

VIEW FROM QUEEN'S PARK: Setting a Higher Standard

Setting a higher standard for accountability in Ontario

By Chris Ballard, MPP

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On the campaign trail, I heard time and again concerns from residents about government's need to strengthen accountability, oversight and transparency across the government and broader public sector.

I'm pleased to report that The Public Sector and MPP Accountability and Transparency Act (Bill 8) passed second reading recently and I'll be part of the committee listening to the public comment on the Bill.

Bill 8 is a sweeping piece of legislation. It's a signature piece for this government ? one that sets high standards for accountability in Ontario.

From giving government the power to directly control executive pay in the broader public sector, to enhancing oversight in the health sector, to further strengthening government's record-keeping obligations and legislating the public disclosure of expenses of our elected members, this legislation demonstrates the government is serious about restoring trust in government.

Ontario has a strong accountability framework in place for its elected members and public servants, and with Bill 8 we propose to set the bar even higher.

The 2014 Ontario budget committed to controlling compensation for executives in the broader public sector, and with this proposed legislation we're making good on this promise.

The people of Ontario have a right to know how their dollars are being spent, and that includes executive compensation.

Under the proposed bill, information on expenses claimed by cabinet ministers, parliamentary assistants, opposition leaders and their staff would continue to be subject to a review process by the Integrity Commissioner, an officer of Parliament.

The Premier, our cabinet and staff have been complying with that spirit of transparency voluntarily since April 1, 2010. By making online reporting a legislative requirement, we would ensure that the opposition follows our lead.

Under the proposed bill, online reporting of expense information would also extend to each and every one of the MPPs in the Legislature. The bill, if passed, would require the Speaker to post online information on MPP expenses concerning out-of-riding travel, related hotel expenses, meals and hospitality expenses.

Our government believes that elected representatives need to lead by example. I think we can all agree that the people of Ontario deserve clear and easy access to the expenses of their elected representatives.

You may recall this is a principle I successfully championed at the municipal level as a councillor with the Town of Aurora, resulting in councillor expenses being posted online.

The proposed legislation would also, if passed, amend the Excellent Care for All Act and establish a patient ombudsman to receive and attempt to resolve complaints from people who have received services from health care sector organizations in Ontario such as hospitals, long-term-care homes and community care access centres.

The patient ombudsman would work directly with complainants and health sector organizations to facilitate the resolution of complaints. He or she would also conduct investigations and make recommendations to health care sector organizations, in response to complaints, and on their own initiative. To increase transparency and drive improvement, the patient ombudsman would issue public reports on their activities and recommendations.

Proposed changes to the Ombudsman Act would provide the Ontario Ombudsman with authority to investigate municipalities, school boards and publicly funded universities.

Our proposed bill would extend the Ontario Ombudsman's role to include the 444 municipalities across Ontario. The provincial Ombudsman could also, upon complaint, undertake a closed-municipal-meeting investigation. If passed, the proposed act would allow the Ombudsman to investigate any decision, recommendation or act done or omitted in the course of the administration of a municipality and most of its local boards.

The Ontario Ombudsman, as he now can for provincial matters, would be able to investigate municipal matters on his or her own initiative.

Our government respects municipalities and the work of municipal councillors. This is about making sure every Ontarian in every municipality has access to an ombudsman; this is about providing the people of Ontario with access to stronger accountability processes.

We value the important work of our broader public sector employees. We want to ensure that we're able to attract good talent and, at

the same time, manage public dollars responsibly. This legislation would, if passed, authorize the government to control the compensation of executives in the broader public service, and take action to ensure compliance.

The provisions in this bill would give government the right to access all compensation-related information so we can set those compensation frameworks, including sector-specific hard caps.

The government would not just be looking at salaries. These proposed compensation frameworks could address a broad range of compensation elements, including pay-at-risk and benefits. If the proposed legislation is passed, the government would take a strong and fair approach to developing compensation frameworks that would provide consistency and clarity.

This legislation will set a high standard for us all in government, and it will help build a transparent, open and accessible government the hard-working people have asked for; and the transparent, open and accessible government the hard-working people of Ontario deserve.

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Our community office has moved to 238 Wellington St., Aurora. Hours: Monday-Wednesday 10 a.m. - 4 p.m.; Thursday 10 a.m. - 6 p.m.; Friday 10 a.m. - 4 p.m. Phone: 905-750-0019. Email: cballard.mpp.co@liberal.ola.org