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Chair: Mr. Ben Carr





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• (1000)

[English]

**The Chair (Mr. Ben Carr (Winnipeg South Centre, Lib.)):** Good morning, colleagues.

[Translation]

Good morning, everyone.

[English]

Everybody, we are gathering together for the 117th meeting of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs.

We have another three hours this morning and into the early afternoon.

I note that there was some surprise on the part of members that there was breakfast this morning. It feels as though, perhaps, this is one of the earlier meeting times, so I hope everyone is enjoying the change in meal plans.

We have with us this morning witnesses from the translation bureau.

[Translation]

I'm going to introduce them and give them the floor shortly.

[English]

As a reminder to colleagues and to witnesses, when you're not using your earpiece, please make sure that it is placed on the sticker to either your left or right in order to respect the health and well-being of our translators—which, of course, you would fully understand.

With that, colleagues, we continue our study. This is the second meeting of our study reviewing the members of the House of Commons workplace harassment and violence prevention policy. I thought the last meeting was incredibly informative, productive and respectful. I hope we can continue in that vein.

Without any further delay, I would like to welcome, from the translation bureau, Jean-François Lymburner, chief executive officer; Matthew Ball, vice-president, service to Parliament and interpretation; and Annie Trépanier, vice-president, policy and corporate.

You will have up to 10 minutes collectively, as a group, for an opening statement.

With that, I pass it over to you, Mr. Lymburner.

[Translation]

**Mr. Jean-François Lymburner (Chief Executive Officer, Translation Bureau):** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Good morning, everyone.

I would like to acknowledge the presence of my colleagues Annie Trépanier and Matthew Ball, the two vice-presidents of the Translation Bureau.

I would also like to acknowledge that we are gathered on the traditional territory of the Algonquin people.

Mr. Chair, honourable members of the committee, thank you for this invitation to contribute to your review of the members of the House of Commons workplace harassment and violence prevention policy.

We are pleased to be able to discuss with you today the long-standing relationship between members of Parliament and our employees, as we celebrate the 90th anniversary of the Translation Bureau. For 90 years now, we have been providing the quality linguistic services that are essential to the smooth running of Parliament.

[English]

While our translators and terminologists rarely have the opportunity to meet the parliamentarians for whom they work, quite the opposite is true for the interpreters, who spend most of their days, and often their evenings, with elected officials.

Since the inauguration of simultaneous interpretation in the House of Commons 65 years ago, bureau interpreters are seen and especially heard at most parliamentary meetings.

On that note, I would really like to take the opportunity to say thank you to Mathieu, Kristen and Caroline, who are interpreting our session today.

Mr. Chair, interpreters have no direct reporting relationship with MPs. They are not part of the political or parliamentary staff, but rather of the core public administration. Although MPs are their primary target audience, they don't have to interact with them directly, except on the few occasions when they are called upon to stand beside them and offer what we call “elbow interpretation”. Interpreters are usually isolated in their booth, and the clerks of the House of Commons administration act as their intermediaries with the MPs.

That being said, MPs have a direct impact on the working conditions of interpreters through their discipline during interpreted meetings. Certain basic behaviours, such as respecting the right to speak, go a long way towards facilitating the work of interpreters in addition to preventing the acoustic incidents that can occur when more than one microphone is open at the same time.

● (1005)

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Jean-François Lyburner:** On this subject, Mr. Chair, the honourable members of your committee will be aware that a number of directives, procedures and measures have been implemented over the past few years to promote sound quality and thus protect the hearing and health of our interpreters.

Interpreters started reporting symptoms after providing simultaneous interpretation at virtual and hybrid meetings over 10 years ago. Since then, we have been steadfastly taking steps to better understand and prevent risks to interpreters, with the help of the House of Commons administration, which is responsible for providing technical support for interpretation.

Drawing inspiration from the many study reports we have obtained and lessons learned from our consultations abroad, we implemented several protection measures. The Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs mentioned these measures in its May 2020 and January 2023 reports, entitled “Parliamentary Duties and the COVID-19 Pandemic,” and “Future of Hybrid Proceedings in the House of Commons”.

Allow me to mention a few of these measures. For example, interpretation consoles designed to protect hearing are being used. A technician is also assigned to each meeting with simultaneous interpretation. Sound tests must be carried out before each meeting. Lastly, anyone speaking virtually, as is the case here today, is required to use an ISO microphone; otherwise, what they say will not be interpreted.

[*English*]

We also created the position of a director of parliamentary affairs and interpreter well-being to ensure the effectiveness and enhancement of protective measures. Over the past years, our director has worked with the House of Commons administration to develop protocols that formalize the prevention and the management of acoustic incidents.

He also drew up a continuous improvement plan under which we received, this year, the results of the three new studies: two on the sound transmitted, and one on the changes in the hearing of the interpreters. We look forward to receiving the expert recommendations by the end of this year.

I'm happy to report, Mr. Chair, that all of these efforts are paying off. While 128 acoustic incidents were reported in 2022, 74 were recorded in 2023, and so far this year, we only have 10.

Of course, incidents still happen. Sound is a very highly complex thing that is very difficult to control perfectly, and there will always be a risk of an acoustic incident. Nevertheless, we're determined to continue working as a team with the House administration and with experts in the field to minimize the risk.

Most recently, following direction received from the labour program of Employment and Social Development Canada, new guidelines for handling earpieces, as mentioned this morning, have been introduced to prevent audio feedback, also known as the Larsen effect.

[*Translation*]

The Translation Bureau knows that these measures increase the complexity of your meetings, and we are grateful to your honourable colleagues for their goodwill in complying with them.

We are also cognizant of the frustration that MPs can feel when, despite all the precautions, a meeting has to be interrupted because the sound is not good enough to allow for interpretation.

For somebody who has never interpreted, it can be difficult to imagine how a seemingly minor sound problem could prevent interpretation. But because interpreters have to speak while they are listening, they require sound quality that is superior to that required by the participants. A bit of crackling that an ordinary participant would hardly notice can cause interpreters to experience headaches and hearing problems.

That's why we've instructed our interpreters to stop interpreting in the event of sound problems.

[*English*]

I will not deny that this decision is often unpopular. Even if the clerk acts as an intermediary between the MPs and the interpreter, some MPs may express dissatisfaction, and the interpreter may be, or feel, targeted.

In the end, despite the inconvenience, one thing is clear: Interpreters cannot interpret what they cannot hear. They should never put themselves at risk by attempting to plow ahead to avoid criticism. This is why our protocol clearly stipulates that if pressure is placed on an interpreter to not interrupt the service or to resume it despite poor sound quality, they must contact the supervisor immediately, and we will intervene to rectify the situation.

That being said, so far, thanks to the great collaboration with the clerks and the committee chairs, interactions have been respectful.

[*Translation*]

Nonetheless, tools such as the policy you are currently reviewing are very useful for defusing any conflicts that might arise in the context of parliamentary meetings, where emotions can run high. Although we have never had to use it, we are grateful to the honourable members for introducing it, and we thank the committee for seeking our comments regarding its implementation.

We would be happy to take your questions now.

• (1010)

[English]

Thank you very much.

[Translation]

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

I'm glad to hear that there has been a remarkable improvement following the introduction of the new rules. Without a doubt, the interpreters do very important work for us, and we thank them for it.

[English]

Colleagues, we're going to now enter our first round of questioning.

Mr. Duncan, I believe you would like the floor, and you will have six minutes.

**Mr. Eric Duncan (Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry, CPC):** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to our witnesses for being here this morning. Happy 90th anniversary to the organization and your team, and thank you for the work you do.

I always say that I have to make sure I talk slowly. I speak “Duncanese” sometimes, as our family in eastern Ontario would say, so I've come to respect, more often, the longer I'm here, the work that you do, day in and day out.

You referenced the reports that PROC has undertaken before, and I want to build off those and ask some follow-up questions, just to narrow down a few different things.

You've alluded to this in your opening, but it is the hybrid aspect, that extra technology through Zoom and through meetings, that has been the the overwhelming increase in workplace injuries or a lot of the anxieties that your staff face. Is that correct?

**Mr. Jean-François Lyburner:** Mr. Chair, absolutely.

I think the period especially at the beginning of the pandemic, for all of us, only a few years ago, we had probably no clue about MS Teams or Zoom, or even about connecting with family and friends, and also in the workplace. Also, the systems were very different. We've come a long way, and now I think it's part of the behaviour of most of the workplaces around the world. I heard that in around 90% of the meetings everywhere now have at least one person who's connecting from a different location; it could be in town, a few blocks away or it could be at the other end of the country.

We got a lot better at understanding, and the companies have also adjusted to make sure they understand the quality of sounds. You've also recognized behaviours, like talking without a microphone. I see more and more people using their headsets. Today, we have people online, and they have their headsets on. A few years ago, it was not even part of the normal practice. Absolutely, I think we've got a lot better.

**Mr. Eric Duncan:** With that, just in looking at the stats that were in a report, from March 2020 to September 2022 the bureau received 90 incident reports. By contrast, prepandemic, when virtual or remote connection was not an option, there was one complaint in the five years before that. My point being, as well....

We have interesting work that we do here—this was brought up at our previous meeting—and it's different from most workplaces in many different ways, in the sense that this is, at times, an adversarial committee as well. Yes, people have remote work options, but the style, the organization of meetings and the passions that are here are a bit different as well.

I don't know if you are able to break it down a bit, but can you elaborate a bit more about the different types of hybrid meetings in which these injuries are reported? The incidents that happen—whether they're injuries, complaints that are made or issues that are raised—are they of a technical nature or were they because multiple people were talking? Do you have those broken down about exactly what the complaints emanated from?

**Mr. Jean-François Lyburner:** That's a very good question, Mr. Chair. I'll try to break that down, absolutely.

You mentioned what happened before the pandemic. I also said in my opening remarks that, for the past 10 years, we've been measuring that. I played Canadian football, if you remember, and people are a lot more aware now of concussion issues. It's a similar effect when you get a big loud bang in your ear. That can create.... I think the data and the science are getting better to...understand what happens. Similarly to concussions, when I played nobody cared about that, but now I think there are a lot of protocols in place. The reason there was no data in the past may be that they were put in the spotlight, given the conditions of the pandemic.

In terms of the breakdown—I really like the question, Mr. Chair, because we call them “sound incidents”—the sound is like the supply chain, but it's a sound chain. It could be many things. If it's a remote participant, like we have today, something can happen in their building, they can lose connectivity and we can lose sound there. For us that might be a sound incident that might not cause an injury or affect the hearing of the interpreter. That being said, they might not be able to interpret if they're not getting the sound, so for us it's a service interruption. We track those.

After that there's.... I don't know, but some of you might have been in meetings a couple of weeks ago when there was an alert on our phones, which was testing the alert system around Canada. There were a lot of meetings, believe it or not, around Canada. Everybody had their phone and, all of a sudden, that big buzz came out. For interpreters who were actually actively listening, it could have created some discomfort, and we have measures for that.

As we mentioned, we went from 128 cases in 2022 to 78 last year, and now we have 10. The downside of that is that the ones we have left are driven mostly by human behaviour. It is the fact that you bring the earpiece towards the microphone, and that's what causes what they call the "Larsen effect". The Larsen effect is basically a fancy name for feedback, the buzz. That sound can be extremely harmful for your hearing. That's why, even though we only have a few now, those are the ones we would really like to prevent by working with our colleagues. We have that type.

It could be, also, that when the sound is super low, they will work but they can't hear, so it will probably have an effect on them. That's not as immediate as the Larson effect, but we're tracking those as well. They're in the family of sound-related incidents.

• (1015)

**Mr. Eric Duncan:** I'm cognizant of my time. I think I can get one more in.

I appreciate the football...that is a good example. Maybe the difference we have to keep confronting here is that, when you play a football game, everyone's there on the field. Here, when we're trying to do the work, people are at home, or in an office or could be wherever, having or not having an approved headset.

My final point for you to comment on is that I think, from the previous studies, the best and safest way for the work you do is when we are here in person within the room. That can control, from a technological...or what you can control is the best. If you're relying on Zoom or other things, wherever people are, the Internet connection, what devices they're using or the way they're participating in a meeting.... The best way, at the end of the day, the safest way for you is still when we are in person as much as possible. Is that correct?

**Mr. Jean-François Lymburner:** Very quickly, I would say it is correct. We really enjoy when it's in person because do work out of the cabin, but there could be some incidents in an in-person setting as well: I will just highlight that. This is where the Larsen effect happens, whereas online there are different types of problems.

**The Chair:** Thanks very much, Mr. Duncan.

[Translation]

Ms. Fortier, you have the floor for six minutes.

**Hon. Mona Fortier (Ottawa—Vanier, Lib.):** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I'd like to thank the witnesses for being here.

Before beginning, I'd like to thank you for your professionalism and your work, because you are being asked to do first-rate work for us every day. Once again, I'd like to thank you for it.

I can work in both languages, but I sometimes use the interpretation service. It's an essential service for ensuring that information is transmitted. I can tell you that the work you do is good indeed.

Getting back to this study, we are currently reviewing the House of Commons workplace harassment and violence prevention policy, and I'd like to focus on this particular exercise, about which we would like to hear your opinion and observations.

I was wondering whether you could describe one or two instances in which the behaviour of an MP during a committee meeting could be harmful to the interpreters.

I'd also like to know whether situations like this occur frequently.

That's the information I would like to have from you today.

**Mr. Jean-François Lymburner:** Those are excellent questions.

First of all, it's important to point out that the Translation Bureau is part of the public administration, and as such, subject to the values and ethics code for the public sector. The Translation Bureau is within the Public Services and Procurement Canada portfolio, which also has a code of conduct. These two codes govern cases of violence and harassment not only within the department, but also in dealings with the public or clients. It's worth noting that 90 to 100 departments and agencies use the bureau's services. This includes translation services, but what we're looking at today is interpretation.

We won't deny that the interpreters here are rather invisible. Things can often happen behind the window of the interpreters' booth. At a liaison committee meeting, we met the committee chairs and were able to discuss ways of improving communications to ensure that the chair or the clerk would be informed if any incidents were to occur in the interpreters' booth.

I can give you an example of certain types of behaviour. You've no doubt already heard about people who twist the cord of their earpiece while speaking. It's not necessarily done consciously. It's often a nervous tick during debate. It's like what some people do when they nervously fiddle with a pencil. But it can definitely jeopardize the interpreters' work. It can also be perceived, not as a lack of respect, but as a lack of familiarity with the dangers of the Larsen effect. That's why stickers are posted to explain how to proceed.

In some instances, meetings had to be interrupted. We spoke about people who are online. There was one instance in which, even though the witness had a working microphone, there was no sound. It's impossible to interpret what you can't hear. When that happens, the meeting has to be interrupted. Once the interpretation is working again following an interruption, you can sense that the committee is eager to get on with the meeting. Sometimes there are heated debates during committee meetings.

Those are the sorts of situations that can arise. We have so far dealt with them in discussions.

I'm going to ask Mr. Ball, an experienced interpreter, to tell you more about it.

• (1020)

**Hon. Mona Fortier:** I'm going to ask you to briefly give us an example, Mr. Ball. After that, I have another question.

**Mr. Matthew Ball (Vice-President, Service to Parliament and Interpretation, Translation Bureau):** Thank you.

Interpreters are well aware of their role in political debate in Canada. We work in a highly politicized setting. In the cut and thrust of political debate, emotions run high. When there's an interruption in interpretation, some people often become critical or angry. However, it's a situation we deal with extremely well. The interpreters know that they are under a great deal of pressure.

The interpreters know that I, as a manager responsible for their services, support them, back them up and help them whenever they have to interrupt their interpretation. We also have a code of ethics: Interpreters who can't hear what is being said can't provide the service, and have to stop interpreting.

**Hon. Mona Fortier:** I used to sit on committees before I became a minister, and now that I find myself back in committee, I have noticed that some of the conversations can be highly toxic.

Would you agree that this has increased? How does this sort of thing impact the work of the interpreters? How can it be dealt with?

**Mr. Jean-François Lymburner:** I'm going to ask Mr. Ball to answer.

**Mr. Matthew Ball:** Thank you for the question. It's a very interesting one. I must say that it would be difficult for me to comment on that.

Interpreters are the voice of you, the MPs. They put themselves in your place. You know better than me how emotions can enter into your statements and your answers. But the interpreter is not you. Interpreters know how to separate themselves from you, the members, and your role. They are there to represent you. They even address themselves in the first person and use the pronoun "I" on your behalf.

I don't think that the situation you are describing is a problem.

**Hon. Mona Fortier:** The interpreter doesn't necessarily adopt the attitude or behaviour of the person speaking. If someone is speaking really loudly, the interpreter is not necessarily going to do so. The interpreter is not going to adopt the emotions of a member, for example. I would imagine that in doing their work, they interpret words, but not necessarily actions or moods. Am I wrong?

**Mr. Matthew Ball:** No, you're not wrong. I think that's a good question.

There are two schools of thought on emotions and interpretation. There is the more traditional European school according to which interpreters should speak in a monotone. Emotions don't enter into it. I believe that today, many clients prefer a more emotional form of interpretation that reflects the emotions behind the words. I used to teach at the University of Ottawa. My view is that interpreting what people say amounts to more than just words, but also the ideas underlying the words, including emotions and other aspects.

So I think it's all right for an interpreter to capture some of the emotion that underlies what you, the members, are saying. But the interpreter is not feeling your emotions, just representing them.

**Hon. Mona Fortier:** If I have an opportunity to speak about this again later, I'd like to go into the matter in greater depth. I'd like to know about current practices based on this school of thought and

whether you have any suggestions to make to us as part of our study.

Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Ms. Fortier.

Ms. Gaudreau, the floor is yours now for six minutes.

**Ms. Marie-Hélène Gaudreau (Laurentides—Labelle, BQ):** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Greetings to my colleagues, the interpreters and the witnesses. I don't often attend meetings remotely.

Given what I've heard, I would like to focus on one particular aspect with the witnesses.

For quite a few minutes, we've been talking about physical health. We talked about the Larsen effect. And we've just talked about the tone of interpretation to render emotions to a certain extent.

We are currently considering the House of Commons workplace harassment and violence prevention policy. I am putting myself in the interpreters' shoes. I believe you'll be able to answer my question, which is about whether they should interpret every single word spoken by parliamentarians, including insulting and disrespectful words?

**Mr. Jean-François Lymburner:** I'll make a start on answering that question, and then ask Mr. Ball to add his comments.

One thing we don't want is for interpreters to add words that were not spoken. We've talked about this. If they don't hear something, even if they think they might have understood the intent of what was said, they are not to use words that were not mentioned.

As words are being spoken, the interpreters can sometimes summarize what was said. It's something that happens very quickly and there's no real gap. They are listening and speaking at the same time. So interpreters can sometimes summarize what was said.

I'll ask Mr. Ball to add his comments about specific words.

Mr. Ball, can you recall instances where words were omitted?

• (1025)

**Mr. Matthew Ball:** It's true that it's important for interpreters to translate all words that are spoken. And, as Mr. Lymburner just said, it's important not to add any words. There are some key moments in political debate. Some words are unparliamentary. Even so, the interpreter should render them because otherwise, people who speak the other language will not have heard them. This happened recently in the House of Commons, and it led to important decisions.

**Ms. Marie-Hélène Gaudreau:** I gather, then, Mr. Ball, that there's no policy on avoiding certain words, which would require the interpreter to say that they didn't hear what was said when they in fact did but don't want to render it into the other language.

**Mr. Matthew Ball:** That's right. If the interpreter hears what is said, the interpreter has to render it.

**Ms. Marie-Hélène Gaudreau:** So, let's say that I'm an interpreter and tomorrow morning, I hear some insulting, misogynistic or other words. What do I do?

How do interpreters experience incidents like the ones that occurred? There's collateral damage. I want you to be very frank about this. I have serious concerns about this issue.

**Mr. Jean-François Lymburner:** I understand what you're asking. There are several aspects I would like to address.

First of all, the work is intense. I believe you've recently noticed that our workload had been increasing in terms of translating your documents, the number of hours of interpretation, and the various requests from the committees. The work is done in a rather short time span. We won't deny that we can feel the pressure during certain events or meetings. It's something you feel, and I think—

**Ms. Marie-Hélène Gaudreau:** I'm sorry to interrupt you, but I don't have a lot of time.

My question is about the mental health of the interpreters, who are sometimes required to interpret comments that cause them distress and that conflict with their values. The work of interpreters has evolved considerably. Interpretation is now done with more emotional content and I appreciate that. I've done some theatre acting and I understand that it's just interpretation, but I'd like to know how the interpreters feel in similar circumstances.

What we want to do here is introduce a policy that would basically have an impact on all staff. What do they tell you when the situation worsens? To be blunt, it's not going very well right now.

**Mr. Jean-François Lymburner:** I understand the mental health side of the question.

I could add that the main impact on our interpreters in terms of mental health is worrying about potential acoustic incidents.

The interpreters show professionalism and understand how discussions can go, whether on one of the committees or during question period in the House, for example. I haven't felt the concern that you raised. But within the department and the Translation Bureau, we make every effort in terms of mental health.

To me, what affects the mental health of interpreters the most is not knowing on any given day whether there will be a Larsen effect that could have an impact on their hearing.

**The Chair:** Ms. Gaudreau, you have 60 seconds left.

**Ms. Marie-Hélène Gaudreau:** Okay. Thank you.

I'm going to explain where I'm headed. For our study, I think we need to have a proper overview of the situation. We could conduct a survey of interpreters to know how they would feel about having to do their work in a different context, one which is disrespectful, in which they would have to interpret hurtful comments. For the pur-

pose of our study, it would be important to know how our interpreters feel about it.

I'm putting myself in their shoes. I know that they're looking at me now. So I imagine myself in their shoes and for me, I would worry most about my physical health. Nevertheless, I would like to know how the interpreters feel when they go back home after having interpreted some disrespectful debates.

Would it be possible for you to get this information?

**Mr. Jean-François Lymburner:** We have services in the department—

**The Chair:** Briefly, Mr. Lymburner.

**Mr. Jean-François Lymburner:** Okay.

We can check to see if there's any feedback of this kind from our interpreters. I would also include the translators, because it's the same for them. We also have interpreters at the Supreme Court, where there are all kinds of issues like that.

Once again, I would point to the professionalism of the interpreters. They are used to working in all kinds of circumstances.

• (1030)

**Ms. Marie-Hélène Gaudreau:** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Ms. Gaudreau.

[*English*]

Ms. Mathysen, the floor is yours for six minutes.

**Ms. Lindsay Mathysen (London—Fanshawe, NDP):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to the witnesses.

I want to continue in that vein. We did hear from the last meeting's panel about the impacts. You're not only interpreting but you're also part of this institution. As a former staffer, I was always amazed at how, while I wasn't directly the one in the line of fire, per se, there was a great deal of impact. There's a feeling on the Hill that gets translated down—excuse the pun—and on to others.

I appreciate that there is an attempt to have that separation, and that interpreters do separate themselves, but is there specific training that comes with that? Is that part of the training in order to become an interpreter?

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Jean-François Lymburner:** As the question is about training, I'm going to ask Mr. Ball to answer it.



[English]

**Mr. Matthew Ball:** Yes, it's part of the interpreter's job to separate themselves from the speech. As interpreters, we are all public servants. Our job is to represent your thoughts faithfully and accurately to the listeners in the other language group. That is part of the training at the university.

Yes, interpreters do have to hear sometimes horrific things. Political debate is probably not the worst of things that many interpreters hear. Yes, it's part of the training. Interpreters form a community. They speak to each other afterwards. If there's a particularly difficult meeting, they talk amongst themselves in the booth and they debrief. I know this because I've lived it.

I would say that I'm not overly concerned about their mental health from that perspective. I would agree with my boss—not just because he's my boss—that the bigger concerns for them are more around the health and safety stuff. As Mr. Lyburner says, we've made great strides, and I think they're reassured by that. I think from a mental health standpoint, for us it's health and safety that's the greatest.

As I said earlier, most interpreters understand that they work in a highly politicized environment. They are able to separate themselves and what they speak into the microphone from you. I'm not overly concerned about that. It's part of the job. When you become an interpreter, you accept that.

**Ms. Lindsay Mathysen:** In terms of the supports that you referenced briefly at the end of the last question in terms of that mental health support, there certainly is a greater understanding as we move forward, even over the last year or so, of what the mental health challenges or impacts are for anybody in any workplace, but specifically this one.

Could you go into a bit more detail about how you're ensuring, in terms of that greater understanding and that evolution of our understanding of mental health, that this is in place for interpreters? Is there anything we can do to ensure that within this institution it's more in line with what is needed?

**Mr. Jean-François Lyburner:** Mr. Chair, this is a very good question. What we did, as I mentioned in my opening remarks, is we created a position, a director's position, for the well-being of interpreters. This has never been done before in the history of the translation bureau, so we've put somebody in place whose only focus is on that—and part of the well-being is definitely mental health. It goes through many types.

We have numerous discussions. We meet them, we bring them together to get their feedback, and we're making sure that we have plans to improve our services.

I would like to highlight that we do 50,000 hours of interpretation every year for Parliament, which is tremendous. There are a lot of things that are going well.

Again, it's that prediction of any type of incident. What I would say is causing the most stress right now when you walk into work.... If you would walk to work and you don't know if today something's going to happen to you, it creates some anxiety, but it's not the only thing.

The relationship with our colleagues in the House of Commons and the Senate is paramount. Doing what we do is a team sport because there are many people who are not even from the same organization who all come together to support what we're doing here.

We're paying a lot of attention. I mentioned the ombudsman of PSPC, which is an amazing service that they can go to talk to. In addition, because of what happened....

And, of course, we also have instructions from Labour Canada.

It's very serious, so we want to make sure that everybody understands what we're doing, and being transparent and having a discussion is our main tool.

• (1035)

**Ms. Lindsay Mathysen:** In terms of how members can do better in this—our improvements—I think of certain instances.... I play with a pen; I don't play with the earphone, but I have certainly seen instances where specific members purposely scream into their mics in the House of Commons. It's a shtick. It's their effect. What do you do in those instances? How do you deal with that? Is there a protocol? Has that been used in these particular instances?

**Mr. Jean-François Lyburner:** Mr. Chair, as part of our measures that we've put in place, the sound is controlled behind the window as well, so we're trying to put in everything that we can to mitigate those situations. Interpreters can also adjust the volume they need to work with, for sure.

Matthew, do you want to add anything?

**Mr. Matthew Ball:** As you know, our goal is not to hamper your debate. Our goal is not to impede how members of Parliament work.

With the instructions, the directions that have been put in place, we understand that they're having an impact on maybe how MPs feel about the service. But really, we've directed interpreters to make sure that they look after their health and safety. If someone's yelling in the microphone, obviously they need to turn the volume down.

We understand that at the end of the day, MPs believe, probably, that it's more important to have healthy interpreters who can continue to support them and can make sure that the capacity is there, rather than maybe missing a word because the volume was turned down.

We're there to support them and to make sure they work as safely as possible.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Madam Mathysen.

[Translation]

Mr. Berthold, you have the floor for five minutes.

**Mr. Luc Berthold (Mégantic—L'Érable, CPC):** Thank you very much, Mr. chair.

Five minutes is not very long.

I'd like to begin by underscoring the Translation Bureau's 90 years of existence, and the 65 years during which the translation of debates has been compulsory. That's extremely important, particularly for a Quebecker like me who speaks French 99% of the time in committee and in the House. I find it interesting to learn that my colleagues can hear, understand, and feel what I'm saying. Indeed, I'm very pleased to have learned more about this new way of understanding interpretation and the ability of the interpreters to also transmit the emotional content of those whose comments they are interpreting. I have, at international meetings, been exposed to the European style of interpretation. I can tell you that it's much more interesting to hear excerpts from our debates, into which the interpreters inject a degree of emotion. I'm not talking here about extreme emotions, but a layer of emotions. I would say emphatically that our interpreters do excellent work, and I'm very grateful to them for it.

As an MP, I tended to speak very quickly, but I think I've slowed down considerably since learning more about the work interpreters do. I was able on a number of occasions to have discussions with a few of them. For a 35-second question in the House of Commons, I slowed down from 130 or 135 words to 100 or 105 words. I believe everyone was very happy about it.

I can't say enough about the excellent work you do.

Having said that, I'd like to know how many complaints you've received from MPs about interpretation over the past five years.

**Mr. Jean-François Lyburner:** Thank you very much for your glowing praise of the Translation Bureau's services.

Since my arrival, the emphasis has mainly been on sound incidents. However, people frequently met with me to discuss preferences or to tell me about certain comments. I must say that the number is rather small. I even received some comments from people who said they really liked the new earpiece, while others didn't like it at all. It's therefore rather difficult to have—

**Mr. Luc Berthold:** So there weren't—

I'm sorry; we're not supposed to talk at the same time. I'll do my best to avoid it.

What I wanted to know was whether you had received any official complaints from members about your work.

**Mr. Jean-François Lyburner:** We received a few official complaints about the translation of certain documents in which mistakes were found. You are no doubt aware of these.

As for interpretation, I could ask Mr. Ball if he has any to report. The comments I've heard since arriving here sometimes had to do with things like the interpreters' tone of voice or the fact that one interpreter was speaking louder than another. I often hear comments like that, but nothing major was brought to our attention. I believe that our interpreters are among the best in the world, because it's a very stringent exam.

Nevertheless, there are preferences. It's like audiobooks: Some people like them, but others find them rather tedious. It depends on each person's preferences.

**Mr. Luc Berthold:** As we've seen, it's sometimes difficult not to talk at the same time as someone else when you're trying to have a

conversation. That's what I wanted to illustrate. It's sometimes difficult for a member like me not to interrupt the person I'm speaking with. Sometimes, when I want to get a witness to talk about something, I have to interrupt them, even though I don't really want to. It's one of the problems we all have as MPs, when we're speaking with a witness and the witness is taking a long time to answer our question. But that wasn't the case with you just now. In any event, it illustrates the nature of conversation. I really wanted us to talk about that relationship.

So there were no complaints from MPs about interpreters for cases of harassment or anything like that.

But then, without naming names, could you tell me if any interpreters have complained about MPs in connection with harassment or related issues?

• (1040)

**Mr. Jean-François Lyburner:** There haven't been any official complaints as far as I know.

I have to say though, as I indicated at the outset, that the Values and Ethics Code for the Public Sector and the department's code of conduct very much encourage informal conflict resolution. Some individuals might not have been heard, but that may be a matter of perception. For example, as you can see on the screen, the person speaking is in a car. The interpreter may say that he or she can't really hear what's being said, while others in the room may reply that they can hear the person loud and clear. That can make interpreters feel their judgment is somehow being questioned. I've heard of cases like that.

As for official complaints, Ms. Trépanier has been with the Translation Bureau longer than I have and can give you more details on that.

**Ms. Annie Trépanier ( Vice-President, Policy and Corporate Services, Translation Bureau):** I haven't heard of any official complaints either.

Interpretation isn't easy work, as Mr. Lyburner said. Interpreters constantly have to rely on their judgment to determine what they can or can't interpret. I can assure you that all interpreters are keen to do their job when they show up for work. They don't enjoy interrupting someone's remarks or saying they can't interpret them because they can't clearly hear them. I can confirm that they don't like doing that.

**Mr. Luc Berthold:** I—

**The Chair:** Mr. Berthold, your five minutes are unfortunately up.

**Mr. Luc Berthold:** I just wanted to thank them.

**The Chair:** Absolutely, I'll let you do that.

**Mr. Luc Berthold:** Thank you very much for the work you do.

I worked for years in the sound industry, in very loud environments, as a radio host and disc jockey in the evenings and on weekends. So I understand how important it is to have good equipment.

It's hard to wear earpieces when you also wear glasses because they make for a very tight fit. That's just a brief personal comment.

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

Ms. Romanado, the floor is yours for five minutes.

**Mrs. Sherry Romanado (Longueuil—Charles-LeMoine, Lib.):** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Thanks to the witnesses for being here this morning.

[*English*]

I want to give a special thank you to the interpreters for doing what they do. Rest assured that when I was chair of a committee, if there were a sound issue, we stopped the committee. It did not go forward if we couldn't secure the sound for the interpreters to ensure the work they do.

I want to follow up a little bit on some of what my colleague MP Mathysen was talking about. In this place, interpreters spend their day being our voice, and some MPs—and it happens, whether it be in the House or in a committee—will get very passionate about what they're talking about. Some will scream into the mike and some will argue amongst each other, so you have words that are being interpreted that are sometimes not the most pleasant, whether it be the very loud sound or fighting amongst each other.

There's also sometimes the subject matter. I've sat on the Veterans Affairs committee, where we would hear horrifying testimony. During some of the studies that we undertake in the status of women committee, we hear horrific testimony. The interpreters are very professional, but, at the end of the day, they go home, and they have to replay what they heard and what they had to say.

I think that is where we're trying to go, to say that the words that we are using, whether it be in tone, in sound or the actual words, must have an impact on them. I mean, I can get up and walk out of debate in the House if it's getting a little testy for me; they can't. I think that's where we're going with this, to understand how the words we use and how we use them impact them.

Have you had any complaints or people saying, “Look, I just I can't do that committee anymore; it's too heavy for me.” Has that ever happened?

• (1045)

**Mr. Jean-François Lyburner:** Mr. Chair, it hasn't happened since I joined the translation bureau, but what I would like to maybe elaborate on today is that there are two or three people in the booth, and they are also replacing one another in the course of a conversation, and sometimes they would focus on something else, so maybe they won't have the entire view.

Just from an energy perspective, when you get into a room and there's something heavy, everybody's affected, of course, and we can understand that. We've been so focused on their mental health and well-being that there's a possibility for them to voice those concerns. It's not something that we take lightly. Of course, recently,

the emphasis seems to be on the physical, but I don't think we ever put down the impact on their mental health.

The scheduling is extremely tight as well. Some of your committees are going over time, beyond midnight, and they're extremely well trained for that type of very intense, short period of time. After that, they have other measures over the summer to kind of get ready.

Maybe I'll ask Matthew about the screaming part, because, again, we have limiters for sounds behind the scene, and that will cut off a sound that is going too high. Maybe you want to elaborate on that.

**Mr. Matthew Ball:** If I may, Mr. Chair, it's a very interesting question, and it is something we are aware of. It is a phenomenon known as secondary or vicarious trauma, and interpreters do experience it.

We have the chief interpreter for Canada behind us here, and she's part of a network of worldwide heads of interpreting services, and this is something that's discussed at these tables, so it is something we're certainly aware of.

I'd just like to reassure the committee members that the interpreters who work for Parliament understand the cut and thrust of the debate. I would say that even members themselves probably understand that, sometimes, you know, they put it on a little and it's a little dramatic, a show, and sometimes it's very authentic and genuine, and that's part of the job. I think all of our staff and our freelance interpreters understand this very well.

I'm not overly concerned about vicarious or secondary trauma. Like Mr. Lyburner said, the bigger concern for me is that they feel safe and that it's a healthy work environment, and Mr. Lyburner alluded to this, that it's a team sport. I've been in the booth when I've had to interpret stuff that's emotional, and sometimes you just have to take a break, so there are three people in the booth to support you.

**Mrs. Sherry Romanado:** I'm out of time, but I wanted to thank you for that. As you've trained us or taught us about the importance of good sound hygiene, we want to also keep in mind that the words that we're using can also hurt in a sense—not just the person receiving them but also the person having to translate them. Thank you.

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

[*Translation*]

Ms. Gaudreau, you have the floor, but unfortunately for only two and a half minutes.

**Ms. Marie-Hélène Gaudreau:** Pardon me, Mr. Chair, but there was a brief lag in the interpretation, and I didn't hear what you said, but I gather it's my turn to speak.

Once again, hats off to the interpreters.

How many interpreters have resigned from the Translation Bureau in the past decade?

**Mr. Jean-François Lymburner:** Let me give you an idea of the number of employees we have. We have approximately 70 interpreters who are Translation Bureau employees. They work 50,000 interpretation hours every year, as I said earlier. We also employ freelancers. So we have roughly 100 interpreters. The interpreter pool is quite limited both in Canada and around the world.

Obviously, some have also retired. Have people retired earlier than anticipated as a result of tougher working conditions in recent years? It's possible.

I'm going to let Mr. Ball tell you more about the number of resignations.

**Mr. Matthew Ball:** There haven't been any resignations. Our staff consists of approximately 60 permanent interpreters, but they may also perform other duties. For example, some have asked to do translation for a period of time, for several reasons. So it's hard to say—

**Ms. Marie-Hélène Gaudreau:** That's exactly what I'd like to know: What are the reasons?

**Mr. Matthew Ball:** Some people are assigned to translation for certain periods of their lives because, for example, they are new parents or they want more stable work schedules. I don't have the exact figures. However, some people do perform other duties and return to interpretation at a later date. We could come up with the figures on—

**Ms. Marie-Hélène Gaudreau:** I actually want to know what can cause trauma in interpreters on the job. What comments do you hear? Perhaps you don't know because you don't work closely with them. I'd like to hear the interpreters' point of view. What do they talk about at the end of their workday? Do they discuss their weekend activities or the remarks they had to interpret?

• (1050)

**Mr. Matthew Ball:** It varies from one individual or group to another. Sometimes interpreters discuss the meeting that has just adjourned, but I imagine they mostly talk about their weekends, their children or their plans for the evening.

**Ms. Marie-Hélène Gaudreau:** I have no further questions, Mr. Chair.

**Mr. Jean-François Lymburner:** May I add something, Mr. Chair?

**The Chair:** Yes, but please be brief.

**Mr. Jean-François Lymburner:** Working conditions aren't the only reason. I would remind you that interpreters were always physically present on the job throughout the pandemic, although some of them may be working remotely now. There are many reasons that have to be considered. Their working conditions are quite intense and the work is fast paced. Interpreters work long hours on site, but I believe they do their work with passion and pride.

**Ms. Marie-Hélène Gaudreau:** I don't even doubt that.

Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

[English]

Ms. Mathysen, two and a half minutes go to you.

**Ms. Lindsay Mathysen:** You've spoken a lot about the new policies that are in place and the new rules, such as the spacing out of members and the placement of earpieces. They're all very important.

These are important changes for your workplace, but an institution steeped in tradition, as we heard at the last committee meeting, may be resistant to change. Barriers could be seen or there could be resistance through parliamentary privilege or things like that.

How can we, in this committee, take the lessons you've learned in applying those rules and creating that change you need so that we can also create a healthier, safer and more functional workplace?

**Mr. Jean-François Lymburner:** I'll be quick, Mr. Chair.

Many measures to respond to the instructions we got were very technical, as you mentioned. Some of those were put in place all at the same time. I just want to reassure everyone that we're working with our colleagues to see if there are some measures we can adjust.

Just a couple of weeks ago, the opening statement by the chair of every committee was very long. Now it's a bit shorter. We feel that people understand the distastefulness. Again, if there's some possibility to use the new technology to limit the impact on you...because we understand that it can create some frustration.

I would go back to when everybody speaks at the same time. That's probably the one I hear about the most. It is very difficult to do a good job, because there are a lot of voices coming in. That's one piece I hear a lot.

Again, if there's a service interruption, to make sure that everybody understands...there are ways for people to get the information quickly. Sometimes, it's coming from behind the window. Other times, it's coming from the sound system. However, I would say respect the fact that everybody wants to get going with the procedure and be respectful in that sense.

The last one is for those online. We're able to send headsets around the world in a very short time. They are those headsets that have been approved. They're ISO headsets. Sometimes, witnesses are in very remote areas of the world. We're doing very well. We can conduct tests ahead of time for your witnesses so that they can use better headsets for our work.

Thank you.

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

[Translation]

Mr. Berthold, the floor is yours for five minutes.

**Mr. Luc Berthold:** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I wanted to take these last five minutes because I hadn't really finished. I have two more points that I'd like to make.

Here's what I understand from your remarks in response to all the questions that have been asked. Interpreters ultimately don't want to be part of the debate or to alter the course of the discussion. What they do want is to convey the debate as is for the people who are listening. Is that correct?

**Mr. Jean-François Lymburner:** Yes, and they also have to do it within very short periods of time. As you can often see, it's harder to maintain a dialogue when the interpretation lags four or five seconds behind.

So, on the one hand, interpreters have to consider the emotion, as Mr. Ball noted. That's the Canadian interpretation model, and it's a good one. And, on the other hand, they have to do the work quite quickly to facilitate a real-time discussion.

**Mr. Luc Berthold:** Interpreters are proud of what they do. I initially didn't understand that when I got here, but I eventually learned that interpreters weren't translators. That was of the first discussion I had with them. I had referred to them as translators, and they then told me that what they did was interpretation, not translation, so people could understand what was being said in the other language. The words aren't the same, but the emotion can be. I find it really interesting.

Ms. Trépanier, we receive training when we're elected as MPs for the first time. Would it be possible to consider giving new members a one-hour training session on how interpretation works? It would be helpful. When I was elected, I had to learn on the job how to work with interpreters.

Do you think that's something the committee might recommend?

• (1055)

**Mr. Jean-François Lymburner:** I'm going to turn the floor over to Ms. Trépanier, but I can tell you we've been involved in many training sessions with our Privy Council Office colleagues during government changeovers and new ministerial office appointments. So it should certainly be offered to our colleagues in the House as well. There should definitely be some basic explanatory document.

As for a course, I'll let Ms. Trépanier answer you on that.

**Ms. Annie Trépanier:** I think that's an excellent idea. As the CEO of the Translation Bureau mentioned, there are documents, but training might indeed be appropriate. Thank you for that suggestion.

**Mr. Luc Berthold:** It would be good to provide practical training during which people could see the work interpreters do and experience a little of what goes on inside the "box", as I call it. By taking an interest in the work they do and experiencing what they experience, we can get a clearer understanding of their situation and do our own work better in a manner respectful of the interpreters.

**Mr. Jean-François Lymburner:** Thank you very much.

We've posted a few videos online to familiarize people with what happens on the other side and with the highly specialized work that interpreters do. We'll make sure we continue promoting them.

**Mr. Luc Berthold:** Now I'd like to discuss the technical aspect of the matter. As I mentioned earlier, I worked in the sound industry and therefore have some experience with it. I know there are sound limiters to prevent peak sound levels, for example. In some places, I've even seen systems that prevent more than one microphone from being unmuted at a time. Here, however, anyone can unmute a microphone and join the debate.

Are these things that are being considered? Technically speaking, what is the Translation Bureau's plan for the next few months and years?

**Mr. Jean-François Lymburner:** Since I'm an industrial engineer, not an interpreter, I've had a fair amount of training in the field as well.

Yes, we're considering a number of technical measures. You mentioned the earpiece, for example. There are ways to ensure that it mutes as soon as the user removes it. As for sound, we can reduce Larsen effects by digitizing the sound and thus limit the risk. I'm thinking of the people who are attending today's meeting via Zoom. The danger occurs when you're in a somewhat more analog acoustic environment. So that's another factor that we're looking into.

At concerts, for example, you see singers wearing earpieces that are pushed inside the ear. That limits Larsen effects and vastly improves the situation.

In our case here, we want many people to use earpieces. We could consider having you use earpiece models that belong to you. We're working with our colleagues on that. We don't do audiovisual work; we supply people, the living beings who are the interpreters and who enter the room. However, we're working with people to come up with the technological tools that could completely eliminate Larsen effects. They're out there and we're looking into this because we obviously want to reduce the number of interruptions for you.

**The Chair:** You only have a few seconds left, Mr. Berthold.

**Mr. Luc Berthold:** You've nevertheless managed to do an excellent job because you've gone from 128 incidents to 10 in only three years. I tip my hat to you.

**Mr. Jean-François Lymburner:** I would add that those 10 incidents were due to human error.

[English]

The last mile is always the toughest one, so that's really where we are.

[Translation]

**The Chair:** Mr. Berthold, I believe I used the word "translation" instead of "interpretation" at the start of the meeting. If that's the case, I'd like to correct what I said.

Thank you for clarifying that point.

[*English*]

Ms. Romanado, it's over to you.

**Mrs. Sherry Romanado:** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I'll be brief because I know we have very limited time.

Mr. Ball, I know that you mentioned there are not a lot of injuries or complaints with respect to vicarious or secondary trauma. I'm not sure if you've had a chance to survey the interpreters to see if that is a problem. I would suggest that you do because I would anticipate that there are some people who are having to deal with that.

The other thing I would say, though we didn't talk about it, is that I have seen in debate, especially in committee, MPs who slam their hand down or bang on the desk to make a point.

I anticipate that also could injure. Is that correct?

• (1100)

**Mr. Jean-François Lymburner:** I'll start with the last part.

The loud bang, which is not an example of the Larsen effect, could definitely have an impact on interpreters. It could be a laptop or a microphone dropping down or somebody banging on the table.

As for the vicarious effects, maybe Matthew can discuss that.

**Mr. Matthew Ball:** We work really closely with the union. There is a professional association representing the freelance interpreters. The bureau management is very open and constantly working with them to ensure that issues are addressed as they come up.

To echo my boss's sentiments from earlier, the biggest issue facing the staff and freelance interpreters right now is the matter of health and safety and the sound quality. We're working really closely on that.

Absolutely, we're always open. We actually did a workplace evaluation recently, so we'll be getting the results from that as well. If there are vicarious trauma issues, they will come up in that report, which we're expecting soon.

**Mrs. Sherry Romanado:** Thank you very much. I greatly appreciate it.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Ms. Romanado.

Colleagues, we are going to suspend briefly in order to set up the next panel.

Typically, we've been inserting some health breaks into our meetings to allow people to move around a little bit and catch their breath. I'm going to give us a generous couple of minutes here to turn over because we do still have a couple more hours to go this morning.

I did want to raise one thing that could be helpful. I know it might be a little bit difficult to adjust to, but in order to assist all of us knowing how much time is remaining in our speaking order—and I note Ms. Gaudreau did this earlier—it is helpful to time yourself and have that clock in front of you.

That would accomplish two things: One, there'd be no discrepancy between the chair and members' clocks, and, two, I wouldn't

have to interrupt and it would perhaps allow for a more seamless meeting.

I make that recommendation. I know it might take a little bit of time for us to implement, but I think it could be helpful.

[*Translation*]

And with that, Mr. Ball, Mr. Lymburner and Ms. Trépanier, thank you very much for being with us here this morning.

[*English*]

Colleagues, we're going to suspend for a few minutes, and we'll be back for our second panel.

• (1100)

(Pause)

• (1110)

**The Chair:** Colleagues, I'm going to call our meeting back to order.

In our second panel, we are welcoming two members of Parliament—our colleagues, Iqra Khalid and Pam Damoff—who are going to be sharing some testimony.

I do want to start by offering a little bit of a trigger warning. I understand that we'll be discussing some things relating to abuses that have either been experienced directly by people around this table, or by extension. I know that for those watching, some of the language or the retelling of stories may be disconcerting and triggering.

For colleagues around the table, for staff in the room, if there is any assistance that is required, you are most certainly welcome at any point to see me or the clerk if we can be of help. I know there will be a number of difficult topics raised, not only by our colleagues across the way, but by other members around the table as well. Just as a courtesy, I wanted to offer that before we begin.

Ms. Rempel Garner, I see you out of the corner of my eye, so I'll turn to you momentarily.

**Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner (Calgary Nose Hill, CPC):** Chair, sometimes when there is testimony before a committee that might have trauma sensitivities, there is the option for witnesses to go in camera. I understand that they might not want to, but I would just put that on the table as well.

**The Chair:** I appreciate that, and I do hope that should we get to a point where witnesses do feel that we need to move in camera, there won't be any disagreement on the part of committee members to seek the unanimous consent we would need for that to happen.

Thank you, Ms. Rempel Garner, for sharing that.

Ms. Damoff, I'm going to turn to you to begin with your opening statement. The floor is yours.

**Ms. Pam Damoff (Oakville North—Burlington, Lib.):** Thank you, Chair.

Thank you for the invitation to appear today. I apologize in advance if I get emotional.

I'm deeply troubled by the serious implications that increasing harassment and threats have for the safety of MPs and our staff, for the ability of MPs to fulfill our roles and ultimately for the integrity of Parliament and the long-term sustainability of our democracy. While I worked for over 25 years in real estate investment banking, which was a male-dominated industry, and certainly experienced some misogyny and harassment in my previous career, it doesn't come anywhere close to what I've experienced as an MP. The level of threats and misogyny that I'm subject to, both online and in person, is such that I often fear going out in public. That is not a sustainable or healthy way to live.

I've been verbally assaulted in the grocery store in my community, with a man yelling, "[Eff] Trudeau. [Eff] you. You're going to jail for what you've done." At a Burlington business event, a man aggressively told me to watch my back, and said that I was going to get what was coming to me as he pointed his finger in my face.

The toxic drive for social media likes and clips among elected officials has hindered constructive conversations, exacerbated differences between us and diminished our capacity to show empathy toward each other. In emails, calls and on social media, one of the clearest examples of this degradation of political discourse is the increasing use of a four-letter derogatory term starting with "c", which I am not comfortable repeating here in Parliament. You know, in all my life prior to becoming an MP, both personally and professionally, I have never been called this word before, but during my time as an MP, it has become completely normalized among the public to use this word to label and degrade me and my fellow women MPs.

Today I want to share with the committee, with Parliament and with Canadians excerpts of communications that I personally have received during my time as an MP through email, by phone and on social media. I also want you to think of my incredible staff, who are being subjected to this abuse on the phone and from reading what people say. This has real, negative consequences for their mental health and for the ability of MPs to continue to hire and retain staff.

I want to be clear that while I will use specific examples of the actions of some Conservative MPs, I do not want to suggest in any way that this reflects all Conservative MPs. In fact, this pin I am wearing today was a gift from a Conservative MP. I have friends across the aisle.

I think it bears mentioning that there are many, many more examples than I have chosen to share with you today, but because the words used are far below the dignity of Parliament, I will not repeat them here.

Some examples include: "I really don't know how you sleazy liberal [c-words] live with yourselves. Good luck in the next election, you peice of shit." "I'm coming after you. That was it. You're done." "How are you in government—you deserve a pig shed you [effing] pos." "We are watching your every move. Nowhere is safe for you. God will make sure you are exposed on judgment day. Judgment is here. The hell fire God has waiting for you will burn you."

Even following my announcement on May 1 that I would not be re-offering—precisely because of the harassment, misogyny, abuse

and explicit threats of violence I received—dozens of hate-filled messages flooded in. For example: "Resign now, you stupid [effing] cow. Don,t wait run and hide libtard [effing] bitch!!!" "Good riddance, [c-word]. Politics, as you call it, is toxic because your party in government is a corrupt, disgusting sack of shit. If you [c-words] had governed like human beings, the country would not hate your corrupt, fascist [c-words]. Do better, you stupid [c-word]."

Lastly, "You're a sad excuse of an MP and worse excuse of a Canadian. May your life be filled with stress and anxiety. May you never know peace in your wretched days. May you live and die alone in a dark, cold place. Burn in hell, [c-word]."

The tone and tenor of public discourse has deteriorated so significantly and to such a degree that I fear the loss of trust in public institutions that we're seeing, driven by misinformation and lies being spread by politicians on social media. I worry about the outcome of this for our democracy.

● (1115)

Members of Parliament must understand that they drive and exacerbate harassment, abuse and threats received by other MPs when they spread misinformation and lies and make personal attacks against other members. This has been my case and the case of many of my colleagues.

One example was in 2018 when Conservative MP Rachael Thomas used her House of Commons budget, which was taxpayer dollars, to send a mailer to every household in my riding with the headline that said, "MP Pam Damoff fails to stand up for victims of rape and sex trafficking", and "Pam Damoff Chooses ISIS over Women & Girls". The first line of this claims, "The current government is committed to welcoming ISIS terrorists back to Canada."

We often hear Conservative MPs carelessly and baselessly using terms like "corrupt" and "treason" in Parliament and in their social media posts. Following Conservative MPs Michael Barrett, Michael Cooper, Larry Brock and Damien Kurek accusing government members of the ethics committee of being corrupt, and MP Barrett accusing me personally of being involved in a cover-up, Conservative MPs posted our email addresses on social media and encouraged the public to contact us.

As a result, my staff had to create a misogyny subfolder in my inbox. I will quote from some of the messages that I received as a result: “You are one sleazy [effing] lying [c-word].... enough is enough of you [effing] lying pieces of shit....how do you sleep....I know your ex-husband sleeps well now that he got rid of you....resign from the party....resign from Oakville....you disgusting piece of shit....nice legacy.” “Pathetic losers, you need to go to jail. You bitches are [effed].” “Hey you [effing] traitor....get the [eff] ou of cnanda before wen deal with you properly.”

These are all different messages, by the way. It's not the same one.

Furthermore, “You are a treasonous piece of garbage. You should be in prison for supporting the destruction of our country and people. You are a criminal.” Another one said, “Your beloved boss is going to stand in front on the Nuremberg tribunals, as should all of you. You're disgusting pathetic Satanist-worshipping humans and you're all finished.” And then the last one said, “You are an arrogant, elite, and unhinged beotch! You are going to rot in max security when revolution comes. I suggest you step down now while you can, TRAITOR!”

While I have been the target of the gun lobby for many years and receive far more than just “mean tweets”, as they call them, I want to give another specific example of an MP's comments directly causing an influx of hate through social media, emails and phone calls. During clause-by-clause consideration of Bill C-21, Conservative MP Blaine Calkins posted a video accusing me of equating hunters with the Danforth shooter, which I absolutely did not. As a result of his video, some of the threats and abuse that I immediately got were, “You stupid [c-word], it's up to the government to justify taking away legal property, not the person to keep it, and fear is not a justification. I hope and pray to God that you will die a horrible, painful death, and your family too, because you and your genes are a piece of shit and need to be removed from the planet.” “Come on, God, answer my prayer. She is a lie-beral whore and a waste of human skin.” Another one said, “In medieval times, this would be considered treason and it would be off with your head and hung from the gates.” Another one: “Well, look at this lying liberal sack of shit. Go [eff] yourself, Pam, preferably with this semi-automatic assault rifle dildo”, with an accompanying photo that he sent. Then the last one, “Even if you sucked my cock, I wouldn't vote for you.”

While I report explicit threats of violence towards me to police, they often say they don't cross the line for them to do anything. I note that the RCMP commissioner recently said we should look at giving police additional tools in legislation to adequately respond to threats against politicians. I believe he's testifying before the committee, and I look forward to his testimony.

I agree with those arguing that a healthy dose of partisanship and criticism of the government are inherent to this place and have always been core tenets of Parliament and a healthy democracy, but what I have experienced, and what many other parliamentarians and our staff have experienced, does not constitute legitimate criticism of government policy, nor a healthy debate of ideas. I'm deeply worried about our Parliament and our democracy should this continue unabated.

• (1120)

While it may be difficult to control the words and conduct of others, I believe it is our collective responsibility as parliamentarians to set the tone and an example for how we interact and debate with each other, and to rise above personal attacks and hostility.

At minimum, we need to call out inappropriate behaviour in our own political parties, and harassment and abuse by MPs towards other MPs. I am heartened that elected women representatives in Halton recently signed a public pledge to stand up for each other and to call on police to do more to combat abuse and threats towards elected officials.

Parliamentarians are called to conduct our work with civility, compassion and respect: respect for each other, for our position, for our office, for the legislative process and for the institution of Parliament and Canadians.

It is not lost on me the difficult challenges that we face, the issues we have to overcome and divisions we have to heal. However, I believe Canada can represent the best in each of us if we, as parliamentarians, do our part.

I want to, again, thank the committee for the opportunity to appear today, and I'm happy to take any questions you may have.

Thank you, Chair.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Madam Damoff, for sharing some very difficult experiences with us.

Ms. Khalid, the floor is yours for your opening statement.

**Ms. Iqra Khalid (Mississauga—Erin Mills, Lib.):** Thank you, Mr. Chair and members of the committee, for inviting me to appear before the procedure and House affairs committee today to speak about the review of the members of the House of Commons workplace harassment and violence prevention policy.

I apologize in advance if my voice shakes today. It will shake, but it will not be silenced. I will not be bullied. I will not be intimidated. I will continue to represent my constituents to the best of my ability.

Mr. Chair, I want to begin by acknowledging the brave woman sitting beside me on this panel, MP Pam Damoff, who has done so much to bring the issue of harassment and threats to members of Parliament, particularly women, to the forefront of the conversation that is so critically important to speak about right now. It's important because it is literally the core value of our democracy here as Canadians.



Are we able to disagree without being disagreeable? Are we going to save what democracy looks like for our younger generations coming forward?

If we are not able to stop the harassment of each other in the name of partisan politics, we are not going to survive as a democracy. Our next generation is going to be completely disengaged, disenfranchised and will have no trust in democratic institutions at all. I think this is very vital for us to recognize.

I had a class of constituents up in the gallery two weeks ago. They watched question period. When I met with them after they had experienced that, the first question that one of the young girls asked me was if it was always that violent in there. She asked how I could do it and why I do it.

My answer to her was that it's because somebody needs to. We need to make sure that we are having positive, constructive discourse with one another, so that we can represent and support Canadians as they deserve. We are elected, all 338 of us, in our ridings by the people and the communities that live there. We represent them.

Mr. Chair, I am embarrassed by how our conduct is deteriorating the very values that we stand for. I do have a few examples for you today, Mr. Chair.

Have you ever been called a racial slur for just doing your job? Have you been called a terrorist casually, as if it were your name? Have you ever been spat on before?

I have.

Somebody once said to me, "I want to fuck you gently with a chainsaw". Imagine the violence of even the thought of it—to utter those thoughts, make it public and put it on record. How do people feel that they have the entitlement to do that?

Harassment for me has not been new. I've been elected as a Member of Parliament for nine years and it has been from day one.

I will highlight a few of the incidents specific to this topic of MPs harassing each other and creating, for me in particular, life-threatening situations.

In 2017, I had tabled Motion No. 103 in the House. It was a motion to combat all types of systemic racism and religious discrimination, including Islamophobia, in our country. It was an attempt to build bridges between communities.

Unfortunately, a Conservative leadership race was ongoing at the time and the members of that leadership race started to, through the use of alt-right media, first off, legitimize the concept that I was bringing sharia law into the country, and that this was not a non-binding motion, but a first step—a bill. This was quite wrong. It very false and maliciously false.

These emails were circulated across the country. They were used to raise fundraising dollars for Conservative candidates in that Conservative leadership race.

• (1125)

All of that happened because conservative MPs running for leadership felt that this was a plug. The politics of agitation is not helpful to how we conduct ourselves as Canadians and as parliamentarians. We need to put Canadians first and foremost.

As I said, I've received, other than the verbal abuse, death threats, including from a gentleman inviting me to become acquainted with his rifle, and another who told me that I would be hanged, another who released my address on a radio talk show to say, "Go kill her. I would happily film it if you go kill her."

When MPs target each other on social media, when the politics of agitation gets pushed by right-wing media, we are doing indirectly what we cannot do directly, according to the House of Commons rules. We are bullying and intimidating each other for partisan politics, and that is not fair to Canadians at all. We embarrass ourselves in front of Canadians. We can dance around the antics of social media posts all we want, but the intent of these social media posts, of sending letters like my colleague MP Pam Damoff received in her riding, is harassment, and we need to do something about it.

As I said, many Conservative members—not all of them—including the current Leader of the Opposition, have done similar things to target individual members of Parliament, to bully, to harass and to silence, and that has divided communities, now more than ever, and some communities more than others.

There are real-world consequences when members of Parliament decide to fundraise and to get clicks by dehumanizing others with insults and with attacks, and I am not the only target. Just this past week, we heard from the Sergeant-at-Arms who testified at PROC that the harassment of MPs, especially online, has increased by about 700% to 800%. This is not new, and this should not be normalized.

Mr. Chair and members of the committee, there must be room in Canada for people to legitimately criticize their elected representatives, their policies and their positions to further the productive democratic discourse in this country. There must also be room for members of Parliament to engage in discourse, for the opposition to do its job and for the government to do theirs. What we are seeing, however, is the boundaries being blurred with intimidation, harassment and outright threats and violence layered with misogyny against us as parliamentarians, to prevent us from fulfilling our duties to our constituents.

There must be a clear distinction and boundary between legitimate criticism and outright harassment that is made clear in your forthcoming study and report in the House of Commons workplace harassment and violence prevention policy, specifically between members of Parliament, and specifically when it comes to women and our unique experiences.

Let me say, Mr. Chair, that people are watching. Canadians are watching us, and we need to do better. We need to make sure that there is respect in this place because if we don't respect each other, how can we expect Canadians to respect each other? How can we continue to build bridges amongst each other, and how can we stand for a democracy that is built on respect?

Thank you.

• (1130)

**The Chair:** Thanks very much, Ms. Khalid.

Colleagues, I just want to check with the witnesses quickly.

Given the nature and the sensitivity of the topic, do you feel ready to go right into a line of questioning? Okay.

With that, Ms. Rempel Garner, you will begin our first round with six minutes. The floor is yours.

• (1135)

**Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner:** Thank you, Chair.

First of all, I want to say that based on personal experience, the type of language you both have been subjected to by members of the public is unacceptable. I think that's something we all can agree on. I think the question now is, how do we move forward?

As a member of the opposition, it is my job to hold the government to account. For me, when I come into the House of Commons sometimes and ask the Prime Minister questions, I will state a fact that's in a report. Then he'll stand up in the House of Commons and say that I'm spreading misinformation. You've both had good suggestions. You've said that we need to allow room for legitimate criticism of the government. But how can we do that when we have a Prime Minister who stands up over and over again—many of the ministry as well—when there is a legitimate concern, and rather than defending the policy, it's just that there's misinformation, or that Conservatives are spreading misinformation? Do you think that also degrades the environment that happens in question period that Ms. Khalid described?

**Ms. Pam Damoff:** Thank you for the question.

I remember a debate that you and I had, Ms. Rempel Garner, some time ago in a late show. I think it was quite emotional for both of us. We were talking about this very issue and about how we could all rise above.

I think it's incumbent on every single one of us to frame our questions in a way that is respectful, but to also frame answers in a way that's respectful. I feel like I always do try to do that. I'm not going to try to make this partisan about the Prime Minister or the Leader of the Opposition, because I really want to talk about how we as individuals can rise above.

**Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner:** On that, I'm not going to get into *tu quoque* here, like who did what. You didn't name a lot of people. I have not shared my experiences, because I don't want that to be my Google search. I'm not saying that sharing the experience isn't valid, but we need to drive to solutions here.

Number one, I would just respectfully ask that, going back to your caucus, maybe say that when the opposition asks for informa-

tion, the line that this is misinformation is not productive. That's one.

Two, behind the scenes—I don't want to share my experience publicly—I have actually had scenarios where charges have been laid and somebody has been released on bail immediately and then disappeared. These were death threats. I have to walk around wondering where this person is.

What do you think about bail reform to prevent this? With online harassment, we know that it's not just us. It's every woman in the country, right? The RCMP said that MPs need more protection. If they can't protect me, how do they protect everyone else? We know that women see escalation in this type of violence.

Do you think that the sort of catch-and-release policy that allows people after repeated harassment to just be released on bail, and then in some instances murder or commit violence against women, should be reformed?

**Ms. Iqra Khalid:** If I may, first and foremost, through you, Chair, I acknowledge the hard work and integrity of Ms. Rempel Garner. I know how much she goes through on a regular basis.

Whether you can share it or not, I acknowledge it. I'm very sympathetic towards it.

I think the study of why we are here today is about the conduct between members of Parliament. I think it would be great if we could provide solutions on that specifically. The one that I had proposed in my opening remarks—

**Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner:** On that, have either of you received or pressed charges for criminal harassment against any other member of Parliament?

**Ms. Iqra Khalid:** No.

**Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner:** Okay. So then I think a lot of what I have heard, and where this comes from, is online harassment from the general public, bots—we don't know. How do we get to a solution on that?

Frankly, I am tired of the perpetual story that I've heard for 15 years: How do you live with violence against women in politics? I'm sure you both feel the same way. Let's go to solutions. I am suggesting bail reform. I'd like to get in other areas as well.

There's the fact that on repeated harassment, the government hasn't moved to look at any sort of way where... On repeated harassment, there are no tools for law enforcement to perhaps get the identity of somebody online. It's a slow and onerous process that allows for escalation of violence.

Do you have any solutions on this type of harassment—either bail reform or this—that the committee could consider?

• (1140)

**Ms. Pam Damoff:** On that, I have made reports to the police. When I have, on some occasions, I've been asked what I would like the police to do. On other occasions, as I mentioned in my opening remarks, I was told that it didn't rise to the level. I do feel that there's a disconnect between what we received....

I do want to make a comment, though, on serial harassers. I know that the member is from Alberta. I'm from Ontario. I will talk about Ontario. It's provincially appointed judges who make bail decisions. Ontario jails are overrun. Judges are hesitant to send people to provincially—not federally—run facilities. It's a complicated issue. We did bring forward a bill on bail reform that was supported by all parties.

I do think that we should focus on what we can do as individuals on MP-to-MP harassment.

There are broader conversations to be had about the criminal justice system in general.

**The Chair:** Thanks very much, Ms. Rempel Garner and Ms. Damoff.

Colleagues, I am going to be a little bit more generous and flexible in allowing the questions to be asked and the answers to be given to ensure that we respect the sensitivity of the conversation. This will go on both sides of the table, of course. We're going to try to stay tight to our time as best as possible.

With that, Mrs. Romanado, the floor is yours for six minutes.

**Mrs. Sherry Romanado:** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Through you, I'd like to thank my colleagues for being here today and for sharing what they've been going through. I think pretty much every female member of Parliament has been subject to it.

I have two questions.

I just want to preface this. I'm sure you're aware that, currently, the workplace harassment and violence prevention policy of members of the House of Commons does not apply to harassment between members. That is a loophole. Right now, a member of Parliament who is being harassed by another member of Parliament has no venue and no recourse, and we're trying to close that. I want to talk a little bit about that, and I'd like to hear your feedback.

Ms. Damoff, you mentioned that, when you go out, you're concerned for your physical safety. Have you taken steps when you're out at an event for your own safety? Could you describe if you have and what those would be?

**Ms. Pam Damoff:** Through you, Chair, yes I have. I appreciate all that the House of Commons has done by offering panic buttons and doing security assessments. Certainly the way my community office operates now is very different from when I was elected in 2015.

For the last two events that I hosted for Canada Day and a family skate, we as MPs have the ability to have a security assessment done. In these cases, they determined that I should have security

there. I believe that the rules have changed now, but at the time I had to pay for that out of my office budget. We didn't have any incidents. It was reassuring, though, to know that there was security present at those events.

**Mrs. Sherry Romanado:** You both mentioned your online accounts; indeed, we all have our email accounts, our online accounts, our Facebook pages and so on. Often it is parliamentary staff who receive those phone calls and emails and have to respond to them. They see those posts and comments. What impact has that had on your staff?

• (1145)

**Ms. Iqra Khalid:** It has a significant impact. Yes, there are ways in which staff can rely on mental health services provided by the House of Commons, but how often do they take it? For my own office, I give 10 mental health days, no questions asked, to my staff. Whenever they need to take it, they should. That is an honour system that we have among ourselves.

I've seen some of the things they have had to deal with. I don't check my own social media. I don't monitor it, because it's a lot. My staff do, and it is not fair to them to have to be subjected to all of that.

I think that we need to do better by our staff, whether it's in our constituency offices or on the Hill, to ensure that their mental health is safe, that we are retaining proper talent and they're not leaving because they've become so disengaged with the world of politics and how nasty it can get.

**Mrs. Sherry Romanado:** MP Khalid, you mentioned something that I'm hearing of for the first time, the politics of agitation. What we heard on Tuesday was that we've seen a lot of hate on social media. A lot of social media sites are not allowing us to report it. When I say "report", I mean report it to the platforms themselves. It's not taken seriously. The Sergeant-at-Arms has said that X or Twitter won't even take calls anymore. I myself have, after sitting in PROC, received a death threat on my social media because of a comment that was made in committee.

Given the fact that our online presence is paid for by taxpayers with respect to whether we're boosting posts and things like that or having social media accounts, it was suggested that perhaps members of Parliament should also have an online code of conduct in terms of, as you said, the politics of agitation, where the member of Parliament may not necessarily be personally attacking you, but the content that they're putting out is put online with the intent to crank, to get that machine, the Twitter army, going.

What would your recommendations be on how do we how do we tackle this?

**Ms. Iqra Khalid:** It's a very good question.

You know what, I went through this last week, when a member of the ethics committee, Mr. Brock, tweeted against me. It was a very strange tweet that resulted in agitation. It was deliberate, it was malicious. I like to say that common sense perhaps is not that common, right?

We are expected to be held to a higher standard between ourselves and how we conduct ourselves as members of Parliament, whom we represent and how we represent them.

If we need to start legislating our own conduct, how can we expect Canadians to do better?

Yes, perhaps legislation is in order now. Perhaps a code of conduct needs to be included in members of Parliament's code of conduct going forward.

This is not right.

**Mrs. Sherry Romanado:** Thank you very much.

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

[Translation]

Ms. Gaudreau, the floor is yours for six minutes.

**Ms. Marie-Hélène Gaudreau:** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

You are truly courageous, colleagues.

Before I ask a few questions, I want to tell you how ashamed I am. This isn't the first time I've said it: I'm ashamed of us, myself included. I get the feeling we're engaged in a soul-searching exercise. Some of us aren't hearing or else aren't listening to the interpretation, but I do hope we're thinking. We could raise so many points.

The reason I'm so outraged, and "outraged" is the right word, is that, even though most people say that they can't tolerate the situation and that it's unacceptable, it's nevertheless the prevailing situation in our institution today. How can we possibly tolerate it? Allow me to explain. In our soul-searching, we're wondering why we're doing this. Is it for gain or power? Partisanship has a lot to do with it. What is respect?

Today we're discussing harassment, and we've heard words that illustrate what that is. I'm thinking, among other things, of our interpreters, who have had to interpret utterly unacceptable words in French. There's an urgent need for action, and I believe this institution as a whole agrees that's true. However, I still hear remarks that

inflame the situation and contribute to the collateral damage, even though we have a right to express ourselves and to be respected.

Ladies, I want to hear what you think about this. Saying words that have an impact on social media is one thing, but the making of death threats is unacceptable.

What behaviour constitutes harassment? Is it considered harassment to refuse to listen to the person who's speaking, and to do so regularly, to roll your eyes when that person speaks, to smile in a contemptuous manner or to position oneself in such a way as to provoke or intimidate that person, who, in many instances, happens to be a woman? Am I the only person experiencing this kind of behaviour, or are you experiencing it too? Words aren't necessarily the only way to harass someone.

I'd like to hear your comments on the subject.

• (1150)

[English]

**Ms. Iqra Khalid:** Thank you very much for that. It's been an honour to both serve with and travel with you and know and appreciate that when the cameras are off, we have good relationships with one another. I remember I bought Michael Barrett a piece of cake for his birthday. I remember Melissa Lantsman brought me a fillet of fish one day, and I was very hungry, and it was pretty late at night. We are capable of having good, strong relationships with each other. When the cameras are off, those relationships absolutely exist. When the cameras are off, we are able to get through committee work and get out consensus reports and work on the important issues.

I think maybe the problem is the camera or the fact that we have the ability to spread so much so fast using social media. I think those are questions that this committee should be asking experts as you continue with this study.

**Ms. Pam Damoff:** If I could just add that I think the algorithms on social media push the angry social media to the top—and the positive, or even just policy-related, social media posts don't get the same kind of engagement. I think that plays into what we as politicians post. The angry, aggressive types of things that get posted, which in turn drive the public to contact MPs, do play a big role in it.

I see a huge difference in the kind of engagement that I get versus a Facebook Live from an MP calling Liberals corrupt, which gets shared 500,000 times. I don't get anywhere near that when I post about young women in leadership programs or something like being really proud to have supported Len Webber's private member's bill on organ donation, posts that go nowhere, whereas the angry, aggressive social media goes straight to the top, because of the algorithms.

[Translation]

**The Chair:** Ms. Gaudreau, you have only a few seconds left.

**Ms. Marie-Hélène Gaudreau:** I'll conclude, Mr. Chair. I'll have two and a half minutes in the next round.

I'd like to tell you this in the context of our soul-searching exercise: When the political parties agree to accept unacceptable behaviour, I view that as a conspiracy. I hope you clearly understand what I mean.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

• (1155)

**The Chair:** Thank you, Ms. Gaudreau.

[*English*]

Ms. Mathysen, the floor is yours for six minutes.

**Ms. Lindsay Mathysen:** I'm often amazed by colleagues in this place, for good or for bad. Today you have shown incredible strength, and I am grateful for that. This is actually one of the reasons why I was so adamant about having this study, and so grateful that we could get to it.

I want to pick up on MP Damoff's mentioning that social media piece and the algorithms. Oftentimes, it's seen as the individual's responsibility to police social media, and yet there is a role, of course, for what we're seeing from the social media giants and their responsibilities, given the money that they make.

The Sergeant-at-Arms, actually, even at the last committee meeting, stated that when they were trying to address specific issues with Twitter, they at one point had connections, and they no longer have those.

What can we as legislators do as part of that, to address that better? I think building off what Ms. Romanado said about a code of conduct online, are there things that maybe we need to do in our internal security systems that have to do with monitoring or policing that a bit?

**Ms. Pam Damoff:** I do think a code of conduct would be helpful. I don't know if there would be consequences. I know that I heard at the last meeting a description of harassment as it applies elsewhere, and cyberbullying was one of them, but I also think that we as individuals need to think twice before posting something that we know is going to incite an organization like the gun lobby.

When you deliberately post something that stirs up that kind of anger in public...I will say that being on the ethics Committee has been an eye-opener for me because of the number of times I've been called corrupt and a criminal. It's actually quite shocking. You know, it goes beyond just what the policies are; it's individual attacks that stir up the public.

The social media companies do bear responsibility in this. Even when we could report, I can remember reporting tweets that were horrific and getting a message back saying these didn't contravene community standards. There is some responsibility there with social media companies, not just for MPs but for every Canadian that gets subjected to abuse online.

**Ms. Lindsay Mathysen:** On the MP piece, of course, though, that's what we're trying to also deal with here, understanding our role within this. A lot of my colleagues have said that when they've tried to report these incidents, or when they have—and I would like

to know about the examples you gave and what your experience was—there were clear links to far-right extreme organizations pumping it up, the Rebel News media outlet and the Proud Boys, as examples, and the links that police found if they were investigated. Did you find that in both of your experiences?

**Ms. Iqra Khalid:** I've had right-wing extremist members stalk my office and hang out in front of me.

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Marie-Hélène Gaudreau:** On a point of order, Mr. Chair. I'm very concerned about our interpreters. It's impossible for them to hear the comments clearly because two microphones are unmutted at the same time.

**The Chair:** All right. Just a moment; we'll see what's going on.

Ms. Gaudreau, we are going to try again. Tell us if there is a problem.

[*English*]

Madam Khalid, go ahead.

**Ms. Iqra Khalid:** As I was saying, I've had members of right-wing extremist organizations who have stalked my office, shared my home address amongst each other, laughed and obviously called me a lot of names verbally, videotaped me while walking around in my community, etc. There's definitely a link. When I talk about the politics of agitation, that's exactly it.

I gave the example of when I tabled Motion No. 103, the Conservative Party leadership race used my motion to raise funds for themselves by spreading deliberate misinformation. Specifically, they leveraged a lot of these organizations to come to raise the alarm and agitation amongst Canadians, to pit Canadian against Canadian. There's definitely a role here and a link between members of Parliament and how the information is spread and used for our own political gains.

• (1200)

**The Chair:** Ms. Mathysen, there are just a couple of seconds left in your round here.

**Ms. Lindsay Mathysen:** I'll bank them then.

**The Chair:** That sounds good.

Ms. Rempel Garner, it's over to you for five minutes.

**Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner:** Thank you, Chair.

I just want to be clear with my two colleagues here. You aren't suggesting that the Liberal Party hasn't made statements that have agitated people in the past, right? You admit that's happened.

**Ms. Pam Damoff:** I think every MP needs to look at what they've done, Michelle. I'm not going to say the Liberal Party has, but I will say that there have been instances when individuals in my party have done things.

**Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner:** I asked this to prove a point because where we can't get to a point.... If you two aren't willing to say that the Liberals have not engaged in this behaviour, I have to say that I have been on the receiving end of what you have described, but it's what your members have done.

What we can't get into when we're talking about solutions is pretending that one party is above scrutiny, right? To avoid that, I would suggest that the solutions need to be oriented towards using what is in law for criminal harassment and hate speech and, where there are gaps that prevent not just us but any Canadian from accessing justice or de-escalating these types of behaviours, that we go there.

Would you agree with the principle that any forward solution to this can't be governed by a partisan body?

**Ms. Pam Damoff:** I absolutely agree. In my remarks, I even said that it's not all Conservatives. I and my colleague can only speak to what we've experienced, Ms. Rempel Garner. We can't speak to what you, Ms. Ferreri, or anyone else has experienced. I can only speak about what's happened to me and the impact that has been a direct result of a Conservative MP. I can't speak to anything that anyone else has experienced.

**Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner:** Thank you.

However, you wouldn't suggest that the Prime Minister is directly responsible for the harassment I've received, would you?

**Ms. Pam Damoff:** I've been trying to stay above the fray because I'm not getting into whether the opposition leader or the Prime Minister.... I mean, if you want to go there, we can, but I really would prefer not to.

**Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner:** The point I'm trying to make is that solutions have to be objective and not be governed by.... I have concerns that a code of conduct that would be governed by a partisan or a quasi-partisan body wouldn't get to that point.

For recommendations, would you support a recommendation, particularly going into the next federal election, where intimate images that are created by deep fake technology would be subject to to the same Criminal Code sanctions that are in the Criminal Code right now for traditional intimate images?

**Ms. Pam Damoff:** I'm not a lawyer, so I'll just give my own personal opinion. I know you've done a lot of work—a lot more than I have—on AI and that type of thing, but absolutely.

**Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner:** The other thing I was thinking of was that there needs to be a mechanism by which, when there's a clear instance of repeated harassing behaviour that has gotten to a point where a court of justice sees...or when there's a summary conviction, law enforcement should be able to go, under some sort of an order, to obtain the identity of somebody from a social media platform so that charges could be laid. Right now there's a grey area in the law. Would you recommend something like that?

• (1205)

**Ms. Pam Damoff:** The ethics committee actually went to the RCMP last week and got a whole training session on their digital forensics, and that's an issue they raised with us.

**Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner:** Okay, so we need some legislation on that.

The other thing is that, when there are clear instances of repeated harassing behaviour online—and we're not talking about a single mean tweet or something here, but somebody who's clearly repeatedly harassing somebody, being threatening and obscene, whatever the definition is—there needs to be some sort of intervention available to the court of justice so that this person is directed to stop communicating with somebody. That doesn't exist right now. Would you recommend that as something that the government should be looking into at this point in time?

**Ms. Pam Damoff:** Yes. Actually, Julie Lalonde is a witness in the next panel. I think she'd be a good person to ask those questions of. She has a lot of experience on that.

**Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner:** Thank you.

Again, the reason that I'm looking at objective solutions is that I could sit here and talk about members of the Liberal party I've had to block on social media because they have sent the hordes after me. I just think that if we get into a situation where we are censoring speech, particularly where we are saying that the government's position is the positive position that needs to be uploaded and that criticism of the government is downgraded in a legitimate situation, we're doing democracy a disservice.

I'm not saying there isn't a problem with what you, I and others have received. I'm just trying to look at objective solutions. Would you recommend, in that scenario, that we look at strengthening...or closing loopholes that are in existing criminal justice laws, which prevent law enforcement from intervening at early stages and allows this behaviour to escalate into hate speech, threats of violence or actual violence?

**The Chair:** Colleagues, I've let that question go about 60 seconds over, so please give a quick response. I'm sorry to rush.

**Ms. Pam Damoff:** Yes.

**The Chair:** Well, Ms. Damoff, that was exemplary in terms of quickness. Thank you very much.

Thank you, Ms. Rempel Garner.

Mr. Erskine-Smith, we turn the floor over to you for five minutes.

**Mr. Nathaniel Erskine-Smith (Beaches—East York, Lib.):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Pam, thank you for your testimony. The comments you read out are absolutely shameful.

I guess where it might be more constructive to spend time is when it comes to member-versus-member harassment. We obviously have a code for sexual harassment. There's no place for that, and that code is rightly in place.

At the same time, though, we have rules in the chamber related to privilege, where we wouldn't have a defamation action that could be brought, for example, because of comments spoken in the House of Commons. We privilege free speech of members in representing their constituents to a very high degree.

How do you see balancing that idea of privilege and the ability to voice concerns and, in some cases, voice them in such a problematic way that it might rise to defamation in the House but is not actionable? How do you see squaring that with a members' code of conduct vis-à-vis members around harassment?

**Ms. Iqra Khalid:** I'll start. Thank you for that question, I really appreciate it.

As I said in my opening remarks, members should not be allowed to do indirectly what they cannot do directly. The code of conduct for members of Parliament is very clear about how we should be conducting ourselves, what we should be allowed to say in the House or not. We have the wherewithal, we have the freedom to be able to represent our constituents and to raise the voices that our constituents need us to raise; but at the same time, I think strengthening or perhaps really clarifying that rule that you cannot do indirectly what you can't do directly would be a good starting point. As members have suggested as well, so would be creating a clear code of conduct online and members' social media.

Look, the thing is that we are and should be held to a higher standard. We need to make sure that our actions are parliamentary. I think there's always that gut check, right, when you know that what you've done is not parliamentary. I know that I have—and I admit to it—deleted tweets that I have found afterwards I wasn't too comfortable with. I think, one, we need to check ourselves. Two, if we can't check ourselves, we need to clarify the code of conduct for members of Parliament.

• (1210)

**Mr. Nathaniel Erskine-Smith:** Pam, do you have anything else you want to add?

**Ms. Pam Damoff:** Nothing else. That's fine, Nate—through you, Chair, sorry.

**The Chair:** You have about two minutes left, Mr. Erskine-Smith.

**Mr. Nathaniel Erskine-Smith:** Thanks.

This place is a circus at the best of times, and it can be even more of a circus when things go on too long, when we haven't had constituency weeks and we enter June and all that.

Look at what's happening to the Speaker right now. There are certain rules that then, you know, people stand on, and they turn those rules into an even greater circus. Do you worry at all that if there's a harassment policy in place, that in turn might become just another procedural tool in some ways for a member to go at another member and to say, “You said this, and I'm going to say it's harassment,” and turn it into a circus in its own right?

**Ms. Pam Damoff:** That's a good question.

There are 338 of us in this House. We are so privileged to be here. Our examples set the tone for every single Canadian. When Canadians—and I worry about young people in particular—look at what is going on right now, I worry that they look at all of it and throw up their hands and say, “One is as bad as the other. I don't want anything to do with it.” Whether or not a code of conduct could be weaponized, I think we need to look at how we can do it. The same could be said for sexual harassment between members, and we managed to do something on that. I do think there's a way that it can be done that is not going to be weaponized.

**Mr. Nathaniel Erskine-Smith:** I appreciate it, thanks. Honestly, to have gone through what you two have.... Every member of Parliament deals with different elements of it, but I have never even come close to experiencing anything remotely close to what you two have gone through. It's outrageous that anyone would have to listen to, read and experience the things you have experienced, so thanks for being here.

**The Chair:** Thanks very much, Mr. Erskine-Smith.

Colleagues, before we move on, I do note that we are running a little bit behind schedule. I would just encourage members to be in touch with their staff or their respective whip's offices in the event that they need to be somewhere else. Because we still have a third panel, we're probably going to end up going 15 or 20 minutes over time today. I wanted to intervene very quickly to give you the courtesy of having some time to address that.

[*Translation*]

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

**Ms. Marie-Hélène Gaudreau:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'll be brief.

First of all, I'm going to take the time to say what I have to say calmly. I hope that, given all the courage, honesty and candour people have shown, what just happened here today won't be abused as a way to spark a partisan movement a week from now. If that's the case, I'll have understood that the situation is even worse than I had imagined. I hope that my colleagues will read the evidence and that those who think that the shoe fits will wear it. We may manage to make a minor change today.

I realize I may have worded my question poorly earlier. I essentially wanted to know how far harassment, with our actions and attitude, goes. The conclusion I'm coming to today is that things are serious and action is urgently needed.

I hear talk about the possibility of striking an impartial subcommittee. Some will respond by saying that it will still be partisan. If anyone can say he or she isn't seeking power, then we can be sure it will be neutral in order to be exemplary. I think that's the complete opposite of what we should do.

Lastly, I have a single question for my colleague Ms. Damoff.

Can anyone imagine a male harassment victim doing what you dared to do on May 1, which was to resign, when you were unable to tolerate it all?

• (1215)

[English]

**Ms. Pam Damoff:** You actually give me the opportunity to talk about a double standard that I've seen.

When I brought this up at the ethics committee, I was called a pearl-clutcher and labelled as being hysterical, and told that it was the price to pay for being a federally elected official.

Then earlier this month, a former Conservative MP testified and talked about the way he got harassed online, and he was called a hero by his Conservative colleagues.

It's disheartening that women who speak out—and I'm sure my friend and colleague here has had the same experience—are called pearl-clutchers. Sean Fraser has told me he doesn't experience anything near to what I've experienced online since I first got elected.

There is a difference in the way that women and men are treated, and how they respond to the type of comments and abuse we get.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

[Translation]

**Ms. Marie-Hélène Gaudreau:** Thank you very much for the extra time, Mr. Chair.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Ms. Gaudreau.

[English]

Ms. Mathysen, you have two and a half minutes and change. It's over to you.

**Ms. Lindsay Mathysen:** Thank you.

There is absolutely a double standard, and it is interesting.

I'm often told that you have to have a thick skin to work in Parliament, but that you signed up for it. I'm sure that we all agree that you did not sign up for this.

You talked a lot about the impacts on your staff. I know that we rely upon them so much, and they are so integral to all the work we do, and they are incredible. I worry about mine, and I worry about the supports that we have in place through administration.

Have you put your minds to any additional supports that you would like to see for your staff, who have to deal with a lot of this as well?

**Ms. Pam Damoff:** Thanks for that question.

I don't think our staff get enough credit for the work they do. None of us in this room could do the work we do without the staff who support us.

I sent my speech to a former staffer to read over last night. When she responded, the individual said, "Thank you for saying all of this. It made my heart jump a bit with anxiety as I feel it again, even though I left some time ago".

It was traumatizing, and it is traumatizing for staff, especially with repeated phone calls into the community office.

I'm sure you get that in London as well.

As Ms. Khalid was saying, reading through the emails, I don't think there's enough support for them. I think the House of Commons has done a lot, and I know they're aware of the issue. They've done de-escalation training for staff so they hopefully have the tools to be able to de-escalate these calls, but it's pretty intimidating.

Most of our staff are young people. It's pretty intimidating, especially for the ones on the front line in the community, to be faced with this at the door of your office or on the phone, because a lot of times, these people who call, they call repeatedly. They hide their phone numbers so you don't know who's calling.

I've explicitly said not to answer phone calls from outside our area code, because a lot of times, those calls are abusive, and quite frankly, if someone lives in a different area code, they're likely not my constituent, and if they are, they can leave a message.

However, I think our staff are really underlooked in what happens in our offices.

• (1220)

**Ms. Iqra Khalid:** Can I just very quickly add to that?

Everything that Ms. Damoff said is accurate. I would make a very quick plug: Our staff don't get paid enough to deal with the things they deal with. If you guys can help us in paying our staff better wages, I think we'd be able to help support them a lot better as well.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much to everybody.

Ms. Ferreri, the floor will be yours for five minutes.

**Ms. Michelle Ferreri (Peterborough—Kawartha, CPC):** Thanks.

Thank you for having me here today. Thank you to our two witnesses.

It is certainly a story to be a person in politics, and then add the word "woman" in front of it, it's different. I appreciate the testimony.

I've always joked. I said, imagine we started a "mean tweets", like Jimmy Kimmel used to do, and we all, as MPs, from every party, just read them.

One of the things that popped up, and my colleague really eloquently positioned this, is about legitimate criticism versus harassment. I think there's a lot around that because it is our job, as she mentioned, in opposition, to ensure that we are holding that line and that people don't feel heard.



One of the things I would ask you about is that a lot of the messages you read in particular, Pam, were pretty graphic ones from the public, not from other members. Do you think those people who write those things are doing okay?

**Ms. Pam Damoff:** Through you, Chair, they were sent to me as a result of the action of another member of Parliament. It wasn't anything I had done. It wasn't necessarily policy related.

In answer to your question, though, I have found that it's gotten much worse since the pandemic. I do think that a lot of people are struggling with their mental health and are struggling in dealing with threats, whether to their health or to their safety, or from what's going on around the world.

I do think there are a lot of people.... I also want to say, too, that the vast majority of Canadians are good and decent people who do not treat other people in this way, but it's becoming more and more prevalent in society.

**Ms. Michelle Ferreri:** I think so, and I think what people say online versus what they say to your face is very different. They're very different things.

Just to retrace what you said, are you saying that those messages you read into the record today were directly linked to an MP's comments, or were they just random messages to you?

**Ms. Pam Damoff:** Look, I have had, over my almost nine years as an MP, thousands of just horrific messages. Most of the examples I gave, though, were the result of the actions of an MP posting something, which then resulted in a flood of responses that were directly related to what that individual had posted.

**Ms. Michelle Ferreri:** Thank you.

I think sometimes, too, it is important to say "policies". I think sometimes there are policies that make people feel unheard or unseen. I'm not excusing it.

Listen, I'm on the same end. I have pressed criminal charges against people who have threatened to kill me as well, but to your point, if people don't feel heard, I think that is a piece of the puzzle. Ms. Rempel Garner touched on this greatly and I would suggest that recommendation.

The biggest thing I am told is nobody answers a question in question period. You have the worst food insecurity in history, you have housing, you have a mental health crisis, you have suicide rates and you have all of these things, and I don't justify people's hateful behaviour, but there's always a reason somebody is doing what they are doing.

On a bigger scale than when we look at raising our children and telling them, "You can't say that to somebody's face, so don't say it online," and when we're making these recommendations, I think it is great to go back to the criminal piece of it.

One of the things that has come up a lot in my work is the Victims Bill of Rights. A lot of people feel that criminals have more rights in this country than victims. In 2020, there was an ask by the Office of the Federal Ombudsman for Victims of Crime for a parliamentary review of the Canadian Victims Bill of Rights citing the top four issues that needed to be addressed, and it has never been addressed. It has never happened.

I guess my question to you is twofold. Where do you see that? Should that be re-examined? Would you suggest something like that as well?

• (1225)

**Ms. Iqra Khalid:** I will share with you that, a couple of months ago, MP Michael Barrett started a Facebook Live in which he called me and my colleague corrupt and released our email addresses, etc., which led to a whole bunch of hate coming towards me—people calling, people emailing me on social media, etc. However, there was this one lady, Peggy, who drove two hours to my constituency office, and she was very upset and was asking me why I was a corrupt individual, why I was shutting down committees, why I was not allowing investigations to happen and why I thought it was okay for us to do X, Y or Z.

I sat down with her. We had a conversation for about half an hour, and she gave me the biggest hug when she left. To me, that really proves a point. When I talk about the politics of agitation, it is that spreading or framing of an issue in a way that really does agitate people and makes them anxious. It adds an extra layer to whatever they are dealing with on a daily basis as it is, so I think that we as members of Parliament have a responsibility to be more fair in how we engage on social media.

**Ms. Michelle Ferreri:** Sorry. Just to clarify that, do you think the Victims Bill of Rights needs to be amended?

**Ms. Pam Damoff:** On that, I have a meeting with the ombudsman for victims of crime. I have met with the office in the past. They reminded me that most people who are in jail are also victims of abuse, so I think that with any of our policies, whether it's the Victims Bill of Rights or the several other things that we deal with, it's always a good thing to take a look at them, but we need to bear in mind.... If you've met with the ombudsperson, you will know they have a very balanced approach to victims.

**The Chair:** Thanks very much, Ms. Damoff.

The last intervention for this panel will be yours, Ms. Romanado, for five minutes.

**Mrs. Sherry Romanado:** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I wanted to go back to something you said, MP Damoff, with respect to already having a system in place with respect to the code of conduct for members, dealing with sexual harassment. In that code of conduct, there's a mechanism. It is not political parties that are involved. This is literally professionals with the human resources office who deal with complaints and mediation, and so on and so forth. Therefore, we know a model already exists. As it was indicated in appendix A of the workplace harassment policy, which unfortunately doesn't apply between MPs, it gives examples of behaviours that can be considered harassment.

Would you say that it would be pretty easy for us to implement not only the harassment policy between MPs because we already have a model in which complaints can be brought forward, but also an example of lists of behaviours that would not be acceptable? I also think it would be helpful—and I'd like your opinion on this—to have mediation or reconciliation.

For instance, if there is a member who is being targeted online by another member, then that indirectly gets the harassment going. If there was a mechanism where you could invite that member of Parliament to a meeting with a professional, with a mediation officer, to say that you're not sure if they realize that what they're doing is causing a lot of hurt, and it's creating this mass of hate and so on.

There is no mechanism, and we have a very adversarial job that we already do. Would you recommend that maybe we have systems in place so that we can actually bring our colleagues together to say that this behaviour is not acceptable, and they need to help and to stop it? What would you recommend? I'm trying to talk about not the indirect hate, but how can we prevent getting there?

**Ms. Pam Damoff:** I think the mechanism you've described would be helpful. I hate to say that anything is easy to do, but, yes. I do think that it would be helpful.

• (1230)

**Mrs. Sherry Romanado:** With respect to the impact on families, my family looks at my page, and I try to put a lot of positive things out. I don't do the personal attacks. I just really put out a lot of positive stuff. However, when I get the comments, I know my dad would call and say, Sherry, do they even know you? You're such a nice person. Why are people saying that about you?

It's very hurtful for our families to see that. I have people come up to me to say that they have seen some of the stuff people write and wonder if people even know me. They say that I'm a nice person. I don't think people realize that when that's happening, our families are affected as well.

When you're having that conversation about whether you're going to run again or whether you're going to continue doing what you're doing, a lot of times, the family is questioning if we really want to keep putting up with that. It impacts our ability to do what we do.

I self-regulate in the chamber now. There are times when I want to get up and ask a question, and I think, you know, I'm not going to because it's just going to invite the hate. My privilege is actually being taken away because I self-regulate. I decide what parts of the debate I'm going to participate in because I just don't want to invite it.

Would you say that's something that's happening as well?

**Ms. Pam Damoff:** I'm sorry, but I'm pretty sure my son is watching right now. He's 34 years old. He's not a little kid. I know that what happens to me here bothers him a lot more than it bothers me. It has an impact on him and his family. I worry about our family's safety. I don't have young kids living at home anymore, but I do worry about MPs who have young kids and who are subjected to abuse.

In 2018, my son called out someone who attacked me online in *The Oakville Beaver*, our local newspaper. It doesn't really exist anymore, but it did a story about the bullying of MPs in politics. I do know that it has a huge impact on our families, and that's across party lines.

It also weighs into what we do and don't do. I actually sent him my speech last night, and then I asked him not to read it because I figured it would be better if he only heard it once and didn't read it ahead of time. I think it's harder on our families than it is for us as individuals. I think that you're correct; it does impact what we do and don't do in the House in anticipation of what might happen out in the real world.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Ms. Damoff.

Colleagues, this brings us to the end of the second panel.

I do just want to take a moment. As I look around the table and online, I want to thank Ms. Rempel Garner, Ferreri, Mathysen, Khalid, Damoff, Romanado and Gaudreau in particular because I do appreciate that life in politics, as difficult as it is, is certainly more difficult for women. I think we've heard that exemplified here today in some brave and courageous testimony. I can't imagine it was easy to share on all sides of the aisle. I know that many of us men who are subject to certain things are never diminished as a result of our gender. That is something that is very specific to our female colleagues, and I do—

**Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner:** On a point of order for that, I'd just like to say, for the record, that I don't feel like my experience has been diminished by my gender. I just want to put that on the record.

Thanks.

**The Chair:** That's fair enough. I'm sorry, Ms. Rempel Garner. I meant to say that on our behalf.

**Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner:** Thanks.

**The Chair:** Colleagues, we're going to suspend briefly, and we are then going to go into our final panel.

Thank you.

• (1230)

(Pause)

• (1240)

**The Chair:** Colleagues, we're going to start again.

I do acknowledge that we have gone overtime. I did my best to be fair to all sides with the amount of speaking time they got. Having said that, I appreciate that it can be challenging to our respective schedules when we go further than we intend.

What I propose—and I'm looking around the room to make sure there is some agreement to this—is that we get a full round of questioning in and then evaluate where we are at the end of that round in terms of what members' responsibilities may be.

It's always possible, of course, for me and some of the members to stick around as well, acknowledging that there won't be voting on certain procedures or anything, but that we have an informal part of the meeting that can continue with witnesses. We can discuss that when we get there, but I do want to try to be respectful to everybody's schedule.

Let's get going and then folks are welcome to come and talk to me at the outset here and see where they want to go.

With that, I would like to welcome the witnesses on our next panel.

I would like to welcome to the committee today Julie Lalonde, who is a public educator, and Sabreena Delhon, the chief executive officer of the Samara Centre for Democracy.

Ms. Lalonde, I'm going to go to you first for five minutes for an opening statement and then to Ms. Delhon for five minutes for hers. Then we're going to get into our line of questioning.

The floor is over to you, Ms. Lalonde.

**Ms. Julie S. Lalonde (Public Educator, As an Individual):** Wonderful. Thank you.

I'm delighted that Samara was added to the list. Their work is something I was going to reference because they do incredibly important work.

Thank you for the invitation.

[*Translation*]

My name is Julie S. Lalonde and I have been working to end gender-based violence in Canada for over 20 years. I have worked directly with victims as a counsellor in sexual assault centres, have crafted policies and procedures for various organizations and trained thousands and thousands of Canadians on how to create safer communities through bystander intervention. I've never been a staffer or worked in politics but I have trained MPs, MPPs, staffers and interns from across parties at the provincial and federal level.

[*English*]

What I want to share with you today are the common concerns that I've received and heard from staff and interns over the years of doing those trainings.

The primary concern is around defining the actual issues at hand. I observed Tuesday's meeting, and I was here this morning, and I see that it is a continuing conversation happening here.

If I said to you, "The solution to harassment is orange," we could all nod our heads and say, "Great, that sounds like an awesome plan" and leave here ready to tackle the problem, but the issue is that half of you were thinking of the fruit and the other half were thinking of the colour, but all of you were convinced that you were heading in the right direction and the same direction.

In reading the policy and the code of conduct and in listening to the previous committee meetings, as I said, there seems to remain much confusion about what exactly constitutes harassment and what to do if it happens to you or someone you work with. This

brings me to the second common concern I hear, primarily from staffers and interns, which is, "Okay, now what?"

There remains much confusion as to whom exactly to report harassment to, what confidentiality looks like in that process, what accountability looks like in that process, etc. Knowledge is power, and we cannot expect people to come forward as targets of harassment or as bystanders—and I will emphasize that several times over, the importance of bystanders in this conversation—if they're in the dark on what happens next.

The House of Commons needs what is referred to as a "no-wrong-door policy", which encourages people to disclose to anyone they trust to figure out how to handle feelings of unsafety or concern.

Finally, I've heard much frustration from members, staffers and interns that there remains a failure to recognize 21st century realities—and this has been mentioned quite a few times. What happens online does matter. If you were to bank somewhere where you could not do online banking, you would be furious. To pretend that what happens on the Internet is not real is naive in 2024.

Coordinated mob attacks, whether they are via bots or individuals, do impact someone's ability to do their job. Those on the front lines of managing social media—as was referenced earlier today—those who are answering the emails and the phone calls and who are behind your Twitter accounts and Facebook accounts need to be protected and supported in their difficult roles.

The work members and their staffers do is also incredibly mobile and often changes day to day, and so there needs to be an understanding written into policies and procedures that all harassment is unacceptable, whether it happens in the House, at the office or at a community meet-and-greet barbecue. We are living in increasingly volatile times, and that needs to be reflected in your policies and your work here.

Finally, I'm happy to speak on best practices for violence prevention and culture change—that is my area of expertise—but most importantly, I want to convey the urgency in getting this conversation right. We all have the right to a safe and equitable workplace, but members of Parliament also set an example for Canadians. Getting it right here sends a message that civility matters, that we can disagree with each other without veering into personal attack and that conflicts can be resolved in a way where everyone is able to move forward. Creating a safer House of Commons means creating a more democratic House of Commons, and that benefits all of us.

• (1245)

[*Translation*]

Thank you.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Ms. Lalonde.

Ms. Delhon, we'll go to you for up to five minutes for an opening statement.

**Ms. Sabreena Delhon (Chief Executive Officer, Samara Centre for Democracy):** Thank you, Mr. Chair. It's a pleasure to speak with the committee today.

My name is Sabreena Delhon, and I'm the CEO of the Samara Centre for Democracy, which is a non-partisan charity dedicated to making Canada's democratic culture more accessible, responsive and inclusive.

We have been studying the lived experience of elected officials for over 15 years through our MP exit interview project, which has produced several publications and two podcasts. This material serves as a key resource for aspiring politicians. It is used by high school and post-secondary educators across the country to teach about active citizenship, and it has received extensive media attention. Over 160 exit interviews have been conducted with former members of Parliament since 2008. Today, I'll be drawing on our most recent cohort of interviews to guide potential changes to the workplace harassment and violence prevention policy.

In these interviews, former MPs across parties have expressed concerns that their conditions of work create significant barriers to achieving a Parliament that is representative of Canadian society. They call for modernization in the form of more flexibility, stronger HR policies and formalized protocols to prevent harassment. Our interviewees feel that these changes are crucial in order to attract and to retain parliamentarians. This was a defining theme in this group, more so than in previous cohorts. MPs repeatedly shared concerns that a failure to improve Parliament as a workplace would undermine the faith and the trust that Canadians have in this institution.

The way forward isn't through policies alone, but through the formation of a healthy culture that can reverse this normalization of an increasingly hostile environment online and off-line.

This requires considering the following questions. What are the rewards for good behaviour? How are parties incentivized to contribute to civility and collegiality? What other healthy boundaries can be put into place to foster a more productive condition of work?

I'll turn now to specific feedback about the working conditions from former MPs. Encountering racialized comments were identified by interviewees as a significant risk when serving in the House of Commons. This problem was compounded by the absence of mechanisms to address these instances, which brought forth a sense of alienation.

In terms of gender equity, harassment of younger women MPs was brought up as a point of concern amongst a number of our interviewees, both men and women. Some interviewees spoke of the negative effects of harassment or bullying during question period, which they connected to the broader harassment and silencing of women and under-represented groups in the political arena.

The effect of online harassment of MPs was also a recurring theme. Our interviewees explained how harassment affected their mental health and extended to their families. This is a particular concern from those that are from minoritized communities who receive a high volume of online abuse.

Recently, we've seen numerous politicians in all orders of government leave the political arena because of hate and harassment that came to define their job. This isn't just about having a thick skin or being more resilient. In our interviews, the women we spoke with frequently mentioned receiving death threats and struggling to get the appropriate security that they required.

If safer working conditions aren't put into place, then the leaders that we need—the leaders that reflect Canada's diverse communities—won't stay, or they'll stop stepping forward altogether. The context that I've outlined here takes a significant toll on staff and has a chilling effect on public engagement. People are pushed away from democratic engagement instead of being drawn in.

None of our interviewees regret devoting years to public service, and they share their stories with us to help evolve life in Parliament. In this period of global democratic backsliding, it's never been more urgent to secure healthy conditions of civic engagement.

We're willing to partner to support a safer and more inclusive workplace, should the committee see a role for us.

Thank you.

• (1250)

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Ms. Delhon. We appreciate the opening statement.

Ms. Rempel Garner, the first round of questioning will go to you, for six minutes.

**Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner:** I think what we should be trying to do is drive to recommendations that effect change. One of the frustrations I've had over the course of my hot-minute career is the weekly request for an interview: How do you feel about being a woman in politics, blah blah blah? I have yet to have an interview to respond to substantive changes that would improve some of these issues, so I'd like to go to recommendations.

The CBC reported about two weeks ago that the RCMP was recommending stronger measures to protect members of Parliament from online harassment and abuse. My reaction was that if you can't protect me, how can you protect other Canadian women? We know that online harassment is a behaviour that escalates into physical violence. It creates anxiety, lack of productivity, impacts on the family and so on. I'd like to focus recommendations on ways to prevent that writ large.

There are three recommendations that I'd like the committee to consider. The first is that the loophole, the grey area under Canada's current intimate image distribution laws that does not explicitly include deepfakes, be closed, and that the language be put in the Criminal Code, particularly ahead of the next federal election.

Would you both agree with that recommendation?

**Ms. Julie S. Lalonde:** Absolutely. I would absolutely agree with that.

**Ms. Sabreena Delhon:** Yes.

**Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner:** Okay.

The next thing I'd like to see concerns two gaps. First of all, oftentimes this type of harassment comes from anonymous sources. I'm not talking about a singular mean tweet objecting to a policy position or even calling me a name. It is repetitive harassment from the same person. Oftentimes, as was mentioned by one of the previous witnesses, not just for MPs but for all women there will be a time when law enforcement will say, "Well, I'm not sure what we can do about that". To the point that Ms. Lalonde made, it's very difficult to even know where to call when you are being harassed by somebody online.

I would like to recommend, or I would like to get your position on recommending, that in instances of clear repeated harassment—defining it along the lines of what constitutes criminal harassment—a judge could issue an order to social media companies to provide the identity of a person so that justice could be followed out. Would you recommend that?

**Ms. Julie S. Lalonde:** I absolutely would recommend that as a member of civil society who cannot speak in public without a security detail because of the amount of death threats I receive for my work on ending violence against women in Canada. I have had rare occasions when folks have been criminalized for their behaviour, but to your point, I absolutely agree that if a member of Parliament cannot get justice for someone who is repeatedly harassing them, how do we expect a 25-year-old single mother who's being harassed by an intimate partner—but using fake aliases online—to get justice?

Absolutely there needs to be a stronger mechanism. That to me is part of the broader conversation: Social media platforms are an industry and they need to be regulated. The fact that I can't see news on Instagram and Facebook tells me that the government has made attempts to regulate those industries, but they haven't made any headway when it comes to exactly the topic that we're talking about today.

• (1255)

**Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner:** I'm looking at low-hanging fruit that the government could implement in short order. I know that there's a bill before Parliament that has received a lot of controversial scrutiny. It looks at setting up a very big bureaucracy that's years out. That debate hasn't started in Parliament yet. I'll focus my remarks on things we could do in very short order within the existing Criminal Code to get justice. That would be my second thing.

I'll go to Samara in a second, but I want to mention my last recommendation. Let's say that came to pass. There was a tool by which if a behaviour online had reached a certain threshold, an order could be given to social media platforms to disclose identity. I'm not talking about for freedom; it's harassing behaviour.

The next thing is, what's to be done about it? In those scenarios, what often happens is that identity might come out. People might know it's happening, but there's this grey area on whether or not the person can continue to contact you. Oftentimes what will happen is

that one account might be shut down, but then there's another. It's very easy to create a different email address. It's difficult to block people who are constantly harassing.

In that scenario, when there's a threshold of behaviour reached, as determined by the court, would you recommend that a judge could issue—I'll use a term that would have to be defined—an online restraining order that would prevent a person, almost in perpetuity if the judge so deemed it, from contacting somebody by any means online so that the behaviour stops? It would be a tool to de-escalate that behaviour from violence.

Would either of you recommend that?

**The Chair:** Witnesses, I'm sorry to rush, but just to let you know, you have about 30 seconds or so for the response.

Thank you.

**Ms. Julie S. Lalonde:** I would say, yes, we should put conditions on people who are threatening people's lives. That shouldn't be controversial.

**Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner:** Samara.

**Ms. Sabreena Delhon:** I would agree and I would add that there needs to be a public education component to this because people don't know where they're supposed to go for recourse—whether that's to the platform itself or to the police.

Education for judges would also be necessary here, in order to have the appropriate level of digital literacy to navigate this terrain.

We also want to see tech platforms have better content moderation practices, so this isn't an issue in the first place and also to reduce the number of times that someone can be anonymous online.

**The Chair:** Thanks very much.

Ms. Damoff, the floor is yours for six minutes.

**Ms. Pam Damoff:** Thank you.

I want to thank both of the witnesses here today for the work you've done.

Ms. Lalonde, I've read your book, I follow your posts and my staff and I did your bystander training. You do amazing work and you do it in spite of the threats and harassment that you get. I just would personally like to thank you.

The mayor of Burlington, Ontario, Marianne Meed Ward, brought together all of the women who are elected in Halton region. She's been doing this for a few years. After I announced that I wasn't running again, she drafted up a pledge that was signed by, I think, 21 or 22 women in Halton region. I just want to read it.

It says:

...we, the women of H.E.R. (Halton Elected Representatives):

1. Pledge to support each other and call out abuse and harassment when we see it or experience it.
2. Call on all our allies to stand with us to support women in office and call out all forms of abuse and harassment.
3. Call on all elected officials to uphold the highest standards of conduct, focusing on respectful debate of the issues and not personal attacks.

4. Call on the relevant authorities to ensure the protection of individuals who speak out against abuse, and who experience abuse, providing them with the necessary support and resources.

Ms. Lalonde, I'm going to start with you because I feel that touches a little bit on the type of bystander training that you do.

A lot of times, as MPs, we don't call out others on what is put out into the public sphere. I'm just wondering if you can maybe comment on your thoughts on that pledge and whether you think it would be helpful. Then I'll turn to Samara.

**Ms. Julie S. Lalonde:** Yes, I think certainly it would be helpful. I mean, it's an all-hands-on-deck situation. To assume that there's some sort of silver bullet that's going to solve everything.... It's going to be a multipronged approach.

I do think that it bodes really well when you see cross-party support around these issues. To call out how another member was treated, regardless of whether or not they're a part of your team, shows that civility is important and that we have respect.

To speak to the point that was made earlier, I know that behind the cameras, folks are going out for lunch and they're having chit-chats. That's important that you're checking in with each other, but being more open and public about those gestures and normalizing that behaviour by definition encourages bystanders.

I think it shows that it's not about partisanship; it's about civility and it's about safety, fundamentally. Yes, we know women and folks of colour are predominantly being targeted in politics, but when you see the vitriol, nobody wants to join that club. Your job does not look appealing from the outside—I'm here to tell you—like, at all.

That's a problem for democracy, so I think that any attempt of cross-party calling this stuff out, even if it comes across initially as lip service, is powerful stuff. I would like to see more of it.

I'll pass it to Sabreana.

● (1300)

**Ms. Sabreana Delhon:** We know from our exit interviews that MPs are collegial. You are friends, you do have lunch and you do have group chats together. The public would like to see a lot more of that side of the job.

These types of pledges, Ms. Damoff, are certainly helpful, but I don't think we need to see a kind of flattening or segmenting of the experience across race or gender lines all the time. That can be useful to help us set a baseline for improvements or to get some necessary context, but I think we want to see, and the public wants to see, all MPs demonstrating collegiality and civility towards each other.

It's not just the burden of those who are experiencing the most violence to stick up for each other and protect each other. There's a role for everyone to play to demonstrate the kind of productive and collegial workspace that we know can exist, that does exist a lot of the time and that needs to be more visible to the public.

**Ms. Pam Damoff:** I forgot to set my timer, Chair. How much time do I have left?

**The Chair:** That's why I'm here. You have a minute and a half.

**Ms. Pam Damoff:** Okay, thank you.

To your point, I think we did see a lot of that when Karen Vecchio was removed as chair of the status of women committee. You saw MPs from all parties—and the public, quite frankly—speaking out about the good work she had done, and you don't often see that displayed publicly, so the point was well taken.

Do you think that, as MPs, we have a responsibility to set the tone for the public? Some of this discourse is going to happen anyway, but do we have a responsibility to set the tone ourselves and set examples for the public?

**Ms. Julie S. Lalonde:** Absolutely.

**Ms. Sabreana Delhon:** Would you like me to answer that?

**Ms. Pam Damoff:** Sure.

**Ms. Sabreana Delhon:** The answer is yes.

**The Chair:** Not to rush you, Ms. Delhon, but please, be as concise as you can. Thank you.

**Ms. Sabreana Delhon:** Yes, we need to see MPs modelling the behaviour. Teachers are currently embarrassed to bring their students to question period because they don't want to expose their students to that behaviour. Nobody wants that. That's not the kind of environment we want for our democracy to function in, so yes, there is a role for modelling that behaviour online and off-line.

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

[*Translation*]

Ms. Gaudreau, you have the floor for six minutes.

**Ms. Marie-Hélène Gaudreau:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

We've witnessed a courageous act in the last half hour. I don't know if you heard all the remarks. We were cited examples of misogynistic verbal violence.

I'd like to ask Ms. Lalonde the following question.

Would you please tell us what you think of the freedom of misogynistic speech that we're currently experiencing?

**Ms. Julie S. Lalonde:** Are you referring to our freedom to speak about misogyny?

**Ms. Marie-Hélène Gaudreau:** No, this freedom has actually been transformed. It used to be something unacceptable decades ago, but now it's different, to the point where demonstrating that you're a misogynist can help you seek power, and it's something that you advertise.

**Ms. Julie S. Lalonde:** As was mentioned this morning, when we women talk about situations in which we've been harassed, we're told in certain instances that it's not true. We're often told that we should toughen up and find a way to deal with it. We're told that, if we don't have the necessary ability, confidence or endurance, this job isn't for us. However, people praise men for their courage and bravery when they discuss their mental health crises.

That's also part of the problem. As women, we're often targeted for harassment, and we've also lost the right to discuss the issue freely without being told that it's not true or that we're just too weak to do the job. It's a big part of the problem.

What often happens is that women decide not to take on the dual role of MP and woman but instead adopt only their role as an MP. I understand, but I tell them that, in the face of misogyny, they nevertheless mustn't forget that they're also women.

Even our freedom to discuss the issue is genuinely compromised now, and that's a major concern for me. Our freedom to express ourselves is at stake. Often when we talk about putting an end to harassment, people wonder what will happen to freedom of expression. Yes, but what will happen to my freedom of expression right now, if I can't discuss feminism in public without having a security officer nearby? What does that tell you?

• (1305)

**Ms. Marie-Hélène Gaudreau:** Yes. Thank you.

My next question is for Ms. Delhon.

I see you're very interested in politics. Why do you think this climate is tolerated, and even accepted? People ask us to change our behaviour and to be civilized, while others strongly encourage us to forge ahead.

Why is that?

[English]

**Ms. Sabreena Delhon:** One key cause is technology's influence on our democracy, particularly over the last decade. We've seen social media platforms develop content recommendation systems that favour divisive and harmful content, particularly that experienced by elected officials, journalists and others who occupy what we can call "professions of democracy." They are getting attacked online, and we end up seeing that material far more than any of the positive stories about civic engagement in our local communities.

We've also seen a reduction in local journalism. Local newsrooms have been decimated over the last couple of years, and all of that is changing the proportion. A lot of what we're hearing about and that sense of tension and anxiety we're experiencing right now is because the harmful material is out of proportion with our norms and it's distorting our sense of our democratic values.

[Translation]

**Ms. Marie-Hélène Gaudreau:** Thank you very much.

Ms. Lalonde, I'd like to know what you think about the effects of certain non-verbal behaviours. Earlier I cited the example of a contemptuous attitude, which is often discreetly displayed. I'm also thinking of the acts of looking at one's telephone while someone else is speaking, pretending not to listen, or simply not listening. In

short, I'm talking about all those behaviours that we can observe every day, and I'd even say we can observe them right now.

Do you think they constitute harassment?

**Ms. Julie S. Lalonde:** Yes, absolutely.

Body language has an impact on intimidation, for example. It's not just a lack of respect that's conveyed by examples such as those just cited: using one's telephone when someone is speaking, talking to someone else nearby and not paying attention. People can also roll their eyes or cross their arms as they look at someone.

That doesn't amount to saying that we're weak. You have to recognize these things. We aren't stupid either. We know what intimidation is. Some people want to make a good impression by insisting they said nothing. However, it's obvious they did something: They wanted to communicate something by being disrespectful or exhibiting impatience, for example.

We haven't come here to tell people they shouldn't move their arms. I'm a francophone, so I obviously speak with my hands. Let's be realistic. We are adults, and we have to be realistic. When someone shows a lack of respect, we know what that is. However, we don't have the courage to put our foot down and say that's enough. Until we manage to do that, nothing will change and we'll keep going round in circles. I honestly think we don't have the courage to actually finish this discussion.

**Ms. Marie-Hélène Gaudreau:** I hope that you can bring us some courage and that the message is ultimately heard.

Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Ms. Lalonde and Ms. Gaudreau.

• (1310)

[English]

Ms. Mathysen, the floor is yours for six minutes.

**Ms. Lindsay Mathysen:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to both of the witnesses for joining us on this important study.

We talk a lot about the rules and tools that we need to implement, which are important. I think that's very clear. But I'm also frustrated in that it seems fairly reactive. I would like to talk about the proactive.

I don't know, but I've certainly worried about whether it's just a matter of peer pressure. There were conversations earlier with Ms. Damoff about that bystander mentality. Could you both expand on what else we as members of Parliament have to do beyond that to raise the level? It's our own behaviour, but what about beyond that as well?

**Ms. Julie S. Lalonde:** Certainly. I would say that bystander intervention training needs to be mandatory. It needs to be across the board. I work with a program where I teach bystander intervention to children aged three to 10. It's a life skill. It's like administering CPR. It's like naloxone and a life skill if you see someone in distress.

I want to reference something that was said earlier this morning. People are not doing well. If you take public transit, you can tell that people are not doing well. If you wait in a drive-through that takes too long, people are popping off at a rate that we've never seen. People are not well. Bystander intervention skills are life skills that we need to make standard across the board, but certainly in the House of Commons amongst MPs, amongst members, amongst staffers and amongst interns. That is something that is, by definition, culture change. It's not putting the onus on the person who's been targeted to be the only one to raise it. It's saying, "I was there. I saw it. I'm going to say something. I'm going to set partisanship aside and say that ultimately we all benefit by putting a stop to this."

I would also say, although it feels reactive, that to return to the point made earlier by Ms. Rempel Garner, we do need to also look at how we even define harassment in terms of the Criminal Code. Changing that is an opportunity for public education. Stalking has only been illegal in Canada since 1993. Until I started an organization in January, there was not a single organization in Canada's history focused on stalking.

There's nobody to talk about what this looks like and to help us get into the weeds. This is an opportunity that you have here. By changing that legislation, yes, it's responding, but you're raising awareness on this. We're not talking about people being annoying on the Internet. We're talking about people threatening our lives and impeding our ability to do our jobs. That public education piece is, by definition, prevention as well. Bystander and redefining criminal harassment are the most important, in my view.

**Ms. Sabreena Delhon:** This is a self-regulating culture, so this is a time where there's pressure to be reactive, move really quickly, just be in the moment and be short-sighted. But in a self-regulating environment, you can take a minute, take a pause and really think deeply about what kind of culture you want. In this moment of democratic backsliding, Canada has a leadership opportunity here. We can really step up on the world stage and set some new norms. The stakes are pretty high.

From our exit interviews, we hear really mundane and straightforward recommendations of what would make a difference. Start as you mean to go on. Put that culture training and piece into the onboarding process. Set a code of conduct and norms at that spot. Then pair new MPs with ones who are more experienced. Maintain that non-partisan opportunity and potential throughout.

**Ms. Lindsay Mathysen:** I do believe our caucus used to do that, but it was one of the many things that were lost during COVID and afterwards. It's an important point.

I want to talk about what Ms. Gaudreau was getting at a bit, but I want to explore it more. We heard from the two witnesses before, the two MPs, of extreme examples of harassment, of what it leads to, and about that verbal violence that was heard.

However, there are also microaggressions. Can you both talk about what you've seen with those, and give examples of those and how we could better deal with them?

**Ms. Sabreena Delhon:** Sure. I can speak to that.

In our exit interviews, we talked to people who aren't in the job anymore, so they could be very open and reflective about what they experienced. Their comment was often, "Wow, I had all this to say, and nobody ever asked me these questions before". Then they were able to unpack all the ways in which they felt slighted, undermined or attacked in varying ways of severity.

It's often women who really downplay the extent of the abuse and the incivility they encountered. As a result, there's a lot of compartmentalization that happens. This affects male colleagues as well because they're bearing witness to this and experiencing it with colleagues they care about.

If we think about this from a sustainability perspective, at the end of the political career, a lot of doors can be closed. That healing and recovering from the compartmentalization that's necessary to perform this job needs to be addressed. That's a serious mental health and wellness issue. It's a public good issue. How are we taking care of our public servants after they've completed their service to us? There's a duty of care element to this as well, then.

What we're talking about is not just what happens on the job. It's hard on the campaign trail, on the digital campaign trail in particular, which can be very abusive and toxic. There is very little training and very few supports available there. The job is hard. Then, post-job is also incredibly challenging. There's a lot of responsibility that we need to account for across that civic journey.



• (1315)

**Ms. Lindsay Mathysen:** I did want to include that our job is hard. We've talked about the impacts on staff, and the supports around us within the institution—

**The Chair:** Ms. Mathysen, I'm sorry. Please be very quick on the final question.

**Ms. Lindsay Mathysen:** Okay.

I, as a staffer, took your training on harassment. Is there anything else in terms of mandatory training that you think should be provided to staff who support us in that way for the institution?

**Ms. Julie S. Lalonde:** Yes, very quickly, I would say that there are lots of folks doing great bystander intervention work. We also know that if you don't do booster training six to eight months afterwards, people don't lose the skills, but do lose the confidence because they've spent six months being told to just shut up and stay quiet. It needs to be a continuous conversation so that folks don't lose that confidence.

There also needs to be some sort of trauma-informed training done with those who are on the front lines and who are being subjected to the abuse, not just on social media, but also on the phones and at the constituency offices so that those folks don't burn out and

so that we keep them in the world of politics, which is where they want to be.

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

Ms. Lalonde and Ms. Delhon, thank you very much for joining us today.

Colleagues, thank you very much for your patience and for a productive meeting.

Right before we adjourn, I believe everyone has received a copy of the budgetary numbers that we need to pass for both the cyber-hacking study as well as the one we are currently undertaking. I'm looking around the room to see that there is no objection to that budget.

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

**The Chair:** Excellent. With that, colleagues, the budget is passed.

I hope you all have a wonderful weekend. We'll see you next week back here.

I adjourn this meeting

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