

## **Elections Nova Scotia 2022–2023 Budget Estimates**

*Presentation to the Special Committee of the House of Assembly to Review the Estimates of the Auditor General and the Chief Electoral Officer*

### **SPEAKING NOTES: DOROTHY RICE, CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER**

JANUARY 18, 2022

Good afternoon and thank you for this opportunity to present our budget request.

As an independent non-partisan agency, Elections Nova Scotia reports to the members of the house of assembly through the speaker. Our mission, to deliver provincial elections impartially and professionally, is drawn from the *Elections Act*. Our vision, to be trusted by all Nova Scotians to excel in the delivery of fair and inclusive elections is founded on our independence from the executive branch of Nova Scotia's government.

We are one of the four independent offices of this house who are charged with upholding government accountability. Independence for election management bodies is a widely accepted international norm and is the single most important attribute of a credible electoral authority.

Just as I present our budget estimates to this Special Committee, nine of the 13 other election management bodies in this country do the same. The difference is each of those committees have some form of statutory authority for the allocation of funding. Statutory authority enables electoral management bodies to be nimble and flexible in the delivery of their mandates. This advantage was made clear in 2020 and 2021, when 3 of the four provinces that held general elections during the COVID-19 pandemic were able to fund the additional requirements without budgetary restrictions. In the fourth, Nova Scotia, the unforeseen incremental costs incurred as a result of the pandemic, as we prepared for the general election call, had to be requested and approved by Finance, Treasury and Policy Board in advance. In the end, the election was delivered safely, but the ability of our organization to respond quickly to the changing circumstances added undue uncertainty, pressure and strain on our team.

Just as independence and oversight go hand in hand, our presentation here today to this special committee provides a necessary measure of transparency and accountability to the members of the assembly.

While Elections Nova Scotia is always ready to deliver a by-election, the change in legislation to a fixed election date will provide an opportunity to better plan and budget which will result in cost savings over the four-year cycle leading up to the July 2025 PGE.

The estimates I presented last year included funding to meet two readiness dates of September 2021 and April 1, 2022, COVID related costs, outside legal counsel, and pressures for one by-election. Your committee recommended our budget request without

alteration to Finance, Treasury and Policy Board. The election readiness funding that we received was approximately \$250k lower than requested and no funding was included for a by-election or outside legal counsel.

The report you have before you today, includes \$480k of additional funding needed to fulfill our mandate compared to the budget targets received to date. This includes funding for projects presented and approved by this committee in last year's budget for the e-voting mandate legislated in the *Elections Act* that wasn't proclaimed until May 2021. These projects were deferred because of the call in July 2021 of the PGE. It also includes funding for one by-election and outside legal counsel, plus the incremental funding required by law for registered party payments to be made as a result of the increase in votes cast in the August 17 election.

For transparency purposes, we have segregated the amounts included for each of these initiatives to ensure you are fully informed of precisely what we intend to spend these funds on.

To ensure complete transparency, should Finance Treasury and Policy Board significantly alter the amounts you recommend to them today, we would suggest that this committee reconvene to be apprised of the impact of those changes on our preparations. If that proves untenable, we commit to filing a report with each member outlining the same.

I respectfully request that you accept our budget as presented and recommend it, without alteration, to Finance, Treasury and Policy Board.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak today.

DR