

Elections Nova Scotia 2023–2024 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 Electoral Officer

JANUARY 25, 2023

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

As an independent non-partisan agency, Elections Nova Scotia (ENS) 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.

ENS has undergone several changes in the last year, and I would like to thank my predecessor, Richard Temporale for his leadership through 3 general elections during his 10-year appointment in the role of Chief Electoral Officer.

I would also like to acknowledge that the budget preparation and program planning has been made easier since the introduction of fixed date election legislation in 2021. The four-year cycle that we plan for enables better scheduling for hiring of staff, training, equipment and materials procurement and rental of voting locations. The next general election is scheduled for July 2025, and the intense period of preparation and spending will take place in the 2024-2025 fiscal year.

In the last year, ENS has recommended legislative changes following the introduction of fixed date elections and the 2021 provincial general election. These proposed changes impact electoral finance and operations. The ideal timeline for introduction of these changes is in the fall 2023 sitting of the legislature in order to incorporate all modifications in the training materials for returning office staff and official agents of parties and candidates.

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.

The report you have before you today, includes \$728k of additional funding needed to fulfill our mandate compared to the budget targets received to date. This includes ongoing funding requirements for projects presented and approved by this committee in last year's budget for the e-voting mandate legislated in the *Elections Act*. Additional funding is also included for a

full-time Outreach Coordinator to support ENS's inclusion, diversity, equity, and accessibility programming. It also includes funding for one by-election, outside legal counsel, plus the incremental funding required by law for registered party annual payments.

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.

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.

DR