

## **Elections Nova Scotia 2021–2022 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 12, 2021

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 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. You need not look any further than the recent electoral experiences of our neighbours to the south for a stark reminder of just how important this independence can be.

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, when 3 provinces held elections during the COVID-19 pandemic and were able to fund without budgetary restrictions such things as the purchase of personal equipment required to protect their election workers, the training they needed to protect the in person voters and the additional communications plans they needed to inform voters of the safety measures they had employed to ensure their voting experience would be safe when they came to the polls.

Just as independence and oversight go hand in hand, transparency and accountability to the members of the assembly through this committee is why we are presenting to you today.

While Elections Nova Scotia is always ready to deliver a by-election, general election planning and budgeting must be targeted to a date in advance of when the next election is likely to be called to ensure we are ready. As a result of the funding received last year, we are on target to be election ready on April 1 of this year.

If the new Premier chooses not call the general election this spring, we will reset our next election readiness date to September 1 and use a portion of the funding we are requesting today to cover costs such as re-training of returning office staff and refreshing technology to

be used in the field. If an election is not called by then, a second election readiness date of April 1, 2022 will be set to repeat the same.

The estimates I presented last year included funding to meet a readiness date of April 1, 2021, 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 legal counsel.

The costs of two by-elections coupled with unanticipated COVID 19 spending pushed us over budget to the tune of \$975k.

The report you have before you today, includes \$1.2M funding for the two additional election readiness dates I mentioned above, funding for one by-election and outside legal counsel as in the past, plus the funding required to restore our service delivery budget to its historical levels.

For transparency purposes, we have segregated the amounts included for each of these initiatives for two reasons. The first is to ensure you are fully informed on precisely what we intend to spend these funds on. The second, is to ensure you know the amounts we intend to return to the general revenue fund, should the new Premier call an election in advance of our need to spend certain funds.

To ensure complete transparency, should Finance Treasury and Policy Board significantly alter the amounts you recommend 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 present 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.

Dorothy Rice  
Chief Financial Officer  
Elections Nova Scotia