

**Pam Damoff, M.P.  
Oakville North-Burlington**



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### Forward:

Honourable Minister Maryam Monsef, Parliamentary Secretary Mark Holland and Staff at The Ministry of Democratic Institutions, thank you for receiving my report from our Electoral Reform Consultations held in September. In conjunction with my staff, I hosted a very well attended Town Hall, which was described as a diverse cross-section of the Oakville & Burlington communities. In an attempt to bring many voices to the table, I also hosted a smaller pre-consultation with representatives and members of the Disability Community on their specific needs and challenges with the voting process. Their insights and perspectives need to be considered while working through the complex task of electoral reform.

In this report you will find the detailed notes from our meeting, notes from the disabilities pre-consultation, media coverage from the event, email submissions that came after the event, and a paper from Josh Hunter, Counsel to the Constitutional Law Branch of the Ontario Ministry of the Attorney General. Mr. Hunter is a well established legal professional, who also happens to be a constituent of mine, so I ask that you accept his work with this report.

Thank you again for all the work you are doing, and continue to press on with this important work for Canada.

Sincerely,

Pam Damoff, Member of Parliament  
Oakville North-Burlington

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## **Oakville North-Burlington Electoral Reform Town Hall**

### **Briefing Notes/Minutes**

Electoral Reform Town Hall Moderated by MP Pam Damoff and Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Democratic Institutions - the Honourable Maryam Monsef -- MP Mark Holland.

Wednesday September 14, 2015. 7-9pm, Haber Centre, Burlington  
 Attended by approx. 80 people

Pam – introductions, bio of Mark Holland, speaks to the importance of elections in general and ensuring they are democratic, fair and accessible for and to all Canadians.

MH: Canada 150 offers us an opportunity to renew our commitment to democracy. Everyone has a voice. We have a moral and constitutional obligation to do so. This is the first time in Canadian history that a majority government gave up its majority on a committee. We are taking a very bipartisan approach to electoral reform.

By Dec 1 we plan to have the committee's recommendations prepared and be ready to table legislation in Spring 2017. Canada is 1 of only 3 OECD countries (Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development) left in the world that uses a first past the post electoral system. Canada, the US and the UK.

Basically there are 5 main families of electoral systems used by everyone.

1. **First Past the Post.** This means that in our 338 ridings, if you win your riding by one vote, you win. Period. Canada has used this system for 150 years.
2. **Alternate Vote/Ranked Ballot.** This means you can vote for multiple candidates by ranking your vote, most favoured candidate to least.
3. **Pure Proportional.** The percentage of the vote you get is how many seats your party gets.
4. **Mixed Member Proportional.** You can vote once locally and for the party separately. That means that you can vote for Pam in ONB but for the NDP party in Ottawa.
5. **Single Transferable Ballot or Vote.** This system puts proportionality down low and allows for multiple MPs per riding. For example, if you have 3 MPs in a riding, 2 may be allocated Liberal and the third Conservative. Voters cast their ballots for individuals rather than parties.

Everything is on the table during the ER process. Mandatory voting, electronic voting, etc.

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**Town Hall Discussion.** (Including first names of speakers)

Scott: First Past the Post makes people feel like their vote doesn't count. Greater degrees of collaboration between the parties in the HoC doesn't matter where a good idea comes from as long as it's a good idea.

Abraham: Worried about a proportional system with low thresholds. It gives us a weak government and allows extreme parties into the government. Parties that are fascists or racists and it's a detriment to the majority of society. The system we have now keeps dangerous fringe groups out. It prevents them from gaining power and getting a foothold. That has unintended consequences that can destroy Canada.

Ramiksha – Mandatory voting is important to have true representation. People should be required to vote.

Rebecca –Mandatory voting suggests a more participatory country, but a democracy at its core should be respected and people should have both the right TO vote and the right NOT to vote.

Tim Batke –Fair vote member tired of seeing governments run with 40% of the vote. That is not a majority. I would like to see this NOT go to another referendum. It will allow for dictatorships and the elite to get their way. True proportionalism is key. A true majority government federally should be key.

MH's responses to the former: One thing to consider is does the system encourage collaboration? WE must have very high thresholds. There is a big difference between extreme government and fringe. I am opposed to referendums in general as they are binary and get very low voter turnout. And money can affect the vote. We need to seek collaboration. The process must legitimize democracy.

Ruby: We vote then we expect our representatives to solve our problems. Some want to help us and some don't. There should be a performance approval of our MPs.

Mr. Khan: Some people can't vote due to disability or assignment. No one should be left behind. In Canada, too few people vote. We need to education everyone as to why voting is so important for every single Canadian to vote. It is the obligation of the Canadian government to ensure Canadians know why they should vote and how to vote. True democracy needs to be more than a 40 or 50% majority.

Dahlia – Youth are disengaged. If you want them to vote, speak their language and deliver your message through a vehicle they use and understand such as social media, text, apps. And make sure in doing so you can guarantee their security and confidentiality.

Inez – Mandatory voting is a symptom of something that is bigger. You can't force people to vote. Rather than make people vote, ask them WHY they don't vote. Engage them in school early, often and let them know their votes matters and WHY it matters. And how lucky they are to live in a country that even asks them to.

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Francoise – Mandatory voting cannot exist without civic education. Programs are weak or non-existent. People don't know how government actually works. Why do our grade 5 and 10 civics classes fail students? They teach the wrong information. They tell students that voters actually elect the prime minister. That isn't true. The majority party names its leader.

Sanad - "You taught me my opinions can be valued." Everyone in government needs to treat kids like adults. Talk to us straight up and engage us. To do that you have to care about what we have to say. Respect our voices and opinions. Pam has always done that. (ovation from crowd)

MH responds to the above: Responsibility by the government to ensure all people have access to the vote is absolute. Regarding mandatory voting, everyone should have the right NOT to vote. But that doesn't mean we need to accept apathy. We need to talk about why some people don't vote. Mandatory voting would force candidates to have real discussions with voters. To Sanad's point, I am so happy to hear him say that he felt heard. Because he felt his voice mattered, he cared. We need to give people the power that comes from being heard.

Serge: I like the proportional system of elections. In 2015 the Liberals got only 40% of the vote but ended up with 55 % of seats. It has to be more fair system for everyone.

Ed Domingo: proportional representation ensures fairness. Now the party chooses who gets a seat in Parliament – the party has the power to decide who gets a seat, not the voter. Some people are offered a seat in parliament by the winning party and they were never elected by us.

Fraser: Halton was originally the home to the Mississaugas of the New Credit First Nation. We need to engage aboriginal peoples in elections. We need to bring them into the fold and provide a segment of the Parliament for aboriginals.

Jason: Declining a vote is different from spoiling a vote. We should give people a chance to decline a ballot. Misinformation about the electoral system is the problem, not the system itself. The rhetoric during an election is ridiculous. Engage people outside of an election. Direct democracy is very important. If we have an ignorant electorate, that is the fault of everyone – schools, governments, individuals. We need a single transferable vote system.

Myriam: Youth and mandatory voting are important. Create a youth organization that goes out to engage kids and educate them and their parents. New comers to Canada look to their kids to educate them on Canada and its culture and citizens because the kids tend to assimilate first, learn the language first, learn the systems to fit in, are active on social and other media (tv, movies, magazines) and they bring their parents along with them. If we help immigrant youth to understand their rights and obligations and choices they have, they can talk to their parents about the various political parties and get them to vote. What we are taught in schools now is not right and not enough. We are not taught that a party can win with just 40%. We are taught that we elect a Prime Minister. We don't. We elect a party and party names the "prime" minister. I think some of the civics teachers don't fully understand how elections and government work. Apathetic kids come from apathetic teachers, parents, schools and systems that don't work hard enough to educate them properly.

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MH responses to the above: Electoral reform must preserve the importance of local representation. Too much centralization of power takes place. Any system we contemplate must consider regionality. We must do a better job of building a House of the Common People. It was designed to represent everyone. “We will restore the powers of Elections Canada.”

Andrea: I don’t like to hear “persons with disabilities.” They are just people who are entitled to a vote. Aiden (son) has autism and I had to be the one to inform him on how elections work, who the candidates are, what the parties stand for before his first election. The autism population does not get the grade 10 civics education that other students do. Why not? If they are eligible to vote, they better be educated in how and why to do so. Everything comes down to education and helping people understand the importance of voting and of civic responsibility. Not everyone can communicate the same way but everyone has an opinion.

Ibrahim: My right to vote is important. I am afraid of party dictatorship.

David: There is no objective way to add up individual votes into a single democratic vote. I am not a fan of electoral reform. It took 150 years to reach gender parity in Canada and electoral reform. First past the post should be dead and buried. Will the December deadline identify a new form of proportional representation? No more false majorities? Will the committee make its recommendations then?

Willy – Elections are too negative. We need civility. We need to create a sense of working together for the common good, that we are all in Canada together and we must come together. Ranked/Preferential Ballot seems to be the most civil and fair way to vote.

Terry: Canada has forged over 150 years one of the greatest democracies in the world. We need a very precise explanation as to why we need reform and on why our current system is not an abject failure. We are a great country and we are not considering a new way to ensure representation that is modernized.

Pam: We can disagree but we don’t need to be disagreeable, I agree with you Willy.

MH: What you need to consider is this: what system BEST represents the will of our population? The goal is every voice counts. How do we do that? Incremental improvements are what we are working towards. We want to build on a great democratic system. The committee has lots of process and compromise to go through but I believe we can do better than what we are doing today. All parties agree we don’t have the best electoral system for a truly democratic Canada. Continued consultations will go on until we find it.

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## **Persons with Disabilities Electoral Reform Consultation**

Corina: the issues matter to me and voting matters to me. Voter stations are hard to get to but the issues matter to me. Affordable housing, jobs, for people like me. Those matter.

MH: We are very committed to increasing accessibility of voting, making it easier to vote. We have travelled around the country listening to what people want in the system and how they want to access it so our goal is to break down the barriers for you wherever those exist. This is about a lot more than how votes are tabulated or how you interact with the process. There is a really important and meaningful conversation to have there, not just how you vote, but who votes. How can the system be fair and inclusive for everyone. We realize its not possible for some people to make it to the polling station. So how do we get those votes and ensure those votes count? We can perhaps consider rolling polling stations. Can we do electronic voting for people who need to vote from home? What do you want to see us do to improve the challenges you face?

Biggest challenges include getting people physically to a polling station and not just people who are unable to physically get there but even for those people who just don't have a ride or an accessible ride. Maybe they can't drive or maybe they need wheel trans and can't get one. We need to carefully educate our staff who work with these people. They need to know how to educate people on how to secure a ride to vote, that they can request a ride, on how to vote, explain the process and ensure they can make a clear choice. It is an intimidating process to vote when you don't fully understand it or aren't able to express yourself in the ways most people can. We need to educate them before the process to relieve that anxiety, explain the process, let them know what will happen, what the actualy polling booth will look like, how to actually make their vote, what a ballot looks like and what their choices are.

Language and communication are key. Meet people where they are. If seniors cannot see or hear well, how do we assist them in the process? If we introduce technology, that is great for people who understand it but intimidating for those who don't know how to use it. That discourages people from engaging in the process or wanting to vote at all.

MH - One of the problems is that Elections Canada removed the option for people to advocate for people and get them out to vote. Restoration and expansion of those power is critical, so that Elections Canada has the ability to promote what options are available to folks. Now there are mobile polls so you can have someone come to you and you can vote exactly where you are. Are we making that option known and available to people who need it? Do they know it exists and to ask for it? [no one in the room knew that option existed]. Yes, it does exist but it's poorly advertised and poorly resourced. It's held out as an option but nobody knows its there. I think elections are a very long period of time, enough time to promote mobile polling stations. Electronic voting must be supported. If someone simply has a physical disability who is familiar with technology and has access to computer and internet, that is great, but for someone who is older or physically unable to work the technology, that isn't an option. Then we need to worry about fraud so we would have to open up electronic voting to a small group. People with physical mobility issues, expats, solders living over seas, etc. We need to create as many options as possible but, more importantly, really advertise, support and communicate those options. That second piece falls to Elections Canada, but we need to restore their power to do that.

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Connie - If EC does get that ability, how can we spread the word through places like community living or seniors residences – not just through tv, radio, papers – not every has access to those things. Some people with autism have terrible challenges with polling stations – stimulation, noise, chaos, confusion. How can we meet people where they are. Someone with autism may have a hard time with all the commotion and will choose to avoid voting as it is out of their comfort zone.

People should indicate when they register to vote if they have some sort of challenge or disability, whether its accessibility, sight, hearing, intellectual challenges and indicate what type of help they need so we know ahead of time how to meet people where they are.

MH - We have 3 years before the next election. There is time to go to those places and talk to people and find out who needs what kind of help to vote. We need to tell people to just ask for an electronic vote. That will greatly increase inclusion. There are 3 groups of people we need to work toward including in future elections: people who have challenges voting, people who work abroad, and military men and women.

Local EC offices should reach out to people who they know will need extra help. Provide support to community groups who work with people who need help. In any democracy there has to be every effort made to ensure that any person who wants to vote and has any desire to vote is empowered to do so. Promotion of voting, getting young people on the voter's list, getting those with physical and intellectual challenges on the voting list. We have to empower EC to be able to do this.

Connie: the Government needs to partner with those at the local level who can carry out these things, this education, etc. In 15 years of working in my job, voting or our right to vote has never come up. Never. I don't know what that says, but thank you for doing this and for asking us how we feel about it. No one has ever asked before. You sought us out, thank you.

Korina- You make me feel as if my opinion matters and people with disabilities need to be heard. We can make a difference but we have to have a chance. This issue needs to be talked about SO much more. Some people I know don't even know they can vote. That they are allowed to vote. Government should make it a priority to include everyone. Just because we can't explain things the same way, we still have an opinion, a voice. And the laws still affect us that are voted on.

Connie - There are sometimes more important issues in the lives of people with disabilities and extra challenges – housing, employment, access to health care, transportation, support networks – so many things day to day that they need to deal with that other people don't have to worry as much about, that sometimes the idea of elections falls by the wayside. Its not critical to day to day living, but we need to remind ourselves and others that the way we vote directly affects funding, infrastructure, education, health care, affordable housing, jobs for the disabled....our vote can make our daily lives easier. That is part of the education side. Don't vote just because you can but because it affects your life. How we can make our government accountable to us. These issues matter most to us, so we should know how to vote

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for them. People with intellectual disabilities may need to be educated on just how voting affects all aspects of your life and how voting for a certain party can make your life better and focus on what matters to you. People need to know how that works. Community groups need tools to help make that happen. We want jobs, housing and we need to tell people voting is how you get these things. We teach people how to ride the bus, grocery shop, find work, socialize, bank, but not vote. We don't teach voting at all.

MH - Everything in the news is about what kind of ballot and process elections should be but you never hear anyone talk about inclusion or education. How we can get people who are marginalized in small groups represented in the general population.

Korina - I am happy that you are listening to us. No one has ever asked me before. Thank you.