

Elections Nova Scotia 2024–2025 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: Li Chao, Chief Financial Officer

January 24, 2024

Good afternoon and thank you for this opportunity to present our 2024-2025 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.

In the fall of 2021, the government introduced fixed date elections, and Elections Nova Scotia is planning for the first provincial general election on July 15, 2025 under this new legislation. Following the August 2021 provincial general election, Elections Nova Scotia has proposed changes to the *Elections Act* that impact both electoral finance and operations. As published in recent reports by our office, the latest timeline for introduction of these changes is in the spring 2024 sitting of the legislature. This will provide adequate time to incorporate all modifications in the training program and materials for returning office staff, official agents of parties, candidates and third parties.

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.

As outlined in our budget submission, an additional \$5.1M is required to fulfill our mandate compared to the budget targets received to date. This

includes \$1.6M election readiness funding to prepare the delivery of the 42nd Provincial General Election. \$3M for the introduction of digital voter registration on election day. It also includes funding for a full-time Outreach Coordinator position to support our inclusion, diversity, equity, and accessibility programming, one by-election, outside legal counsel, and incremental funding required by law for registered political party annual payments.

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

If Finance, Treasury and Policy Board significantly alters the amounts you recommend to them today, I commit to send a report to each member of this committee summarizing the changes made.

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.

Li Chao

Chief Financial Officer

Elections Nova Scotia