlined, this is a request that we've received. It's certainly in line with other donations, and it is a long-standing tradition among Commonwealth parliaments to make such donations. We leave this to the board to discuss the possibility of this donation to Montserrat.

• (1110)

Hon. Greg Fergus: I have Mr. Julian on the speaking list.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. DeBellefeuille, if you wish to speak, please use the "raise hand" function.

Mr. Julian, the floor is yours.

[*English*]

Mr. Peter Julian (House leader of the New Democratic Party): Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I had the fortune to visit Montserrat a few years ago, and it's hard to overstate the incredible devastation of that volcanic eruption. The capital city, the major city, was completely devastated, and the impacts are still felt today. The southern portion of the island is still uninhabitable. Hundreds, if not thousands, of people had to seek refuge off the island. The island has very few resources, and they've been trying to rebuild ever since.

Given the incredible devastation, the refugees and the fact that the island is struggling to rebuild after an apocalyptic event that destroyed everything, including the airport, the capital, most major commerce, schools and hospitals, it seems to me that this is a modest donation. However, it is very symbolic just the same, in solidarity between the people of Canada and the people of Montserrat, so I certainly support this contribution to their rebuilding efforts, which continue today.

Hon. Greg Fergus: Ms. Findlay, you have the floor.

Hon. Kerry-Lynne Findlay (South Surrey—White Rock, CPC): I have a point for clarification.

I agree that these Commonwealth connections and providing something like this would be a good gesture for Canada. On the travel costs, is that for the craftsmen to go there to reassemble the table? Is that what we're talking about?

Ms. Rebekah Kletke: Yes, it is.

Hon. Greg Fergus: Are there any other questions?

Do I see a consensus to proceed? Good. Thank you.

[*Translation*]

We are moving on to the fourth item on the agenda, which concerns the Annual Report on the Members of the House of Commons Workplace Harassment and Violence Prevention Policy for 2023–2024.

I will now invite someone we know very well to take the floor.

Ms. Evangelidis, the floor is yours.

Ms. Carlyne Evangelidis (Chief Human Resources Officer, House of Commons): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Today I am presenting the 2023–2024 Annual Report on the Members of the House of Commons Workplace Harassment and Violence Prevention Policy, which applies to members as employers and to their employees.

From April 1, 2023, to March 31, 2024, 17 new incidents were reported to the Office of the Chief Human Resources Officer. Of the 17 incidents, nine are related to third party cases, and those cases were resolved following a review of the workplace assessment.

As we continue to do outreach and education and provide tools on the policy, we anticipate that there will be an increase in the number of incidents reported. This policy allows employers to be aware of the risks these behaviours pose to the health and safety of their workplace and to contribute to fostering a safe and positive workplace for their employees.

[*English*]

The report also details the training and awareness activities related to this policy framework. This includes informing members' employees about their obligation regarding workplace harassment and violence prevention during their onboarding and confirming that all active MPs have completed the mandatory training.

To further support members in their role as employers and promote a healthy and safe workplace for all, we, in collaboration with the Sergeant-at-Arms office, are continually reviewing our security awareness training and implementing preventive measures to maintain a safe and healthy environment for all.

We are happy to answer any questions that the board may have.

• (1115)

[*Translation*]

Hon. Greg Fergus: Are there any questions or comments?

Ms. Findlay, you have the floor.

[*English*]

Hon. Kerry-Lynne Findlay: Thank you.

Thank you for your presentation.

You mentioned five complaints last year that concern “multiple grounds”. Can you break that down for us a little bit? What are the overlaps?

Maybe I can ask you my two questions, and then you can answer. Is that all right, Chair?

I was also wondering about this upward trend. I think you said it was due to increased awareness, which I understand. That's probable. As a lawyer in a past life, I dealt with a lot of these kinds of issues.

What I was wondering about, though, is the reason, or are we seeing an increase? What about trends in other workplaces? Is that an issue, or do you feel it's just more about awareness and processes?

Ms. Carlyne Evangelidis: I will answer your second question, and I will pass your first question to my colleague to answer.

To your second question, I believe that awareness definitely does promote more opportunity for individuals to understand the processes in place. Usually when you put in a new policy, it takes a couple of years before it's 100% implemented and people feel comfortable with it.

I'm not going to say that we want to see the uptake, because we don't want harassment in the workplace, but it is normal to see an uptake. That said, we are seeing, I think, that the environment today also speaks to more harassment in the world. I think that it's a subject that is spoken to quite a bit and that this awareness is not just in our workplace; I think that is something that is globally prominent.

On for the first question, though—

Ms. Myriam Beauparlant (Manager, Respectful Workplace, Diversity and Inclusion, House of Commons): “Multiple grounds” means essentially that the person who came with the complaint was complaining about different situations, but also on different grounds, meaning potentially general harassment, psychological harassment and maybe even violence in certain circumstances.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Greg Fergus: Mrs. DeBellefeuille, you have the floor.

Mrs. Claude DeBellefeuille (Whip of the Bloc Québécois): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I understand that complaints are increasing because the policy is known. In fact, as an administration, we want to make our policies known so that people who are going through difficult situations in the workplace know what they need to do to get the support they need. That's good news. I expect that the number of complaints will continue to rise in the coming years as the policy becomes more well known.

Ms. Evangelidis, since the policy has been in place, are you aware of any similar complaints where resolution has been acceptable to both parties?

Could training be put in place to avoid repeated behaviours that are the subject of complaints, or at least to reduce their occurrence?

Is there a pattern emerging? Is there more harassment? Are there things that could be done to avoid what comes up year after year in terms of the grounds for a complaint?

Ms. Carolyne Evangelidis: Thank you for the question.

Yes, I would say we need to be civil and respectful in the workplace. We're trying to focus on that, and a number of our training courses do that. We still have work to do on it.

A new tool is now available to the House, and it will soon be presented to members. The tool will be there to support them and to let them know what training is available.

You will also be able to suggest to your employees which training courses to take and see which ones they have not taken. You will be able to check the training calendar.

Our team is there to recommend training to you. That said, I believe that a new training course was recently added.

• (1120)

[*English*]

Can you comment on that?

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Myriam Beauparlant: In co-operation with the Office of the Sergeant-at-Arms and Corporate Security, we're trying to reduce the number of unpleasant situations and ensure a workplace that's free of harassment.

We also need more security. Thanks to the partnership between human resources and the Office of the Sergeant-at-Arms, we're able to provide solutions and resolve situations.

Mrs. Claude DeBellefeuille: Okay, thank you.

Hon. Greg Fergus: Thank you very much, Mrs. DeBellefeuille.

Ms. Sahota, you have the floor.

[*English*]

Hon. Ruby Sahota (Brampton North, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

At the outset, I just want to say that I really appreciate the increased training and the professionalism that I've seen in getting to resolutions.

I am wondering about—I didn't see this in the report—the number of employers we have who are currently under this policy and how many employees we have. We had an increase in the number of employees since 2021.

In terms of these complaints, is there overlap? Are there numerous complaints for one employer, or are these all separate complaints for separate employers?

Ms. Carolyne Evangelidis: Regarding the increase for the training itself for the employees—this is what I was referring to earlier—every member is going to have access to their employees, and they will see what training they've done. The awareness is there. If my mind serves me right, I think we've had 1,919 employees and staffers take the training since 2021. We're looking at that on a regular basis to ensure all active employees at this time actually have done it. We'll be doing a follow-up with you. It's up to the employer to encourage their employees to take the training, of course.

I'm sorry—what was your second question?

Hon. Ruby Sahota: It was along the lines of the numbers of employers and employees we currently have, just to have an idea. There are 17 complaints; how many employers and individuals are there?

Also, my follow-up to that is this: Are any of these complaints about the same individual, the same employer, or are they all separate, stand-alone complaints about separate employers?

Ms. Carolyne Evangelidis: For your second question, if I may, I can say it's not all the same employers, it's multiple. Usually when we're seeing the type of complaint that's coming in, there's a lot of the third party, as we were talking about, and part of that is a lot from public information, if I were to go even further. It's really not directed to one particular employer or one office.

Hon. Ruby Sahota: Perhaps I could follow up on that. If I understand correctly, each complaint is about a separate employer, and it could be made from third parties, as we see. Are you saying that you're also seeing a rise in complaints coming from third parties, as compared to the employees?

Ms. Carolyne Evangelidis: That's correct.

Hon. Ruby Sahota: Okay.

I also see that the number of complaints withdrawn is substantial enough—

Ms. Carolyne Evangelidis: Yes.

Hon. Ruby Sahota: —given the number of complaints. Is that usually due to the fact that the person feels they won't have a satisfactory outcome from the process, or is it due to other reasons that I'm unaware of?

Ms. Carolyne Evangelidis: Through you, Mr. Speaker, each situation is really evaluated case by case. The team of professionals will go in and actually speak to the employees, or to whoever's doing the complaint, and assess each situation. At that point, if the individual who is putting in a complaint feels fairly satisfied that there's a different route to take, they have withdrawn the complaint.

I wouldn't necessarily say it was because they don't feel they can go forward; I would say it's more because they're satisfied with the potential result that could occur outside of going through the full resolution process.

• (1125)

Hon. Ruby Sahota: Okay. That's interesting.

Thank you.

Hon. Greg Fergus: I have Mr. Julian on the speaking list.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Peter Julian: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Ms. Evangelidis, thank you for the work you're doing and for this report. What you're doing is extremely important.

I find it troubling to see the increase in the number of complaints. However, it's reassuring to see that people have a better understanding of how important this process is. Thank you very much for everything you're doing on this.

Are there any other cases on Parliament Hill that are not included in this report? I'm thinking of cases that might give rise to civil or judicial remedies.

Are all complaints included in this report?

Ms. Carolyne Evangelidis: Thank you. That's a good question.

We can only report the cases referred to us. I couldn't confirm 100% that there are other cases elsewhere, but it's possible.

We want to give people the opportunity to come and talk to the chief human resources officer about their complaint.

Mr. Peter Julian: The complaint process is extremely important, as is the resolution of complaints. If there have been civil or judi-

cial remedies in some cases, it would be important to know. It seems to me that we could try to obtain that information.

Is it possible to get that information?

Ms. Carolyne Evangelidis: I'm going to give Mr. Bédard an opportunity to answer that question.

Mr. Michel Bédard (Law Clerk and Parliamentary Counsel, House of Commons): Thank you for the question, Mr. Julian.

The report before you today is really the regulatory report prepared under the Canada Labour Code, which deals specifically with the nature of complaints.

As part of the employer-employee relationship between members and their staff, exchanges are planned. Complaints will sometimes be raised, without necessarily being formal complaints under the Canada Labour Code.

Through its human resources and legal services, the House Administration can help the member as an employer as well as the employee to facilitate the process or make representations, as needed.

Unfortunately, there are no established processes or reports to provide this type of information to the Board of Internal Economy.

In addition, I can't guarantee you that all cases are brought to the attention of human resources or legal services.

Hon. Greg Fergus: First of all, thank you, Ms. Evangelidis, Mrs. Beauparlant and Ms. Carpentier for your dedication and ongoing work on this very important issue. Let's continue to promote awareness so that everyone knows what's expected when it comes to professional and acceptable behaviour, and certainly what's not considered professional and acceptable.

Colleagues, we will now go in camera to discuss some other business.

The meeting is suspended.

[*Proceedings continue in camera*]

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