



## Opening Statement before the House of Commons Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics

**Mary Dawson – Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner**  
Ottawa, Ontario, May 6, 2013

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Mr. Chair, thank you for inviting me to appear before you today as the Committee considers my Office's budgetary submission for the 2013-14 Main Estimates.

With me this afternoon are Lyne Robinson-Dalpe, Assistant Commissioner for Advisory and Compliance, and Denise Benoit, Director of Corporate Management.

To provide some context for my remarks, I will begin by reviewing briefly the organization and operations of my Office. Then, I will outline our budgetary requirements for the current fiscal year and discuss any relevant considerations.

### *Organization and Operations*

To fulfill my mandate as effectively and efficiently as possible, I have organized my Office into five divisions. We are fully staffed and maintain a stable staff complement of 50 employees.

Advisory and Compliance is the largest division, accounting for about one-third of my staff. This group provides confidential advice to public office holders and Members of the House of Commons about their obligations under the *Conflict of Interest Act* and the *Conflict of Interest Code for Members of the House of Commons*. It reviews their confidential reports of assets, liabilities and activities, maintains internal records of this information, and administers a system of public disclosure.

Our primary goal is to help public office holders and Members meet their obligations under the Act and the Code, through education and guidance.

Our advisory and compliance services are complemented by a range of education and outreach activities, coordinated by our Policy, Research and Communications division. It also contributes to policy development, compiles research, conducts public communications and media relations, and coordinates our dealings with Parliament.

While the major focus of my Office is on prevention, we also investigate possible contraventions of the Act and the Code. Our Reports and Investigations division leads our investigations and coordinates the preparation of our annual reports.

Legal Services also plays a critical role in our investigations, and provides strategic legal advice on all facets of our work.

Our Corporate Management division oversees the development and implementation of all internal management policies and the delivery of services and advice on human resources, finance, information technology, information management and the management of Office facilities, including security. It also administers our shared services agreements with the House of Commons and the Library of Parliament in the areas of information technology, security and financial services, and with Public Works and Government Services for compensation services.

Finally, my own team within the Commissioner's Office provides general administrative and logistical support for the Office.

### *Estimates*

For the past five years, I have maintained the same operating budget of \$7.1 million. My budgetary requirements for 2013-14, which I will review with you in a moment, are sufficient to discharge my mandate in its current form. I note, however, that both the *Conflict of Interest Act* and the *Conflict of Interest Code for Members of the House of Commons* are under review, and any resulting changes could have resource implications for my Office. We would have to review any amendments to assess what, if any, resource adjustments they might entail. Most of the recommendations that I have made are resource-neutral, and the ones that are not are unlikely to have a major impact on our resource requirements.

This year, in keeping with the current climate of fiscal restraint, we are proactively offering a reduction to our operating budget. I expect my Office to be able to fund its operations with a reduced budget of \$7.035 million in 2013-14.

In 2012-13, we conducted a spending review that identified opportunities for efficiencies. These include using email rather than letter mail to communicate with some of our many stakeholders and restructuring the delivery of some of our internal functions. We also reduced the amount set aside as a reserve to cover unexpected situations. As a result, I was able to reduce the non-salary portion of my 2013-14 budget by \$190,000, which is equivalent to 3% of the 2012-13 total budget.

This reduction, however, is partially offset by a requested increase in our salary envelope of approximately \$90,000 to cover the economic increases that came into effect in 2013-14. The economic increases are in line with the results of collective bargaining in Parliament and the Public Service.

I note that in the fiscal year just ended, we absorbed within our existing salary budget the payment of severance allowances for some employees. This is the reason for the overspending in last year's salary budget. This was absorbed through the conversion of non-salary funds, rather than by requesting additional funds.

We remain cognizant of the ongoing need for budgetary restraint, and for good financial management and internal controls. We regularly and carefully monitor our spending, and ensure that our financial practices adhere to standard government practices. We have, for example, documented our internal financial management processes, identified potential risks and ensured that internal controls to address those risks are in place. Although we have no legal obligation to do so, we follow the practice of proactive disclosure and publish reports of spending on travel and hospitality on our website.

I am also pleased to report that, for the second year, the annual financial statements for my Office were audited independently and we again received a positive opinion.

### *Management Initiatives*

We continue to follow good management practices in other areas of our operations as well. Priorities for my Office are identified each fall at a strategic planning session of senior management, and refined throughout the fiscal year as appropriate.

My Office has a strong policy framework in the area of human resources that in 2012-13 enabled us to put in place policies and guidelines on specific issues.

For example, this year we instituted a guideline on job shadowing to support and encourage the career development of our employees, as well as a policy on workforce adjustment that is similar to policies in Parliament and the Public Service. The policy on workforce adjustment was not developed because of any current plan to downsize, but rather, proactively, to put in place appropriate mechanisms should we be faced with such a situation in the future.

Other policies and guidelines under development address such topics as occupational health and safety, and disability and duty to accommodate. We have also updated our Terms and Conditions of Employment to reflect similar changes made to leave provisions and severance pay in Parliament and the Public Service.

Although there are strong indicators that the Office is a healthy workplace, including the now stable staffing levels and very low turnover, we have contracted with an independent third party to conduct an employee satisfaction survey later this spring.

We are developing a performance measurement strategy to demonstrate the effectiveness of my Office in fulfilling its mandate.

In the area of technology, we have invested in a new application to manage the content of our website, because the current application has reached its full capacity. We expect to deploy it in the near future. This improvement follows the launch in April 2012 of a new integrated case management system.

I also regularly share best practices and exchange information with my provincial and territorial counterparts. This will be a particular focus of our activities in September, when I host the next annual meeting of the Canadian Conflict of Interest Network here in Ottawa.

Detailed financial and other information is available on my Office's website and in my annual reports.

Again, I thank the Committee for inviting me to discuss the Main Estimates today. I look forward to answering its questions.