



## NANCY BÉLANGER, COMMISSIONER OF LOBBYING

### STANDING COMMITTEE ON ACCESS TO INFORMATION, PRIVACY AND ETHICS

2023-10-16

#### OPENING REMARKS

Good afternoon Mr. Chair and Committee members.

Thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today on the work of the Office of the Commissioner of Lobbying together with my colleague the Information Commissioner.

My Office is a micro-organization with a broad mandate set out in the *Lobbying Act* (the Act), which requires that my Office:

- maintain the Registry of Lobbyists;
- offer education to increase awareness and understanding of the lobbying regime; and
- ensure compliance with the Act and the Lobbyists' Code of Conduct.

Despite the small size of our organization, we also have the same extensive reporting requirements as all other federal departments.

We delivered on our mandate with a small number of employees, which averaged 28 staffed positions last fiscal year, and with a budget of \$5.2 million.

#### ANNUAL REPORT

The number of registrations and registered lobbyists continues to grow each year, and 2022-23 was no exception with as many as 5,300 active registrations and 7,000 active lobbyists at any given time. The same is true for oral and arranged communication reports filed in the Registry of Lobbyists, which once again set a new record at 30,681.

We enhanced the Registry by introducing a search alert feature which notifies users when their selected keywords are added to the Registry.

We continued our efforts to contribute our experience and knowledge both in Canada and internationally with approximately 80 presentations to a variety of stakeholders.

On the compliance front, in 2022-2023, I determined that that no further action was required in 27 preliminary assessments. I pursued 3 investigations and made 1 referral to the RCMP. As of September 30, we have 36 ongoing compliance files.

During 2022-23, as you know, we also worked tirelessly to update the Lobbyists' Code of Conduct (the Code) that was ultimately published in the Canada Gazette in May 2023.

## LOOKING AHEAD

For the first half of 2023-24, our efforts have been focused on ensuring that stakeholders understand the updated Code of Conduct, which came into force on July 1, 2023. We are prioritizing communications with those who are currently listed in the Registry of Lobbyists to support their understanding and compliance with these updated standards.

More broadly, we are developing ways to expand awareness and understanding of the lobbying regime. We will increase our products and tools, while also improving our use of plain language, so that we can further promote compliance.

I was pleased that the Office was identified in Budget 2023 to receive an ongoing increase of \$0.4 million. This funding will allow us to hire 4 additional indeterminate staff to help alleviate some of the risks associated with depth of capacity. I am hopeful to receive these funds through the Supps B process and proceed to staffing these positions.

In the ongoing absence of a review and changes to the Act and recognizing that I have just over a year left in my mandate, I will continue to identify and pursue improvements that could enhance the transparency, fairness, clarity and efficiency of the federal lobbying regime. These changes will include updating our interpretation materials with respect to the application and enforcement of the Lobbying Act, improving the Registry of Lobbyists and potentially seeking regulatory updates to enhance the effectiveness of lobbying registration.

## CONCLUSION

I would like to conclude by thanking each and every employee of the Office. I am grateful for their dedication, professionalism, and excellence in delivering on our mandate.

Mr. Chair and Committee members, thank you and I welcome your questions.