



Standing Committee on Public Accounts

Report 1—Annual and Financial Reports 2019-2020; Appropriation Bill 2020-2021 and Appropriation (Office of the Legislative Assembly) Bill 2020-2021

Speaker's Responses

Recommendations 24, 25, 26, 27, 28 and 29

Recommendation 24:

The Committee recommends that the Office of the Legislative Assembly increase staffing for the committee secretariat within Committee Support.

Recommendation 25:

The Committee recommends that the Office of the Legislative Assembly provide Committee Secretaries with additional administrative support for each of the committees that they work to.

Speaker's Response:

These recommendations are noted. The committee's report does not appear to set out any evidence on which these two recommendations are based. Nevertheless, the Assembly's Standing Committee on Administration and Procedure recently considered this issue, has resolved to conduct such a review which will be completed by August 2021. On Thursday 22 April 2021, I made a statement to the Assembly under Standing Order 246A about this review and it is clear to me that the review will enable these recommendations to be taken into account.

Recommendation 26:

The Committee recommends that the Office of the Legislative Assembly consider, in addition to a bullying and harassment policy, measures that can be taken so as to ensure the Legislative Assembly is a safe working environment.

Speaker's Response:

The recommendation is noted. I note the recommendation implies that the Legislative Assembly is not a safe working environment, which is not reflected in data and evidence. For a significant number of years, the Assembly has enjoyed being assigned the lowest possible workers' compensation premium rate, reflecting its relatively low rate of workplace injury. As will always arise, there have been some cases of minor incidents and injuries and work safety issues identified/ reported – but no cases of major illness or injury or significant work safety issues.

I also observe that directing this recommendation at the Office of the Legislative Assembly assumes that the Office has control over all work safety issues across the Assembly. It is worth noting that while it is the Office does have control of the building and building services – which makes it responsible for issues such as a heating, ventilation and cooling; cleaning; and security – many issues that contribute to a safe working environment across the Legislative Assembly are the responsibility of members and their staff.

The Assembly's Health and Safety Committee – which was reformed late in the last Assembly to include a larger number of work groups and to better reflect the statutory duties that members and the Clerk have for workplace safety – will continue the effective work it has done to consider work safety risks and to develop strategies, policies and measures to address those.

Recommendation 27:

The Committee recommends that the Office of the Legislative Assembly implement an anonymous reporting portal for Members of the Legislative Assembly and staff of OLA, Members, and the Executive, who wish to report bullying and harassment.

Speaker's Response:

The recommendation is noted. While it is recognised that an anonymous reporting portal may contribute to a greater willingness of individuals to report inappropriate behaviour, the investigation and resolution of such matters are very difficult to achieve if reporters remain anonymous. A better approach may be to encourage individuals to report and to identify themselves but for them to be assured they will receive appropriate support.

It must also be noted that, under current administrative arrangements – which are long standing and I expect will endure – the Office is not in a position to manage reporting of bullying and harassment involving ministers and their staff – unless those reports involved non-Executive members, their staff or Office staff.

Recommendation 28:

The Committee recommends that the Office of the Legislative Assembly consider implementing a data collection and reporting mechanism to document the occurrence of bullying and harassment in the ACT Legislative Assembly.

Speaker's Response:

The recommendation is partly accepted. The Office already collects data on any reports it receives of bullying and harassment but it will consider an appropriate reporting process. Just like the previous recommendation, the Office is not in a position to manage reporting of bullying and harassment involving ministers and their staff – unless those reports involved non-Executive members, their staff or Office staff.

Recommendation 29:

The Committee recommends that the Office of the Legislative Assembly finalise the Legislative Assembly Questions on Notice (QoN) database.

Speaker's Response:

The recommendation is accepted. The Office's schedule to finalise the database has been delayed slightly and it is expected to be finalised by mid-2021.



Joy Burch MLA
Speaker
April 2021