

PEI Coalition for Women in Government

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Special Committee on Democratic Renewal
Legislative Assembly of Prince Edward Island
PO Box 2000
Charlottetown, PE
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Dear Members of the Special Committee on Democratic Renewal,

The PEI Coalition for Women in Government appreciates your work on democratic renewal, and the opportunity to present on the topics of electoral systems and election financing. Our discussion this week prompted us to consider sharing our recommendations from the 2009 report, "Whose Job is It Anyway?"

Parliaments across Canada, including that of PEI, were designed at a time when democratic process excluded the voices and experiences of women, when women didn't have the right to vote or be considered "persons" under the law. It is not surprising then that certain aspects of parliamentary institutions fail to meet the needs of women members. Modernizing the system with family-friendly updates can make parliaments more inclusive spaces not only for women, but also for men.

The topic of family-friendly parliaments has received increased attention at all levels of governments recently. At the federal level, the Procedures and House Affairs Committee is considering ways to make it easier for MPs to balance parliamentary responsibilities with duties in their ridings. At the provincial level, the government of Alberta's all-party members' services committee voted earlier this month to examine how to make the Alberta legislature more inclusive for parents and to ensure pregnancy and parental leave are listed as approved reasons for absences.

Our conversations with prospective and past women candidates over the years have indicated that one of the reasons women do not run for public office is the perceived lack of work/life balance for politicians. In 2009 the Coalition undertook a national research project, titled "Whose Job is it Anyway? The Life and Work of an MLA," that examined the work/life balance for MLAs across the country. In total, the Coalition presented 17 recommendations for government and political parties. Going forward, we would like the Special Committee on Democratic Renewal to consider the following recommendations we first made in 2009.

- We recommend that Government constitute the Special Committee on the role and responsibilities of the MLA, as proposed in the 2008 Speech from the Throne, invite and appoint participation from all four political parties, and task the Special Committee with the following;
 - explore ways to restore public trust and respect to the office of MLA;
 - explore ways to create reasonable public expectations regarding the role of the MLA;
 - explore ways to ensure that MLAs are fully removed from the business of finding jobs for individual Islanders;
 - develop a clearly defined MLA job description for modern times; and
 - explore ways to eliminate identifiable barriers connected to the role, work and expectations of PEI MLAs, to women entering Provincial politics

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- We recommend that Government create an Ombudsperson Office to provide information as well as direct assistance to Islanders in navigating government and community option for problem solving. We recommend that the Ombudsperson perform a role separate from the role of an MLA or government, at times advocating on behalf of a citizen. We recommend that this office be accessible beyond regular government hours.
- We recommend that Government provide support and funding for five staffed constituency offices, with one in each of Southern Kings, Eastern Kings, West Prince, East Prince and rural Queens, to be shared by MLAs and where they may conduct constituency communications, hold office hours, and receive constituency problem-solving support from trained staff.
- In order to support current and future MLAs traveling from outside Charlottetown, and those with young families, we recommend that Government eliminate the evening hours of the Legislature.
- To reduce travel time for MLAs representing rural ridings, we recommend that more Standing Committee Meetings be planned outside Charlottetown.
- We recommend that Government provide regularly accessible training for MLAs in chairing and facilitating meetings and time management.
- We recommend that Government provide a caregiver benefit to MLAs with child or elder caregiving responsibilities.
- We recommend that an Orientation for new MLAs, and ongoing and regularly accessible training for MLAs, include;
 - information about the Employee Assistance Program and other counseling and support available to MLAs; and
 - discussion and support regarding time management, including balancing work and personal time.
- We recommend that, during times when the House is in session and food is provided, healthy choices are available to MLAs and staff.

Having a greater diversity of voices and experience in government is vital to strengthening democracy. Introducing family-friendly policies and procedures into the legislature is one way to make the job of an MLA more sustainable and attractive to new, diverse candidates. The White Paper on Democratic Renewal provides an opportunity to examine ways to strengthen gender equity in our democratic process. PEI has an exciting opportunity to make bold changes that are inclusive and supportive to all MLAs.

Again, thank you for taking the time to review these additional recommendations. If you have any questions, or if you would like more information about the research and consultation that informed these recommendations, please feel free to contact me at (902) 218-2184 or peiwomeningovernment@gmail.com.

Sincerely,



Dawn Wilson

Executive Director

PEI Coalition for Women in Government