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# Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs

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Chair: Mr. Emmanuel Dubourg





## Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs

Thursday, November 24, 2022

• (1535)

[Translation]

**The Chair (Mr. Emmanuel Dubourg (Bourassa, Lib.)):** I call the meeting to order.

Welcome to meeting number 27 of the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs.

[English]

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2) and the motion adopted on Monday, October 3, 2022, the committee is resuming its study of allegations that medical assistance in dying was offered to a veteran unprompted by a Veterans Affairs Canada employee.

[Translation]

Today's meeting is taking place in a hybrid format pursuant to the House order of Thursday, June 23, 2022. Members are free to attend in person. When you are not speaking, I ask that you please keep your microphone on mute, which will help make the interpreters' job easier.

A reminder that all comments by members and witnesses should be addressed through the chair.

Pursuant to our routine motion, I confirm that all witnesses have completed the required login tests prior to the meeting.

[English]

I would now like to welcome our witnesses.

First, we have the Honourable Lawrence MacAulay, Minister of Veterans Affairs. We have Steven Harris, assistant deputy minister, service delivery branch; and Paul Ledwell, deputy minister.

Minister MacAulay, you have five minutes or less for your opening remarks.

Please go ahead.

**Hon. Lawrence MacAulay (Minister of Veterans Affairs):** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair and members of the committee.

First of all, thank you very much for the invitation to appear before you once again to further discuss the deeply regrettable and horrific situation that came to our attention over the summer when medical assistance in dying was discussed with a veteran.

I have said it before and I'll say it once again: What happened was totally unacceptable. There is no way to justify it, and I will not try to do that today, or ever. As all of you know, I've directed my deputy to conduct a full and thorough investigation into the

matter and to do everything possible to ensure this never happens again.

Our investigation into the situation is ongoing, as is the labour process, but this week my deputy updated me that through the course of the investigation two subsequent cases with the same veterans service agent have been confirmed, bringing the total number of cases from the employee to four.

We expect all Veterans Affairs Canada employees to interact with veterans with care, compassion and respect, and the actions of this one employee are simply disgusting. I condemn this behaviour in the strongest terms.

I have instructed the deputy to examine all options in this investigation, including referring the matter to the police for investigation if necessary. I can confirm that the RCMP have been contacted, and the department is taking steps to formally refer the case.

Through the investigation, we have looked through hundreds and thousands of files from all of the frontline staff who deal with veterans, and we remain confident that this is all related to one single employee and is not a widespread or systemic issue, but in light of these findings, I have also instructed the deputy to expand the investigation to look at the management of the employee, the department's quality control and how this disgusting behaviour was able to happen four times before it was finally brought forward to the attention of department management.

Colleagues, it is deeply troubling that this behaviour was allowed to continue as long as it did, and we're going to get to the bottom of how this happened. However, this is not a reflection of the hundreds of case managers and veterans service agents who interact with the utmost care, compassion and respect with veterans every single day. This is one employee.

I know the members of this committee will have questions about these new cases, so I'd like to provide some information before we get into it.

The incident on July 21 is what began this investigation. Here, I should point out that as soon as this issue came to light, the employee's manager called the veteran to apologize. The second known time, on December 9, 2021, which my deputy informed the committee about back in October, involved a veteran asking questions about MAID. The third known time occurred in 2019, when a veteran called the department for information and was directed to the employee. MAID was inappropriately raised, and this was the only time they spoke. The fourth known time occurred in May 2022, when the employee provided information on MAID to another veteran.

If any of the veterans in question are watching or listening right now, I am sorry. I am sorry that you had to endure these appalling interactions, and we are doing everything we can to ensure this never happens again. We understand that incidents like this can create sanctuary trauma, and the department provides frontline staff with a variety of training to ensure they're sensitive to the unique needs of veterans and their families. The department is reviewing our frontline training to address this.

• (1540)

Thank you very much. Now I will take your questions.

**The Chair:** Thank you so much, Minister.

Now, for the first round of six-minute questions, I'd like to invite the first VP of the committee, Mr. Blake Richards, to please go ahead.

**Mr. Blake Richards (Banff—Airdrie, CPC):** Thank you for the statement and the update, Minister.

You indicated that since you were last at the committee, on October 20, you've found two more cases. If I understand correctly, there's a total of four, all confined, you say, to this one employee. If I understand correctly, the first one would be the one from the media report that was put out in August and discussed at the last meeting. In that one, the veteran was pressured. It was brought up, unprompted, and the veteran was pressured.

In the second instance we're talking about, which is the one that was brought up at the last meeting by your officials, there was a veteran...it was prompted, but there was a discussion about MAID. That veteran, according to reports that we hear, has completed MAID and is no longer with us.

There are two other cases that you've brought up today. One meeting was in 2019 when, again, it was raised unprompted and inappropriately by the employee in question. The fourth one you mentioned was from May 2022. Again, that was one when information was provided after being asked for by the veteran.

Do I understand that correctly? Are those the four cases?

**Hon. Lawrence MacAulay:** That is correct.

**Mr. Blake Richards:** Okay.

I'm sure you're aware of the case that was reported in the media today, where a veteran came forward on a podcast last night indicating that he also was pressured by a Veterans Affairs employee inappropriately to consider taking assisted suicide.

Is that one of these four cases?

**Hon. Lawrence MacAulay:** No.

**Mr. Blake Richards:** Okay. I suspected it probably wasn't, because my understanding of that case is that it occurred in November 2021.

Have you had a chance to read these media reports or hear the podcast yourself, Minister?

**Hon. Lawrence MacAulay:** Thank you very much.

The first thing I would do is ask Bruce—that's the name he used—as we have very little information on this, to please contact us—if he wishes to contact me personally, or contact the Department of Veterans Affairs—and just indicate who he is. I can assure that veteran, if he wants to speak personally, in private, to myself or the deputy minister or anybody in the department, we will make sure that number is provided.

We just want to make sure that veteran comes forward and gets the appropriate treatment.

**Mr. Blake Richards:** Thank you for that, Minister.

I know that veteran has indicated he does prefer to remain anonymous. He's likely watching today. If he's looking to take you up on that, certainly I will do everything I can to help facilitate that as well.

**Hon. Lawrence MacAulay:** I know you would.

I'd just like to say there's the ombudsperson, too, if he wishes to contact them.

**Mr. Blake Richards:** I appreciate that, Minister.

Having said that, that means we now have a fifth case. This is a fifth case. We do not know if this case is confined to this single employee or not.

What can you tell us that you will undertake to do to investigate this? My question would be this: Have you completed going through the files of the employee in question whom you found in regard to the four cases? Has that investigation been completed?

• (1545)

**Hon. Lawrence MacAulay:** We have completed a large number of investigations and we have scanned hundreds of thousands of files, and to this point—

**Mr. Blake Richards:** Sorry, Minister, just to be very precise on what I'm asking, for the employee in question, the one you have now referred to the RCMP for potential charges, has your department completed the investigation of all of that employee's files? Are you confident these four are the only four related to this employee?

**Hon. Lawrence MacAulay:** Of course, as you indicated, there is another one. Bruce, or whatever his name is, is possibly a fifth. There is a fifth, and we have to make sure that person is dealt with—

**Mr. Blake Richards:** Minister, sorry to interrupt, but I only have so much time.

I'm trying to get some certainty here, some clarity.

**Hon. Lawrence MacAulay:** Yes.

**Mr. Blake Richards:** Have you finished going through her files or not?

**Hon. Lawrence MacAulay:** Yes. We have finished going through the files.

**Mr. Blake Richards:** Okay. In that case, either something was missed in this investigation, or there is another employee involved. Now it's a matter of determining which of those two things it is. In either case, that's concerning. Obviously, in the one case it means your investigation is not nearly thorough enough. That might mean there's a need for an outside investigation, frankly, if that's the case, an external investigation, because, clearly, your department would have failed in the investigation in that instance.

Would you agree with that?

**Hon. Lawrence MacAulay:** I would agree that what we need to have—and I think you're fully aware of this—is the information from this veteran. What we want to do is find out exactly what happened, what difficulties he had. That's why I appreciate your bringing this up to make sure he contacts any of us or the department and gets the appropriate treatment.

**Mr. Blake Richards:** Okay. Understood.

**Hon. Lawrence MacAulay:** But I cannot tell you what employee it is.

**Mr. Blake Richards:** No problem.

There's obviously more work that needs to be done here in terms of the investigation. I will endeavour to do my part to make sure you get all the information you need.

There is another matter here. This veteran indicated he was told there was another veteran—and I'm assuming it's the one who was referred to in your previous testimony—who had gone through with MAID at the suggestion of Veterans Affairs. It was indicated to him that we won litigation to assist this member with MAID, and then, in a further part of the conversation, that we helped a member win a case in court to get assistance.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

**Mr. Blake Richards:** Who was “we”? Did VAC help a veteran go to court to get medical assistance in dying? Was that Veterans Affairs? Who is “we”?

**The Chair:** Excuse me, Mr. Richards.

Excuse me, Minister. We're going to have another round. You will be able to answer the question then, because the six minutes are well over.

Now I would like to invite MP Wilson Miao for his six minutes, please.

**Mr. Wilson Miao (Richmond Centre, Lib.):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you, Minister and officials, for coming again to our committee to address this issue that we have. Thank you for your update on this investigation.

You said in your opening remarks that the investigation is ongoing. Could you please explain the steps of the investigation and how confident you and the department are that this case is isolated to only this one employee?

**Hon. Lawrence MacAulay:** Of course, you're fully aware of this situation brought forward by Bruce, or whoever it is. I indicated quite clearly to my colleague previously that if he wishes to contact any one of us or the department, or wishes to talk to somebody privately, we're very open to that.

As far as being confident is concerned, the investigation has not been totally completed. It's close to being completed, but the human resources part of the investigation is also an issue that has to be dealt with. That's basically where we are in the investigation.

You can never be sure of anything until the investigation is over, but we're in the final stages of the investigation. As I indicated in my remarks, and as you heard, it's being turned over to the RCMP.

**Mr. Wilson Miao:** I have a follow-up question on that. How can you assure this standing committee and veterans that all incidents have been uncovered? I understand that one of my colleagues just mentioned another incident. Is this process being worked on?

• (1550)

**Hon. Lawrence MacAulay:** We went over hundreds of thousands of files and we haven't found anything as of yet that would.... We found the two cases that I indicated when I spoke, but beyond that, we have not found....

However, as you heard from the previous questioner, there is the situation with Bruce. Of course, we want to deal with this up front and make sure that he gets the help and assistance that he needs. We're going to make sure that happens.

**Mr. Wilson Miao:** Thank you.

Minister, what is the status of the labour relations process as it relates to the veterans service agent, and how do these processes normally play out?

**Hon. Lawrence MacAulay:** The labour relations issue is the human resources issue. It's an issue that is dealt with by the public servants in the federal bureaucracy, and I believe that it would be more than appropriate to have either the assistant deputy or the deputy expand further on how that process works.

It's important to note that this employee, who was responsible for four of the discussions, is not talking to veterans. We want to make sure that doesn't happen, and we will make sure that doesn't happen. The employee is definitely not dealing with veterans. She is not dealing with veterans' issues at the moment.

**Mr. Wilson Miao:** I understand you talked about the timeline of this information you found—

**The Chair:** Excuse me, Mr. Miao. Could you please address your question through the chair?

**Mr. Wilson Miao:** No problem, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Chair, could the minister explain how this information was uncovered and when he received this update on the four incidents?

**Hon. Lawrence MacAulay:** I gave the dates.

The first information that we received... When we received information from the department to my office, I immediately instructed the deputy to conduct an investigation. As I indicated when I spoke—and we found the two cases—we have now gone on to make sure that it's expanded to case managers and veterans service agent managers to make sure that everybody is covered on this issue and that everybody is trained properly.

There's a lot of training that took place. I believe about 75% of the frontline workers have had training and we're continuing that process. There have also been questions and answers with the frontline workers, to make sure that they fully understand what they can and cannot say.

Of course, with MAID, the policy is that if the issue is brought up at all by a frontline worker, they are to bring it to their managers immediately.

**Mr. Wilson Miao:** Great. Thank you.

Mr. Chair, how much time do I have?

**The Chair:** You have one more minute, Mr. Miao.

**Mr. Wilson Miao:** Thank you.

Through you, Mr. Chair, was the department in contact with any of the families of the veterans who were implicated?

**Hon. Lawrence MacAulay:** Can you please say that again?

**Mr. Wilson Miao:** Did the department have any contact with the families of any veterans who were implicated?

**Hon. Lawrence MacAulay:** Absolutely. Immediately upon hearing it, the department issued formal apologies to the veterans or the veterans' families who were involved. Absolutely.

**Mr. Wilson Miao:** Thank you for making the apologies to those families.

**Hon. Lawrence MacAulay:** Of course, I would like to apologize to any veteran who had anything to do with this situation. It was totally unacceptable.

**The Chair:** Thank you so much.

[*Translation*]

I now invite the second vice-chair of the committee, Luc Desilets, to take the floor for six minutes.

**Mr. Luc Desilets (Rivière-des-Mille-Îles, BQ):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Good afternoon, Mr. MacAuley, Mr. Ledwell and Mr. Harris. Thank you for being here.

Hello to my esteemed colleagues as well.

Mr. Minister, it's been four months since the allegations were filed or made public. Has any progress been made on this matter? What is the status?

• (1555)

[*English*]

**Hon. Lawrence MacAulay:** We are in the final stages, Mr. Desilets, on the investigation itself, but the human resources area is an issue that has to be dealt with. As I indicated previously, it's been referred to the RCMP. I'm not sure how much time that will take. We want to do this as quickly as possible, but I'm sure we all agree that we want to do it as efficiently as possible and to make sure that we take every step possible so that this does not occur again.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Luc Desilets:** Okay. I want to be sure I understand. When was the matter referred to the RCMP? When we saw each other a month ago, there was no mention of that.

[*English*]

**Hon. Lawrence MacAulay:** Mr. Desilets, you're absolutely right. I had my briefing with the deputy a few days ago. I had indicated previously to him to take every possible measure, and he indicated to me that he had contacted the RCMP.

I think it's appropriate to let the deputy expand on that, if he wishes to.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Paul Ledwell (Deputy Minister, Department of Veterans Affairs):** Of course.

After our briefing with the minister this week, and after receiving the analysis of all the files, we know that four employees have discussed the matter. We spoke with people from the RCMP yesterday to inform them of that and send the files to them.

**Mr. Luc Desilets:** When are you going to send us those files? When can we get them?

**Mr. Paul Ledwell:** I can't say because it's in the RCMP's hands.

**Mr. Luc Desilets:** Okay.

Have any other agencies been made aware of these cases, such as the Office of the Veterans Ombudsman or the Union of Veterans' Affairs Employees?

I am directing my question to you, Mr. MacAuley, or Mr. Harris.

[English]

**Hon. Lawrence MacAulay:** Go ahead, Mr. Harris.

[Translation]

**Mr. Steven Harris (Assistant Deputy Minister, Service Delivery Branch, Department of Veterans Affairs):** I'm not aware of the information being shared. Neither the office of the ombudsman nor any other agency has told us they are aware of any such cases.

**Mr. Luc Desilets:** Okay.

Mr. MacAuley, you were presented with the file and given an update. I guess there was some new information, other than the four mistakes that were found.

Did the fourth mistake make you decide to entrust the RCMP with this?

[English]

**Hon. Lawrence MacAulay:** Well, of course I can tell you that when the investigation is completed—and I did indicate this previously at the committee—the committee will be provided with the details of the investigation so that you fully understand what took place.

[Translation]

**Mr. Luc Desilets:** When exactly was the employee suspended?

[English]

**Hon. Lawrence MacAulay:** It's a human resource issue that's dealt with by the department, Mr. Desilets. They handle the employee part. I would have to turn that over to the deputy.

Thank you so much.

[Translation]

**Mr. Luc Desilets:** Does one of the deputy ministers know?

I assume that you had to interview people. So how long ago was the employee suspended?

**Mr. Paul Ledwell:** Mr. Chair, what I can tell you is that, as the minister said, the employee has had no contact with veterans since the event and is not at work.

**Mr. Luc Desilets:** He is suspended, if I understand correctly.

**Mr. Paul Ledwell:** I can't provide specific details due to a confidentiality issue. However, I can assure you that the employee is not at work and has no contact with veterans.

**Mr. Luc Desilets:** I'm surprised that this information is not public given the three incidents that have been added. Normally, we would be made aware of this. It's public. All of his colleagues know. He's either on sick leave or suspended, or he has resigned.

• (1600)

[English]

**Hon. Lawrence MacAulay:** Mr. Desilets, I will tell you that we don't want to affect the case itself or whatever might develop. This is a human resource issue and we have to be careful.

I'll let the deputy answer, if he has any more to add to it, but I doubt he does.

[Translation]

**Mr. Paul Ledwell:** The minister is absolutely right. We want to make sure that the investigation goes smoothly.

**Mr. Luc Desilets:** Okay, thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Desilets.

[English]

Now I'd like to ask MP Rachel Blaney to ask questions for six minutes, please.

Go ahead.

**Ms. Rachel Blaney (North Island—Powell River, NDP):** Thank you so much, Mr. Chair. I appreciate that.

Through you, Mr. Chair, I want to express my feeling of frustration right now. The last time the minister was here with his crew, we were told that there were two incidents. Now we're hearing that there are four and there may be five. It's getting really concerning.

I think the other thing that is important in this context is that there is no way the Department of Veterans Affairs could assist anyone in any way around MAID. That is something that is clearly not in the legislation. At the same time, veterans should not be calling and asking for help and being offered this as something that they can select. That's what's very concerning to me right here in this situation.

One of the things I keep coming back to is the fact that, from what I understand from the last testimony on October 20, when veterans call into the call centre and have conversations, those are recorded, yet if a caseworker calls the veteran, then those are not recorded. When I hear how much confusion there is about what happened, it seems to me that if there was a recording that was kept confidential, and if veterans were made aware of it, then it would allow for the department to actually address this issue in a more meaningful way.

Could I just get clarity from you, Minister? I appreciate your being here today. I also want to publicly express my condolences for your loss not too long ago.

Can we get some clarification? Is this being explored so that we can protect veterans, so that when this sort of incident happens there is a process in place that allows us to get down to the facts so we can protect the veterans who, hopefully, we are all here to serve?

**Hon. Lawrence MacAulay:** Thank you very much, Rachel.

This is what the investigation is for. It's important to note that it's one employee out of thousands of civil servants who are very compassionate and dedicated employees of Veterans Affairs Canada.

**Ms. Rachel Blaney:** I agree with you, Minister. I think most of the workers are incredible. I think we both agree on that.

**Hon. Lawrence MacAulay:** I know you do.

**Ms. Rachel Blaney:** However, to me, the point is that the department records some conversations, but not all conversations. This is what we heard in the last testimony, that it's about confidentiality. You're recording some of those. Why are those conversations less confidential than other conversations? It doesn't make any sense.

Could I ask you to focus on this? Are there any discussions happening about making sure there are recordings, so that, if something like this happens again, you can identify who the person is? You could go back and find that out, so there could be a higher level of accountability. It also protects veterans.

I think of Immigration. Every single call that comes into Immigration is recorded. Those are very confidential conversations and, often, very personal conversations. I'm not really understanding the difference. This is about protecting veterans.

Are there any conversations happening within the department to consider this, or to give the veterans the ability to say, "Yes, I want this recorded" or "No, I don't"? We're hearing so much right now. It's not clear, and it doesn't feel as if the department knows what's happening, either.

**Hon. Lawrence MacAulay:** Rachel, thank you very much.

I know you care. I know you know this department quite well. You are right. Call centres are general, and that is recorded. Case managers' calls have personal medical information, and it's a privacy issue. No, they will not be recorded, because it would be inappropriate.

You mentioned MAID in your opening statement. The fact is that there is absolutely no way we can have anybody here discussing MAID. That is an issue dealt with between—

• (1605)

**Ms. Rachel Blaney:** Thank you, Minister. I'm sorry to interrupt, but I only have a few minutes.

**Hon. Lawrence MacAulay:** I only have that, too, and I want to answer your question. The point is that it's the same type of thing. It's to make sure it's between the doctor—

**Ms. Rachel Blaney:** If it comes in through the call centre, it's referred directly to a case manager, just like that, from my understanding. That is recorded.

**Hon. Lawrence MacAulay:** That's right.

**Ms. Rachel Blaney:** Unless there is something I don't understand.... If it comes through the call centre and it's forwarded to the case manager, that call continues to be recorded. However, if a case manager.... I need clarification. I see Mr. Ledwell shaking his head. That's what I'm trying to ask. I need that clarified. If I could get an answer for that, it would be appreciated.

**Hon. Lawrence MacAulay:** Quite simply, when the call is transferred or referred, the taping stops. Case managers deal with personal medical issues, which, for privacy reasons, cannot be recorded. Unless the deputy wishes to add something to this, I believe that's—

**Ms. Rachel Blaney:** Are there no discussions about changing that, at this time, Minister? That is through you, Mr. Chair. I apologize.

There are no conversations about changing that. Is that correct?

**Hon. Lawrence MacAulay:** The answer is no, because we cannot tape personal medical information. We just can't do that, nor should we.

**Ms. Rachel Blaney:** Okay. Well, thank you for that.

The next thing I want to come back to is training. We heard, on the 20th, that all workers are trained. I think you said 75% of them are trained, at this point. I wonder if I can get clarification. Are all staff trained, or are only 75% trained?

**Hon. Lawrence MacAulay:** About 90% of the people are trained. I think everybody in the department has information on this, information on the issue at hand. It is certainly well circulated that you are not to discuss the issue. That has been clearly indicated to all frontline workers, in order to make sure this is not discussed and it's—

**The Chair:** Thank you, Minister. Your time is up.

Now, for the second round of questions, I'd like to invite Mr. Blake Richards for five minutes.

**Mr. Blake Richards:** Thank you.

I want to pick up where we left off. Before I do that, I have another question. I think I'll follow up a bit on Mr. Desilets' conversation with you.

You're telling us that the employee in question.... We're talking about an employee who has now counselled at least four veterans on assisted suicide. One of those veterans is widely reported to no longer be with us. One veteran has lost his life. This happened over the course of about three years. Are you telling us that this employee is still employed at Veterans Affairs?

**Hon. Lawrence MacAulay:** I can tell you that this employee has no interaction with veterans. This is a labour relations issue—

**Mr. Blake Richards:** Sure, Minister, I understood what you said—

**Hon. Lawrence MacAulay:** I'm sure you do understand the point, but if you want to ask—

**Mr. Blake Richards:** You're repeating what you said previously.



Minister, if I can, you're repeating what you said previously, and I only have so much time. I understand what you're saying. You say this employee has no interaction with veterans, but you have referred the case of this employee and what they've done. You've called it inappropriate. It's potentially criminal, because you've referred it to the RCMP. There is at least one veteran who has lost their life as a result of this. Are you telling me those aren't grounds to fire an employee? This employee is still employed at Veterans Affairs. That is completely unacceptable, Minister.

Now, it doesn't seem like you're going to give me an answer, but it certainly sounds like they are still employed, and they shouldn't be.

**Hon. Lawrence MacAulay:** Well, I'd just like to respond to you. I think you fully understand that the labour relations process is under way. There's a police referral. I think you would understand fully what has to take place here. We do not want to jeopardize the situation.

**Mr. Blake Richards:** Understood.

**Hon. Lawrence MacAulay:** We want to make sure that veterans are cared for.

**Mr. Blake Richards:** That's fine. We'll agree to disagree on that one, Minister, because I'll tell you, when we're talking about veterans who are being counselled to take their lives and are being pressured, frankly, which happened in the one case, the first case that came forward in the media. In the case of Bruce, I would strongly suggest that you listen to this podcast, because you'll be appalled, Minister. In Bruce's case it was the same thing: Pressure was applied to consider this. That's completely inappropriate.

Let's return to where we were in terms of the court case, because in that podcast, which I would suggest you listen to, Bruce mentioned twice.... He used the word "we", repeating back what he was told by the worker at Veterans Affairs, the employee at Veterans Affairs. In both cases, he used the word "we". He said that they had told him that "we" had recently won a litigation to assist a member with MAID and that "we" helped a member win a case in court with assistance.

Do you have any idea who "we" is? Did Veterans Affairs participate in litigation or in court proceedings of any kind, or any kind of legal proceedings, to help a veteran have access to medical assistance in dying?

• (1610)

**Hon. Lawrence MacAulay:** No. We have no record of a court case or litigation on a situation like this.

I can tell you again—and I think you want this to happen—to make sure that Bruce, whoever Bruce is, makes contact, because we want to help, and you do too.

**Mr. Blake Richards:** Sure. Yes, we all do. It's only a matter of how we do that.

I really hope that you'll take this very seriously, because when I hear "we", that implies it wasn't the worker themselves. That implies it was Veterans Affairs. When they're speaking to a veteran in their employment at Veterans Affairs, they are speaking on behalf of Veterans Affairs. They have implied to this veteran that Veterans

Affairs went to court on behalf of a veteran to try to give them an opportunity to commit suicide.

That is obviously a pretty concerning allegation. I hope you're going to investigate that, Minister.

**Hon. Lawrence MacAulay:** Well, you asked me a question. I would tell you absolutely, yes, we are. Of course, I do take this very seriously. It's heart-wrenching to see the likes of this happen—

**Mr. Blake Richards:** Yes, absolutely.

**Hon. Lawrence MacAulay:** —and I want to make sure. That's why it's referred. That's why we want a proper investigation. That's why I wanted to tell you exactly what the situation was, to the best of my ability.

**Mr. Blake Richards:** Sure, and I appreciate your doing that, Minister. I do.

**Hon. Lawrence MacAulay:** We want to make sure that veterans feel very comfortable to come to Veterans Affairs, because we have a lot of assistance for veterans, and the veterans need the assistance. We want to be sure they get the assistance.

**Mr. Blake Richards:** I appreciate that, Minister.

I think the other thing you should investigate is the recording of calls, this situation of recording of calls. What Bruce was told by the worker when he was trying to see if there was a recording of his call, to find out what the heck was said to him exactly, he was so shocked. He was told by the agent he spoke to at that point that one in 25 calls is actually recorded for quality assurance. Either you have employees who have incorrect information or policies aren't being followed.

**The Chair:** You have 15 seconds, Minister.

**Mr. Blake Richards:** I would suggest to you to investigate that as well.

**The Chair:** You have only 15 seconds. We'll have a quick answer, please, and we'll go on.

**Hon. Lawrence MacAulay:** Well, of course, I'm not sure that you want medical information to be recorded on veterans. That is not what we want—

**Mr. Blake Richards:** But this worker indicated that it was recorded—

**Hon. Lawrence MacAulay:** —and we have to ensure that veterans' information is protected.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Please, it was only five minutes. I'm sorry.

I'd like to invite MP Rechie Valdez for her turn for five minutes, please.

**Mrs. Rechie Valdez (Mississauga—Streetsville, Lib.):** Thank you for joining us again, Minister, and thank you to your department.

Through you, Mr. Chair, I just want to share that in this committee, we've had the opportunity to have case managers come and speak with us. They've shared how important their work is to them, since they care about veterans.

I'm curious to understand how the other employees in the department are reacting to this.

**Hon. Lawrence MacAulay:** I appreciate your question.

I appreciate caseworkers or anybody coming forward and discussing the situation they're involved with. I live in Prince Edward Island. I meet with Veterans Affairs employees all the time. They are very proud of what they do. I would have to say that I find them—I've been in a number of departments—so dedicated to the task. I always say that the only place you can find a tear of joy and a tear of caring is in Veterans Affairs. You can find that here.

I don't know if the deputy would like to expand on this. I think the atmosphere here is a bit of a hurting atmosphere, too, because we have thousands of dedicated public servants in Veterans Affairs Canada who want to do, and who are doing, a good job for veterans. They're doing their very best to make sure we provide the services that veterans so rightly deserve. As to this, yes, it hurts.

Look, I meet veterans. I met a veteran yesterday who came up and told me his first name, and said he just wanted me to know that caseworkers saved his life—and they do. It's hard to get the good stories, but it's so important to realize that there's an awful lot of good work.

But veterans suffer. They see things that you and I do not see. It hurts them. You'll find there's a very dedicated workforce here.

Thank you.

• (1615)

**Mrs. Rechie Valdez:** Thank you.

Just to clarify, how have the employees in the department been handling the investigation with their current workload?

**Hon. Lawrence MacAulay:** I will let the deputy speak to that, but as I said, they want this to come to an end. They want this resolved in an appropriate manner, but in an efficient manner. They're proud of what they do.

I'll turn it over to the deputy.

**Mr. Paul Ledwell:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

With regard to the question, in addition to what the minister has said, employees here are incredibly dedicated and very concerned that their dedication and their professional work in this regard might be called into question. They would want this investigation, this review, to be as comprehensive as possible to assure all of us, them included, that this is an isolated situation.

That's very much where the focus is. They're getting on with their work. They're serving and providing good and critical services to our veterans from coast to coast to coast, and they want to maintain that.

**Mrs. Rechie Valdez:** Thank you.

Through you, Mr. Chair, how do the minister and the department plan to repair the damage to the reputation of the department, given what's been going on so far?

**Hon. Lawrence MacAulay:** Well, basically what I can do is apologize, number one, for what happened to the individuals, make sure we have an appropriate and in-depth investigation to find out just how this happened and how it wasn't addressed when it did happen, and make sure we put a process in place so that this does not happen.

You're absolutely right that we're dealing with public servants here who truly care about what they're doing. We want to make sure that veterans feel fully confident and comfortable coming to Veterans Affairs Canada. We have a lot of services that veterans need and deserve, and we want to make sure they feel fully comfortable.

Thank you.

**Mrs. Rechie Valdez:** Thank you.

The last time you were here, Minister, you committed to providing a copy of the report of the investigation. Is that report finished? Do you have any updates there? Do you know when we're expected to receive it?

**Hon. Lawrence MacAulay:** No, the investigation is not finished, and yes, I will provide a copy of the investigation to the committee. It's only right to do so in order for you to fully understand just exactly what took place, how it took place and what was done in order to make sure, in the best way we possibly can, that the like of this never happens again.

Thank you.

**Mrs. Rechie Valdez:** Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you so much.

Thank you, Minister.

Before I go to Mr. Desilets, I would like to welcome MP John Nater to our committee.

We'll now have two quick interventions, beginning with MP Desilets for two and a half minutes.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Luc Desilets:** I'd like to address the two deputy ministers.

With respect to the employee's suspension, we've done the rounds, but my question remains to be answered.

Has he been transferred elsewhere at Veterans Affairs? If not, when did he leave the department?

[*English*]

**Hon. Lawrence MacAulay:** Thank you very much, Mr. Desilets.

Of course, it's a human resources issue. It has to be handled in the proper manner.

I will turn it over, as you requested, to the assistant deputy minister.

[Translation]

**The Chair:** Excuse me, Mr. Minister, we have an interpretation issue.

[English]

Please, Minister, can you repeat the answer? We had a translation problem.

**Hon. Lawrence MacAulay:** The problem is that it's a human resources issue. We want to make sure that it's handled properly. As you indicated, I think we would turn it over to the assistant deputy minister.

• (1620)

[Translation]

**Mr. Luc Desilets:** So there's nothing more to say about that.

Mr. Minister, rarely have I heard you use words like “disgusting”, “unacceptable” and “deeply troubling”. I trust you. I'm certain that you are an honest man, and I believe that what you're saying is true.

Suppose this employee is due to retire soon. Would he be entitled to all the benefits accrued during his employment with your department?

[English]

**Hon. Lawrence MacAulay:** Thank you very much. I'll turn it over to the assistant deputy minister.

[Translation]

**Mr. Steven Harris:** What I can tell you is that the process will be consistent with the collective agreement and will honour all remedies to which employees are entitled during an investigation under that agreement. They will be in place and will be guided by—

**Mr. Luc Desilets:** I understand.

So, if it was an indictable offence under the Criminal Code and the RCMP charged him with an indictable offence, his retirement wouldn't be affected. Is that what you're telling me?

[English]

**The Chair:** You have 10 seconds, please.

[Translation]

**Mr. Steven Harris:** I can't make any assumptions about the outcome of—

**Mr. Luc Desilets:** So can you just tell me—

**The Chair:** Mr. Desilets, I'm sorry, but your time is up.

Ms. Blaney, you have the floor for two and a half minutes.

[English]

**Ms. Rachel Blaney:** Thank you again, Chair.

I would just come back to the training. I understand, based on what we were sent earlier today about the self-directed learning, that this is mandatory training. I see it here, around suicide awareness and so on.

They are all self-directed. How does the accountability work for this? I see that on the form it says to fill out this tracking form. How is that assessed? I'm a little concerned here. That's my first question: Is there a way to track how that's taken care of?

The second question I have is about the particular staff member who was offering MAID as if it was an option, which is still so concerning to me because we all know that within the legislation in this country, that doesn't even make any sense. Has that member taken this training?

**Hon. Lawrence MacAulay:** Thank you very much, Rachel.

As you're aware, and as I said before, 90% of the staff have taken the training. They had questions and answers. I'll let the deputy minister expand on that because they are conducting that fully. We have to make sure that all employees at Veterans Affairs Canada fully understand that this is totally inappropriate.

For the tracking, I would have to turn to the deputy.

**Mr. Paul Ledwell:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I would indicate that for the 10% who have not taken the training, it could be because they're on leave. Some are on maternity leave. It's not that they are not taking or are refusing to take the training, but that they have not been in the office to be able to do it.

It is mandatory to take this training and to attest to that. As the minister said early on, as a consequence of this, we are also going to step up our training around sanctuary trauma.

In terms of the individual circumstance, I can't speak to that. I can't attest to that. I don't know if my colleague has any information or some comment about that.

**Ms. Rachel Blaney:** Are you referring to Mr. Harris?

**Mr. Paul Ledwell:** Yes, I am.

**Mr. Steven Harris:** I don't have any more information about the individual employee's completion.

**Ms. Rachel Blaney:** Okay.

The training is self-directed and they sort of just sign in. There isn't really a fulsome understanding of whether they took the training and how they took that training in. That, I think, is another question.

I see my time is up.

**The Chair:** Exactly. Thank you so much, Ms. Blaney. I'm so sorry.

Now let's go to Mr. Fraser Tolmie on the web for five minutes, please.

• (1625)

**Mr. Fraser Tolmie (Moose Jaw—Lake Centre—Lanigan, CPC):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The ombudsman's report, the Auditor General's report, the PBO's report and the committee report are all saying there's a failure to deliver service, Minister.

Minister, your opening statements from the last time you were here and this time seem to conflict with what's actually happening within the department. You first stated that it was one employee and one incident, and then it changed to one employee and two incidents. Now we're at one employee and five incidents.

In light of today's news, are you sure that it is only one employee who is offering MAID?

**Hon. Lawrence MacAulay:** Thank you very much for your question.

The reason why you have an investigation is to make sure that you get to the bottom of the situation. I indicated quite clearly when I was at the committee last time that I asked the deputy to conduct an investigation into this situation. That was to find out the details. When you have an investigation, you find out exactly what took place.

Yes, we found two other situations, and I clearly stated that to you when I spoke. However, I'm surprised you would say there is no delivery from the department. This department has worked so hard on the backlog—

**Mr. Fraser Tolmie:** Mr. Chair, I'd like to—

**Hon. Lawrence MacAulay:** You asked me about delivery, and I want to answer.

**Mr. Fraser Tolmie:** Yes. I've given you four statements from different independent reports. They are the ombudsman's report, the Auditor General's report, the PBO's report and our own committee report, saying that we're failing to deliver service. Now we're analyzing how this service is being delivered, and what we're actually doing is offering MAID.

Is it in Veterans Affairs' mandate to help members win court cases in MAID, instead of helping vets deal with PTSD and become integrated into Canadian society?

**Hon. Lawrence MacAulay:** As you indicated.... We have no record of a court case, and I indicated that clearly before.

However, you also indicated that the ombudsperson.... Yes, we certainly appreciate any information from the ombudsperson, who also indicated that we have worked very hard and have reduced the backlog from 23,000 down to 9,300. That is not good enough, but as I clearly indicated, by next spring or summer, we will have it to the national standard. That's what we have to do.

I indicated when I became minister that this was the number one priority, and by next spring or summer, we will reach that threshold. It's important that we make sure that veterans receive the benefits they should receive in a timely manner.

**Mr. Fraser Tolmie:** Thank you, Minister.

Mr. Chair, through you, does that mean that the investigation the minister told this committee about the last time he was here has failed or that it needs to be reopened or expanded in its scope, based on yesterday's news?

**Hon. Lawrence MacAulay:** Failed? I don't understand. Reopened...I mean, it's not closed. How would you reopen something that's not closed? It's ongoing—

**Mr. Fraser Tolmie:** Minister, your investigation—

**Hon. Lawrence MacAulay:** You asked me a question. Please, sir—

**Mr. Fraser Tolmie:** —is obviously overlooking things here. We already have that we're failing to deliver a service, and now we're failing to find out the true scope and nature of what's going on within the department.

**Hon. Lawrence MacAulay:** You're talking about delivering services and an investigation, which is not an investigation on delivering services. An investigation was put in place in order to find out just exactly what took place. An investigation finds out, if it's done properly—

**Mr. Fraser Tolmie:** Then I go back to my opening statement, Minister.

**Hon. Lawrence MacAulay:** —exactly what took place, and that's what we're doing and making sure that we do find out—

**Mr. Fraser Tolmie:** It seems that you don't know what's going on within the department.

**Hon. Lawrence MacAulay:** You don't want me to answer. I'll answer, if you wish.

**Mr. Darrell Samson (Sackville—Preston—Chezzetcook, Lib.):** Point of order, Mr. Chair.

**Mr. Fraser Tolmie:** I've not had an answer.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

**The Chair:** Please, Minister and Mr. Tolmie, for the interpreters it's important to talk one after another because of the chaos.

I have a point of order here.

Mr. Samson.

**Mr. Darrell Samson:** Mr. Chair, the member is asking two or three questions at once. He should allow the minister to articulate answers to each one of those questions.

Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Samson.

Let's go back to Minister MacAulay.

Please answer the question from MP Tolmie.

• (1630)

**Hon. Lawrence MacAulay:** I appreciate the question.

The answer is that we are working very hard to make sure that we deliver services to the veterans in a timely manner. We will do that. As I indicated, the backlog will be at the national standard by next spring or summer.

He wondered if the investigation needed to be restarted. The investigation never stopped. We find out new stuff in an investigation. That's what it's about, to get to the root cause of this and deal with it. We're going to do that.

Thank you.

**Mr. Fraser Tolmie:** I'll circle back to how I started off. It seems that the minister doesn't know what's going on within the department.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

**The Chair:** The five minutes are over.

Now let's go to Mr. Churence Rogers for five minutes, please.

**Mr. Churence Rogers (Bonavista—Burin—Trinity, Lib.):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Welcome to the minister and to the officials.

I have a question for you, Minister, and maybe your officials might want to comment on this, as well. I'm curious because of the new updated information, of course. How many veterans have actually brought up medical assistance in dying with their veterans service agents? Does the department keep track of this information? Will the department track this in the future?

As a further question, what steps will be taken to ensure that each incident is given the attention that it needs in order to ensure that nothing inappropriate is being discussed with veterans?

Minister, you can start. If you want to ask your officials to comment as well, I'd appreciate that.

**Hon. Lawrence MacAulay:** Thank you very much, Churence.

The fact is that we will not be taping the information with veterans service officers. As I indicated previously, it's personal information, medical information. We do not want to.... We can't do that. It's inappropriate to do that because it's personal information.

As for making sure that, as you indicated, this does not happen again, we'll take every measure possible to make sure it does not. As the deputy has indicated, and Ms. Blaney indicated quite clearly, we have a program in place to make sure that the frontline staff are fully informed on what takes place and how to deal with issues, and to make sure, number one, on the issue at hand, that if that's brought up, it's brought to the service manager right away. They're not to discuss it. It's against policy to discuss that issue. That issue itself is to be discussed between the doctor and the patient only, not recorded, or anything else.

What we want to do is make sure here that we get to the bottom of this issue, make sure we find out. That's why we have an investigation, to find out just exactly what took place. That's why we scanned hundreds of thousands of files, to make sure we address the problem properly. To this point, we have found one employee who has not handled this issue properly. It's totally inappropriate, totally wrong. I know there's another issue that came to light today, but we have to find out. Hopefully, we would hear from this veteran and we will do everything we can to help that veteran.

That's what it's all about. I'm sure everybody around this table wants that. That's my job. That's what I'm going to continue to do.

**Mr. Churence Rogers:** Thank you, Minister.

Given that we have this updated information today and the ongoing investigation, how were these issues missed? What discussions are taking place with this employee's colleagues and managers to ensure that no one else was missed, no one else was aware of what was going on here?

**Hon. Lawrence MacAulay:** Mr. Rogers, on the missed part, what we did was scan hundreds of thousands of files to find the proper word. If that had been discussed, we would have found it.

What we have also done—I've instructed the deputy and they're certainly doing it here in the department—is to make sure that all frontline employees are fully aware of what to do when this takes place. The fact is that, in this situation, when the veteran calls, the veteran can mention what he or she wishes, but, if they happen to mention MAID, that's to be brought immediately up to the manager level and not to be discussed at all with the veteran and the veterans service agent. That's what the policy is, and that's what would take place.

That's why I asked the deputy to expand the investigation and also to make sure that the information is clearly explained and that the frontline officers fully understand what they can and cannot do. It's vitally important.

• (1635)

**Mr. Churence Rogers:** Minister, obviously, then, this employee totally contradicted the policy that the department chose to follow by making the suggestion to the veteran in the first place.

**Hon. Lawrence MacAulay:** Churence, you're absolutely right. It was totally unacceptable and a terrible situation to have happen. It was unacceptable, wrong, against policy—whatever word you wish to use—and it hurt veterans. Of course, everybody around this table understands that we're here to help veterans, not to hurt them, and it's unfortunate, but we're dealing with human beings.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Minister MacAulay.

Thank you, Mr. Rogers.

[*Translation*]

We will continue with the two other witnesses. However, we will suspend for one minute while the minister disconnects.

[*English*]

Honourable Lawrence MacAulay, thank you for coming.

**Hon. Lawrence MacAulay:** Thank you so much.

• (1640)

**The Chair:** Thank you.

[*Translation*]

We're suspending the meeting for a few minutes.

• (1640)

(Pause)

• (1640)

**The Chair:** We're back in session.

We have with us Deputy Minister Paul Ledwell and Assistant Deputy Minister, Service Delivery Branch, Stephen Harris.

Committee members, I would suggest we first do a six-minute round of questions and then a second round. I would also ask that you please let us know who your question is for, Mr. Ledwell or Mr. Harris.

So, I would invite Cathay Wagantall to take the floor for six minutes.

[*English*]

**Mrs. Cathay Wagantall (Yorkton—Melville, CPC):** Thank you so much, Chair.

I'll direct this question to Mr. Ledwell.

In reviewing these conversations in regard to telephone calls being taped, it appears that not all are, specifically in regard to case managers calling the veteran. I know this because this individual this morning indicated that he had tried to get that conversation and they said that it had been too long and that it had likely been erased. They also said that it's one in 25 for quality control.

Can you tell me, are these calls reviewed before they're erased?

**Mr. Paul Ledwell:** Just to clarify, only calls that come in through our national client contact centre, our 1-800 number, are recorded. Once a call that may come in through that source is referred to a veterans service agent or to a case manager, that recording stops, and there are no further recordings of those calls between the veteran and their veterans service agent or their case manager.

**Mrs. Cathay Wagantall:** Sir, this individual told the veteran that chances are that the call would have been erased by now because it had been too long, or, with the case managers, it's one in 25 for quality control. If you're doing quality control recordings, they don't serve any purpose unless you check them.

Very quickly, yes or no, are they reviewed before they're erased?

**Mr. Paul Ledwell:** Calls into the national contact centre, yes, would be reviewed as a matter of course, but there are no other further calls that are recorded beyond that. Quality control, if I could, comes through—

**Mrs. Cathay Wagantall:** Okay. I just have so little time. I appreciate it.

If they are reviewed, that's fine. Thank you.

I am concerned because these individuals are growing in number. You indicate that you've reviewed hundreds of thousands of case files to determine if, as the minister said, "the word" is in documents. Can you tell me what the word is? Is it "MAID"? Is it "assisted suicide" or "assistance in death"? What exactly are the words that were searched for?

If I were a case manager doing what it appears this case manager was doing, I would be very careful as to what I wrote down.

• (1645)

**Mr. Paul Ledwell:** Mr. Chair, we undertook a search of 402,000 unique files. The search looked for references to MAID in its various guises, as well as "medical assistance in dying".

Through that, we were able to determine the four cases that have been established through this single employee. These are the four cases that are the real focus of our investigation.

**Mrs. Cathay Wagantall:** Thank you. Those words were within files that you were able to retrieve that information from, then.

**Mr. Paul Ledwell:** That's correct.

**Mrs. Cathay Wagantall:** Okay, thank you.

I think the minister contradicted himself somewhat in indicating that either the investigation was done or the investigation wasn't done.

Can you tell me, as VAC itself is continuing to deal with this issue, is an investigation continuing on within VAC, yes or no?

**Mr. Paul Ledwell:** Yes, the investigation is ongoing.

**Mrs. Cathay Wagantall:** Okay, thank you.

He indicated that the issue has been referred to the RCMP because it's an HR issue. Can you tell me, please, what has been referred to the RCMP? Is it in regard to one single case manager, or is this a case where we need to be concerned that they are investigating with regard to possibly more cases of case managers doing this?

Like Ms. Blaney, I also hugely support the work of our case managers. The three we had before us a couple of days ago were exemplary.

Is it one case that's been referred to the RCMP or is this a case of concern over possibly other situations that need to be investigated criminally?

**Mr. Paul Ledwell:** If I could, through the chair, let me thank you for your comments about our case managers. I obviously fully agree.

These are four cases associated with one single employee that have been shared with the RCMP, from which they will be undertaking their further investigation.

**Mrs. Cathay Wagantall:** Okay, thank you.

It was mentioned that there will be more work done on training case managers in regard to sanctuary trauma. I found that interesting. Basically, the term "sanctuary trauma" refers to a veteran facing greater harm, emotionally and mentally, because of VAC and the government not being able to meet their needs in a timely way or to actually provide the services that they should have.

Is that something you're going to train your workers on?

**Mr. Paul Ledwell:** Yes, we plan to extend the work that we currently do around trauma-informed training for all of our frontline employees—any employee who has interaction with veterans—to really build a greater and deeper understanding of sanctuary trauma and some of the moral injury that can occur through sanctuary trauma, so that there is an even deeper awareness of the circumstances by which veterans are coming to us, the importance of our interrelation with them and the way that we interact with them.

**Mrs. Cathay Wagantall:** Okay, thank you very much.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mrs. Wagantall.

**Mrs. Cathay Wagantall:** Oh, I'm sorry. I try not to look at the chair.

**The Chair:** Yes, it's important sometimes because I still carry my red card.

Thank you.

Now, I'd like to invite Mr. Darrell Samson for six minutes, please.

**Mr. Darrell Samson:** Thank you, Chair.

I want to thank, of course, the minister, who has left, and the employees—the deputy and Steven Harris—for being here with us today and sharing some of the key information.

I'd like to focus a little bit on the labour relations process because that by itself is an important part of how we deal with issues on the ground. Can you tell us what the status is on the labour relation process as it relates to our veterans service agents?

**Mr. Paul Ledwell:** If it's okay, Mr. Chair, I will start. I might ask my colleague to add anything I might not reference here.

It is an ongoing process that is not yet completed. It's guided by our collective agreement with the union representing this employee, as well as our general guidelines around employment in the public sector. It was initiated very soon after this issue came to light. It is through this process that we determined there were further cases. That has obviously put more emphasis on, and more seriousness around, this undertaking. It's not yet completed, but we are hopeful it will be completed soon.

I'll ask my colleague Mr. Harris whether he has anything to add to that.

• (1650)

**Mr. Steven Harris:** Thanks, Deputy.

I will add that it is a very formal process. It follows a case for determining what offence may have been committed, and what circumstances or mitigating factors are in place. It's also considered in terms of precedents and guidance. There is a lot of jurisprudence around how this process needs to take place, in keeping with the collective agreement. We're following that process.

**Mr. Darrell Samson:** I'm trying to follow up on morale. Were other employees aware of those discussions? How would we know if they were? Did they bring information forward, or did they not? What happens if they didn't? Can you chat a bit about that? I'm concerned about the morale, of course, on the ground, as well.

**Mr. Paul Ledwell:** Thanks very much, Mr. Chair.

In the case that came forward this summer, the first case, this was raised so directly and seriously that it was shared immediately with the manager of this veterans service agent. That manager engaged, and others engaged soon after that. It was raised in all seriousness.

In terms of morale, as I said earlier, there is strong concern among colleagues who work in this space. They're not just concerned about themselves. They're concerned about veterans and how this might keep veterans from coming forward. They are very much determined to be in a space and place.... We are here to support our veterans, however difficult the circumstance might be. To think that a veteran might not come forward to our department to seek help when they need help, as a consequence of this, is something that worries our employees, I think. It certainly worries us among the department's leadership.

**Mr. Darrell Samson:** I have a follow-up question to that, because it's extremely important to make sure our veterans have the trust to come forward. What have we done—and what will we do—to ensure our veterans have the trust they need to continue to come forward and ask for help and benefits?

**Mr. Paul Ledwell:** I think we have our first face to the veteran, in terms of how they're coming forward, to ensure they have the professional support they require, and a level of care and compassion that comes from the employees. I know that is extended quite extensively. If there is any concern among veterans about the level or type of service, or grave concern about the kind of direction they are receiving, they have recourse.

In our own case, if difficult issues come forward—if a veteran feels they are not getting the level of attention or service they require—they can be escalated very quickly within the organization to supervisor or managerial levels. The veteran also has recourse through the Office of the Veterans Ombudsman, which was established precisely for these terms.

We have different measures to put in place, and we'll ensure that we are working as a team, in our organization, so a veteran has other places to turn to, within the department.

Again, I might ask my colleague Mr. Harris whether he has anything to add to that.

**Mr. Steven Harris:** Just quickly, I would say it's incumbent upon us to be proactive in disclosing the results of the investigation and sharing it publicly with members of the committee, and with veterans, so they understand the action we've taken as a result of the incidents identified, the seriousness with which we take this, and how we're going to proceed to address this issue going forward.

It's incumbent upon the department to make sure we're sharing that information broadly, so everybody can see it—see the work we've done to address it, and the work we're doing.

• (1655)

**Mr. Darrell Samson:** Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Harris.

[Translation]

Luc Desilets now has the floor for the next six minutes.

**Mr. Luc Desilets:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Harris, I understand that it's difficult to find out the current status of this employee. However, if he is neither on leave nor close to retirement, can you assure us that he will be suspended or terminated?

**Mr. Steven Harris:** We will wait until the end of the process to make a final decision on his status in the department. We need to wait until all the data and facts are available before we make a final decision. We have a process to follow, and we need to see it through.

**Mr. Luc Desilets:** That's wise of you, except that I understand you already have a lot of information in hand. The minister called it a disgusting and unacceptable situation. I assume that you have enough to give me an answer.

**Mr. Steven Harris:** In my opinion, the investigation should be completed. You can't make a determination in the middle of an investigation or because you have enough information. There is a process in place, both for the employee and with respect to the collective agreement, and it needs to be seen through.

**Mr. Luc Desilets:** Did you know that the veteran in question had recorded the last few conversations?

**Mr. Steven Harris:** That's what's been published in the media. I believe a witness who appeared before the committee mentioned it, but I'm unable to confirm that it's true. However, I have heard that there are recordings.

**Mr. Luc Desilets:** Okay.

It's my understanding that one in 25 interviews is randomly recorded.

Is that correct?

**Mr. Steven Harris:** This allegation came out in the media today. I can state that it's not true. No conversations between VSAs, or veterans service agents, veterans and their families are recorded.

**Mr. Luc Desilets:** Okay.

I don't know if it was you or Mr. Ledwell who said it, but it seems that thousands of files were closely examined, and the term “medical assistance in dying” or its abbreviation, “MAiD”, came up in only four of them. Is that what was said?

**Mr. Paul Ledwell:** Not exactly. There were four cases discussed where the term was used by the employee first, but not by the veteran.

**Mr. Luc Desilets:** Okay, I understand.

It would be quite surprising if the term didn't appear in hundreds of files. In the current context, using the term “medical assistance in dying” or talking about it is entirely inappropriate. However, the subject must come up occasionally in the files and VSAs must occasionally have to discuss it. They may be prompted to do so by veterans.

Can we agree on that?

**Mr. Paul Ledwell:** Yes, you're right.

**Mr. Luc Desilets:** Okay.

One thing worries me. One of you—perhaps it was the minister—said that 90% of employees had taken relevant training related to medical assistance in dying. Is that correct?

**Mr. Steven Harris:** Yes.

**Mr. Luc Desilets:** Okay.

Could it be that older employees nearing retirement do not or did not have access to this training?

**Mr. Steven Harris:** All employees have access to the training. Some may not have had the opportunity to complete the training yet because they were on leave, but all employees have access to training. This was not self-directed training. It was provided by a departmental standards training and evaluation officer.

• (1700)

**Mr. Luc Desilets:** Was this training mandatory?

**Mr. Steven Harris:** Yes.

**Mr. Luc Desilets:** Okay.

I'll share my concern with you.

A firm will soon be taking over, but are we going to have a guarantee that those 6,000 or 9,000 employees, if I'm not mistaken, are going to receive similar training?

**Mr. Steven Harris:** We will ensure that contractors are well trained to meet veterans' needs.

**Mr. Luc Desilets:** Perfect.

Thank you very much for your responses.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Mr. Desilets.

[English]

Now let's go to Ms. Rachel Blaney for six minutes, please.

**Ms. Rachel Blaney:** Thank you, Chair. I appreciate that.

My first question will be for Mr. Harris.

This is from my understanding. Is it true that some case managers have actually been disciplined because they've given out their direct phone line to the veteran so that the veteran doesn't have to go through the call centre, and that often their reason for giving them the number is to avoid the veterans being triggered and having to retell their story to an agent at the call centre?



I'm just trying to clarify whether there's disciplinary action and why that's the case when case managers give out their direct desk phone line to veterans.

**Mr. Steven Harris:** I'm not aware of any disciplinary action. Our guidance that's issued to case managers and others is that staff members are permitted to share their VAC assigned numbers with their clients and their representatives when it's appropriate. That decision should be made on a case-by-case basis and involve their manager.

The issue is.... We want to ensure that if a veteran reaches in, if they're using a personal phone number, such as an assigned work phone number, for a Veterans Affairs agent, be that a case manager or a veterans service agent, that veteran gets their call answered. It's possible that they could call a direct line to a case manager, as an example, and that case manager is away or on leave in some way, shape or form. If that is not updated appropriately, as opposed to voice mail or what have you, that veteran's call could just go into a voice mailbox and may not be responded to immediately.

That's why we try to direct people through the contact centre. It's to make sure that whatever their need might be on that particular day, they will get responded to in an answer.

**Ms. Rachel Blaney:** Am I to understand, then, that if a member goes on leave for whatever reason, their voice mail wouldn't regularly be checked in their absence?

**Mr. Steven Harris:** It may not always be checked, so what we ask is that our case managers or others who go on leave say in their voice mail who they would be directed to follow up with. There are other contact numbers. That may include calling to our 1-800 NC-CN number if they're going to be away for a period of time. It is possible that somebody who leaves unexpectedly and is away for a couple of days is not able to update it.

It certainly is, of course, our guidance and our training that people update their out-of-office information, be that email, phone or otherwise, to indicate who should be contacted in their absence.

**Ms. Rachel Blaney:** Thank you.

Since recordings are not currently used, which, again, I think is a massive concern, when you call and it does say that it's going to be recorded, it often says that this is for "quality assurance". If calls are not recorded for some sort of internal quality assurance control, what is the process?

What I'm hearing right now is that the only quality assurance that's done is through the calls that come into the call centre. How do you know that services are being delivered in the best way if there's no recording?

**Mr. Steven Harris:** We do quality assurance on the calls that come into our national contact centre network. That was indicated before. We do review those calls and work with our frontline agents to respond to those—

**Ms. Rachel Blaney:** I understand that. I'm talking about the case managers.

**Mr. Steven Harris:** For the case managers and others, the distinction is that in terms of recording those calls, you don't necessarily record your phone calls with your doctor. You don't necessarily

record your phone calls with your lawyer. Some of these are similar types of conversations.

The second part is that we don't record in-person meetings. We don't record transition interviews. We don't record a whole host of other interactions. Recording only phone calls would be only one way of looking at it.

I could speak to the quality assurance, if you'd like—

**Ms. Rachel Blaney:** I think I got it.

Thank you, Mr. Harris. I appreciate that. I understand that.

Thank you to the chair for his patience with me.

My next question is, how does quality assurance happen? I'm going to switch that up a little bit. How does the department, in terms of quality assurance, measure the training that is self-directed, that you do individually online? How do you measure whether that information has been absorbed by the member or the case manager? How does the department know that the person has understood it and is taking that training?

I remember that on October 20, I asked specifically about training for people dealing with members of the public who have experienced trauma. Trauma-informed services are really important, especially for veterans. Quite frankly, from what we're hearing, somebody really fell off and was not doing what they should have been doing.

How does the department know that the information from this training...? Let's look at it. How long is this training on suicide? It's an hour and a half. How do we know that it's been absorbed and is being used when there is no form of quality assurance that occurred, even if it's once in a while recorded?

The second part of that is, is there any way for a veteran to say, "I want this conversation recorded"?

● (1705)

**Mr. Steven Harris:** My reply would be lengthy. We probably don't have time to go through all of it.

What I would say is that we do quality reviews and quality assurance on client notes. We compile lists of people who have completed that self-directed training. We ensure that, even if it's self-directed, somebody fills out that they've completed that self-directed training. We do regular performance reviews with individual employees and others as well. There are a number of regular check-ins to make sure that training is being completed and that training is being absorbed and applied in the appropriate way, in the way in which they would interact with veterans, including things such as client notes and others along the way.

That's a very short answer to what otherwise would be a long one.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Ms. Blaney. Thank you so much.

**Ms. Rachel Blaney:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Harris.

Now let's go to MP Blake Richards for five minutes, please.

**Mr. Blake Richards:** Thank you, Chair.

I appreciated the minister being forthcoming with the fact that they have found two additional cases since his last appearance here on October 20. Obviously, I also appreciated his concern when I mentioned to him a fifth case, which I'm sure we all have heard about. It's been reported in the media pretty thoroughly today.

Regarding the fifth case that we're talking about now, just quoting from the podcast itself, this veteran was referred to as "Bruce", so I'll call him Bruce.

Bruce said, "I had been suffering from PTSD and recently had a lot of suicidal thoughts. I was kinda hoping they would help me with my transition out of the military, help me find new doctors", etc. This is what he got instead. He said, "I wasn't expecting them to let me know 'Hey, we had recently won litigation to assist members with MAID (medical assistance in dying), and you know that's always an option'". He insisted he wasn't interested in that, and they went on to pressure him and told him to just remember that it's an option and it's something that's still available to him—very much like what we heard from the veteran who was first reported in the media back in August.

This occurred back in November 2021. The minister indicated that there was one case as far back as 2019.

This particular individual, Bruce, reached out to me personally today and has indicated that he really would like the opportunity to have his story told. He really believes it will help—and I agree with him—to ensure that this doesn't happen to anybody else. He wants to be able to do so anonymously. I don't think he's comfortable with the idea of speaking to the minister or the department for that very reason. He wants to be able to stay anonymous, so I'm going to move the following motion:

That the committee invite the individual referred to as "Bruce" during Episode #258 of the Operation Tango Romeo, the Trauma Recovery Podcast to testify before the committee on or before December 12th, 2022, and that he be given the opportunity to testify in a way that would preserve his anonymity.

I'll speak to this briefly, because I'd like to see if we can deal with this quickly and agree to have the individual appear so that he can tell his story in the hopes of making sure others don't go

through what he went through. I think it would be very informative, obviously, for the committee to be able to hear from him and ask him questions about his experience. I hope we can deal with it quickly and in return give opportunities for questions to any of my colleagues who still have them.

I will point out quickly, just in argument for the motion, that there is precedent for this type of situation. There have been at least two instances that I know of where this has occurred. In October 2018, there was a witness who appeared before the citizenship and immigration committee in this way. In February 2021, there were two witnesses who appeared before the information and ethics committee in such a fashion.

There is precedent for it, and I would hope that this committee would give this veteran the opportunity to tell his story as he wishes to, but to do so anonymously. I'll make that motion, Mr. Chair.

• (1710)

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Richards.

I know that we can have the committee in camera, but I'd like to know how the clerk will be able to contact Bruce.

**Mr. Blake Richards:** Sure. As I have said, he has been in contact with me. He reached out to me, so I have a manner of contacting him. I can make sure we do that in a way that preserves his anonymity but ensures the clerk has the ability to reach out as well.

**The Chair:** Thank you so much.

Mr. Casey, go ahead, please.

**Mr. Sean Casey (Charlottetown, Lib.):** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I, for one, am quite interested to hear from Bruce. I think that if we can put the precautions in place for that to happen, we should. I know that when we had another veteran here—I think it was Mr. Meincke—he had a conversation with a veteran involved in the first case who was concerned about the disclosure of his identity, and that was preventing him from coming before the committee. I would suggest that he be invited under the same terms and circumstances to the same meeting.

I would also point out that we have already set aside one more meeting to hear from veterans. These two people are veterans. This in camera special session should be the second meeting.

**The Chair:** Mr. Richards, go ahead.

**Mr. Blake Richards:** I have a point of order on that. We're obviously dealing with two different studies. The study that was referred to, which veterans have been invited to appear on, is the rehab contract. This is obviously a different matter. I would suggest that it not take up the matter of the other study.

Is anybody on the speaking list?

**The Chair:** No.

**Mr. Blake Richards:** Since I have the floor, I'll just move from a point of order into the speaking list, then.

I certainly appreciate the suggestion, and I would be happy to accept a friendly amendment to invite the other veteran. However, I will point out that I have heard from individuals who have spoken to him, including Mr. Meincke, who say that he wouldn't be comfortable in appearing. However, if the committee would like to invite him, I certainly think that would be fine. I suspect he would decline.

**The Chair:** Mr. Casey, go ahead.

**Mr. Sean Casey:** I'm back to the same concern I raised at the last meeting, which prompted my resignation from the subcommittee, and that is that this constitutes a further violation of the compromise that was made in camera with respect to the scheduling.

While I do think it's important to hear from this witness in the circumstances that have been provided, I do think that when people make commitments in camera they should keep them, and that's a problem.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Ms. Blaney on the web and Mr. Desilets, do not hesitate to intervene in this discussion.

Mr. Desilets, go ahead.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Luc Desilets:** From what I understand, the court date has not been set, but I see that it's no later than December 12. If it's just Bruce, would you like a one-hour or two-hour meeting?

**The Chair:** We will continue with Mr. Richards and Ms. Blaney.

Mr. Richards, you have the floor.

[*English*]

**Mr. Blake Richards:** I'm comfortable with whatever the committee feels is appropriate, or perhaps if an hour is more helpful so that it would be possible to move on to other things, I think that would probably be sufficient for this veteran to give his testimony and provide an opportunity for questioning. I would be comfortable with that.

If there are to be two of them, we might need a little longer than an hour. I'm open to—

• (1715)

**Ms. Rachel Blaney:** Mr. Chair, I'm going to interrupt Mr. Richards.

**The Chair:** Ms. Blaney.

**Ms. Rachel Blaney:** I can't hear him. I can't hear Blake.

I don't know about other members, but I can't hear him at all.

**Mr. Blake Richards:** My apologies for that. I was probably looking away from the microphone.

All I was indicating was that I am comfortable with an hour or two hours. I'm comfortable with whatever. I didn't specify it in the motion because I didn't think it was necessary to specify a certain number of hours. If it's important to somebody that it only be an

hour, if we're talking about one veteran, I would be comfortable with that personally, but I'm open to whatever the committee feels.

I just think it's important that this veteran have the opportunity to speak to his story and that we have a chance to be informed by his experiences.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Ms. Blaney, go ahead, please.

**Ms. Rachel Blaney:** Thank you so much, Mr. Chair.

I do support this.

It sounds like some other things happened while I was away, and I don't know if we're supposed to talk about them in this venue since it is a public venue. When we bring up things that happen in camera, I would think that we would be breaking the in camera conversation. I just want to point that out.

I also want to say that things change because issues arise that we need to deal with. Obviously, this is an issue that is incredibly important, and actually hearing from a veteran who had the experience I think will significantly help the committee.

I agree with the one hour. We should be mindful of that and perhaps offer that to the veteran. I don't want to put a veteran up for two hours and feel that we're really grilling him over something that is probably upsetting. If one hour fits and that works, then I am absolutely in support of it.

[*Translation*]

**The Chair:** Mr. Desilets, you have the floor.

**Mr. Luc Desilets:** So we will allow one hour for this witness and, should Mr. Meincke accept our invitation, he could testify in the second hour. Since he was uncomfortable being here in front of us, we could offer him the possibility of testifying via videoconference. That might be another solution.

Here's the last part of my question. You put a deadline on appearances, which is December 12. If you have a deadline, wouldn't it be better if it were further away? We realized today that there would be other cases and new disclosures as a result of our previous work. If the deadline were pushed to after the holiday season, it would give people time to come forward. We might have other situations "of interest" to consider.

**The Chair:** Mr. Richards, the floor is yours.

[*English*]

**Mr. Blake Richards:** For me, the deadline is simply that I'm mindful of the fact that we are approaching the time when the Parliament will rise before Christmas. That would leave this veteran wanting to have the opportunity to tell his story and leave him hanging for two months, essentially, and maybe longer.

I am mindful of the fact that he has come forward. He would like to have this opportunity, and I want to make sure he gets that opportunity without leaving him hanging for an extended period of time. I saw December 12 as the last date when we can probably assume, without a lot of question, that this committee, if we were to look at the parliamentary schedule....

It's simply for that reason, and I don't think there is anything in our schedule that would prevent it. I know that we have another study we plan to begin, and I look forward to that study as well. I hope we can commence that before Christmas too, but if that's not possible, I would much rather see that wait than leave hanging a veteran who wants to have the opportunity to tell their story. I think it's far more important that we hear from the veteran.

[Translation]

**Mr. Luc Desilets:** Understood.

Thank you.

[English]

**The Chair:** I understand that, for this motion, it's for an hour and it will be in camera.

**Mr. Blake Richards:** I don't think the examples I've cited were in camera, so the matter is then part of the official record. It's just that the witness is able to be anonymous.

**The Chair:** That's perfect. Thank you.

[Translation]

We are voting on Blake Richards' motion.

Does anyone object to the motion?

I see that no one objects.

(Motion agreed to)

• (1720)

**The Chair:** We will work with the clerk to make the necessary arrangements.

[English]

**Mr. Blake Richards:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. I appreciate that.

Is there time for me on the clock?

**The Chair:** Yes, you have two more minutes.

I apologize to our witnesses.

**Mr. Blake Richards:** I apologize as well.

I have some other colleagues who would like to have opportunities, and I've taken far more than my share today. Mr. Tolmie, I know, has some questions, and I'll turn the remainder of my time to him.

**The Chair:** Mr. Tolmie, the floor is yours.

**Mr. Fraser Tolmie:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

We have already established in this committee that in 2016 MAID came into place, and it was a conversation between a doctor and a patient. The minister stated earlier that, when vets call and ask about MAID, this is moved up from a case worker to a manager.

Earlier my colleague mentioned “we”, in a podcast reference to a court case, referenced by the National Post.

Through you, Mr. Chair, to Mr. Ledwell, why is this happening? Shouldn't a case worker, when approached about MAID, shut the conversation down and say to the vet, “This is a conversation between you and the doctor”?

**Mr. Paul Ledwell:** Yes, we absolutely agree with that statement. It should not be a conversation between a case manager or a veterans service agent and the veteran, unless the veteran has made the determination in consultation with his health care professional and is seeking information regarding benefits or any consequences to the benefits for that veteran or their family.

I should also indicate that we have looked into, and have had our legal staff look into, cases where this has been challenged in the courts, raised in the courts. We have not found a single case.

Where veteran Bruce, as he calls himself, as indicated on the podcast, has raised this issue and suggested that Veterans Affairs Canada was involved in this, we are completely surprised by that. We find no record of that whatsoever, not only in our case but in the courts as well.

**Mr. Fraser Tolmie:** Okay. Thank you very much.

I ask that question because it is based on conversations where we've talked about training and the mandate for Veterans Affairs. Is Veterans Affairs allowing for a loophole to get involved in the MAID conversation, where they shouldn't be?

**Mr. Paul Ledwell:** Absolutely not. That is not the case.

Our policy is clear, and our guidelines are clear. It is a conversation that should not take place in any substantive manner between a Veterans Affairs Canada employee and a veteran.

**Mr. Fraser Tolmie:** Would it be fair to say that on the issues that are arising—if this is bigger than what we expect it to be—it's because there have been problems in the training or with an unclear mandate?

**Mr. Paul Ledwell:** If I could, Mr. Chair, I think we've established through our investigation thus far that it is clear in all of our 402,000 file reviews that these are four cases affiliated with one employee. This is an isolated situation, as we've been able to determine. It is not widespread within the department.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Ledwell.

Now we'll go to Mr. Sean Casey for five minutes, please.

**Mr. Sean Casey:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Ledwell, when you appeared before the committee on October 20, I asked you whether the union had taken a position with respect to this case, and you said that they had not taken a public position.

Has that changed since you last appeared before committee?

**Mr. Paul Ledwell:** No, it has not.

**Mr. Sean Casey:** Have you seen the letter that they sent to the committee today?

**Mr. Paul Ledwell:** I have not seen that letter.

**Mr. Sean Casey:** Okay. Let's go through it, because it appears to be the first public proclamation they've made with respect to this issue.

They have attached something that was sent to veterans service agents on November 14, asking them to take mandatory self-guided learning. They then referenced something called NOTP training, which has been offered in P.E.I. since 2018.

What's NOTP training? Mr. Harris, can you help with that?

• (1725)

**Mr. Steven Harris:** It's a national orientation training program. It's our group here that offers centralized training on all things related to interaction with our veteran clients. That's for case managers, for VSAs and for others as well.

**Mr. Sean Casey:** The letter that has been submitted to the committee—and is, therefore, public—indicates that “training was being held in PEI since 2018 for new employees onboarding however since the pandemic these moved to virtual and they”—I presume that means you, Mr. Harris, Mr. Ledwell and the department—“were not providing most training during the pandemic on suicide prevention to new employees or refreshers for staff who had been there many years.”

I would ask you to comment on the veracity of the public allegation that the department, since the pandemic, has not been providing training on suicide prevention to new employees or providing refreshers.

**Mr. Steven Harris:** As you know, the training, since the pandemic started, moved to virtual as people weren't in offices and people weren't able to travel. It has continued in a virtual format, and that has included training related to suicide prevention.

**Mr. Sean Casey:** The next sentence talks about a course called “ASSIST Suicide Prevention Training”. What is the ASSIST suicide prevention training program, which was apparently delivered through something called “LivingWorks”?

Can you help us with that?

**Mr. Steven Harris:** I have to go back to get the specific details of that particular program. I'd be happy to provide them back to the committee.

**Mr. Sean Casey:** Okay.

Specifically, I'm looking for a response to the union's public statement that there used to be a course called “ASSIST Suicide Training Program” through LivingWorks. However, the national president of the union said, “I cannot remember the last time that ASSIST was provided in our department.” It appears that you can't, either.

Maybe it's quite dated, but I think it would be helpful to respond to that public statement.

**Mr. Steven Harris:** I would be happy to provide information back to the committee related to the training that's been offered during that period of time.

**Mr. Sean Casey:** Thank you.

The last time you came before the committee, I asked about whether it is possible to terminate a civil servant. The response I got was that any disciplinary action, including termination, is subject to collective agreements.

Have you had conversations or any involvement with the union? Have they reached out to you to attempt to collaborate on resolving this issue, whether it's through a disciplinary process or any other process?

**Mr. Paul Ledwell:** It is of course possible, through a disciplinary process, to terminate an employee, particularly around misconduct and particularly around a series of misconduct.

The union has been engaged through the disciplinary process, but it is standard practice that the union would have representation alongside the employee through that process.

**Mr. Sean Casey:** Back to the letter....

Oh, I'm sorry. It appears my time is done.

Thank you very much for being with us. This is an extremely difficult issue and we appreciate the professional way in which you've handled it. Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Casey.

[Translation]

We still have two speakers for two and a half minutes each.

Mr. Desilets, you have the floor.

**Mr. Luc Desilets:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'm going to go along with Mr. Casey.

Have any case managers been terminated in the past two years?

**Mr. Steven Harris:** I need to think about that for a minute. I don't believe so, but I'm not entirely sure. I'll need to check.

**Mr. Luc Desilets:** How many case managers are there in Canada in total?

**Mr. Steven Harris:** There are about 475 case managers.

• (1730)

**Mr. Luc Desilets:** Can you give us an example of an inappropriate relationship a case manager might have with a veteran? Have you had to manage similar cases? If so, can you describe them?

**Mr. Steven Harris:** As far as the collective agreement goes, I don't have an example. I've been in this position for about two and a half years and I don't know of any similar cases. On a day-to-day basis, managers work closely with their case managers to ensure that any relationships case managers have with the veterans they are handling are appropriate. Building a good relationship with the veteran may require the case manager to offer advice beyond the normal scope or to speak to the veteran in a more personal manner than is necessary.

**Mr. Luc Desilets:** Okay. Case managers report to a manager, right?

**Mr. Steven Harris:** Yes.

**Mr. Luc Desilets:** Are managers generally aware of what's going on in the cases handled by their case managers?

**Mr. Steven Harris:** I would say they are.

**Mr. Luc Desilets:** They must occasionally report.

**Mr. Steven Harris:** As part of the annual performance assessment, managers do talk to their employees, in this case, the case managers, about the cases of the veterans they are handling.

**Mr. Luc Desilets:** Was this employee's manager aware of how to work with his case manager?

**Mr. Steven Harris:** First of all, I'd like to clarify that he was not a case manager, he was a veterans service agent. He was not aware of the information on file regarding medical assistance in dying.

**Mr. Luc Desilets:** Perfect.

Thank you very much, Mr. Harris and Mr. Ledwell.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Desilets.

[*English*]

To close this panel, I'd like to invite Ms. Rachel Blaney for two and a half minutes.

Please go ahead.

**Ms. Rachel Blaney:** Thank you so much, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Harris, I really appreciated your answers last time around, so I think I'll come back to you for a second.

For my first question, is it possible for you to table with the committee the system of performance review—absolutely not details, but just what the methodology looks like—so that we can better understand it?

**Mr. Steven Harris:** Sure.

The system of performance review is guided by the Treasury Board Secretariat for all public servants, not only in Veterans Affairs. We can certainly make sure that becomes available to you.

**Ms. Rachel Blaney:** Thank you.

When these performance reviews are done, are veterans ever a source of the performance reviews? What does that process look like, if that is so?

**Mr. Steven Harris:** Veterans aren't consulted directly. However, sometimes veterans are included in terms of case notes that are referenced.

There could be veterans who have escalated issues. If the veterans service agent or the case manager they are directly dealing with hasn't responded effectively to their needs, as Mr. Ledwell pointed out before, there are measures for escalation.

Feedback from veterans and the support that's being offered to them does get taken into account in terms of the performance review process.

**Ms. Rachel Blaney:** If a veteran has a case manager and feels concerned about something, do they have a clear process? Could what that process looks like and how that complaint is followed up also be shared? That would be extremely helpful for the committee.

**Mr. Steven Harris:** There are a variety of ways of escalation. Sometimes that includes reaching out to somebody in the office directly. Sometimes that's a phone call into our client contact centre. Sometimes that's a message to someone like myself as a senior official. There are a number of ways to do that.

We can certainly try to collect a few of them for you and share methods of escalation for veterans who may have questions or concerns about the service they're receiving.

**Ms. Rachel Blaney:** Thank you. That's really helpful.

For me, what's really important is that we don't want this to happen again. The best way to do that, of course, is to see systems become stronger, so I think that would be very helpful for the committee.

The last question I have is just a repeat from last time, which I didn't get answered.

If a veteran asks for a conversation to be recorded, is there any method of doing that?

**Mr. Steven Harris:** There's no method of doing it on the Veterans Affairs side.

Often veterans have indicated that they're recording conversations that they may be having with a Veterans Affairs representative. In some cases, they will note to us that they are actually recording the conversation. In other cases they won't tell us, but at future points they may come back and indicate that they have this recorded and that's what was said last time or what have you.

We don't have a method of just clicking a button and starting to record a conversation if requested.

• (1735)

**Ms. Rachel Blaney:** Thank you for that.

Thank you, Chair.

**The Chair:** Thank you so much. That concludes our panel.

I would like to say thank you to our witnesses.

[*Translation*]

Our guests today were Deputy Minister Paul Ledwell, and Assistant Deputy Minister, Service Delivery Branch, Steven Harris. Once again, I thank them for participating in our study.

I'd like to remind committee members that, in light of the motion introduced by Mr. Richards, we will continue our study survivor pension benefits next Monday in camera.

As everyone knows, several people have worked very hard to organize today's meeting. We thank our clerk, who is joined by Ms. Burke and our analyst.

I also want to thank the interpretation team and the technical team for all their efforts.

Is it the pleasure of the committee to adjourn the meeting?

I see that no one objects.

The meeting is adjourned.

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