

Good afternoon, Mr. Chair.

3:30

I am very pleased to have the chance to meet with you and Committee members once again to discuss the work of my Office. Given our past discussions, I know you are already familiar with our mandate, so I will not go into any detail in that regard, other than to say that my Office is the external and independent Office where public servants and members of the public can make disclosures of wrongdoing and where public servants can make complaints of reprisal linked to disclosures. The internal whistleblowing system, which is the other component of the regime, is overseen by Treasury Board, and I have no responsibility or direct role to play in regard to the internal system.

My Office has a single program with a budget of \$5.5 million, and 32 employees at this time.

I currently have sufficient financial resources to do my job, and I am anticipating a year in which expenditures will be at or near the full level of my budget.

Mr. Chair, I have spoken to you on several occasions about the importance of changing the culture in order to make whistleblowing an accepted and normalized part of the public service. The 16 recommendations for legislative change that I tabled in 2017 remain part of my effort to contribute to that change. While I understand that formal amendments were not on the legislative agenda following this Committee's review and formal report, I do remain hopeful that they will be made, if not now, then as soon as possible in the future. I remain of the strong view that the changes I proposed were reasonable, advisable and achievable.

Speaking of cultural change, a very important indication of the current state of the public service culture is the Public Service Employee Survey. The most recent survey results were published earlier this month. My reading of those results shows that concerns about values and ethics in the workplace, about confidence in speaking up, and about the mental health and wellness of the workplace remain largely unchanged from the previous Survey. In fact, these concerns have been reflected in some of the 16 case reports my Office has tabled in Parliament.

An immediate interest of mine, in my role as a Chief Executive, as well as in my role as Commissioner, was how the Survey reflected on the state of my own Office. While building a healthy environment is a permanent and ongoing challenge for all organizations, I was pleased to see very positive results for my organization. For example, we had a 92% response rate, compared to 58% in the public service overall. Further, 95% of respondents said they have confidence in senior management in my Office, 100% said they have support to balance work and personal lives, and 90% said they feel they are treated with respect.

One question is of particular concern to me. When asked, only 48% of public servants said that they felt they can initiate a formal recourse process, such as a grievance, complaint or appeal, without fear of reprisal. This clearly signals that significant cultural change has to happen. While my small Office is indeed part of that process of change, I must underscore that this requires effort and commitment at all levels in all organizations.

I should note, Mr. Chair, that in response to the same question, 88% of employees in my Office said they could initiate a recourse process without fear of reprisal. I believe that this signals to public servants that they can speak up and speak out to my Office, knowing that we value and support the act of doing so. As outreach and awareness remains a major challenge in my work, I am particularly pleased that the results send an encouraging and clear message to potential disclosers.

Before I close, Mr. Chair, I will share some information about our operations, including some of the challenges we face.

First, I am pleased to confirm that we met our internal service standards for timeliness in dealing with cases in 2017–18 and that, as of today, we are continuing to meet those standards. I will be providing final numbers in my Annual Report in the months to come.

Today, we have 16 active investigations and 38 files in analysis to determine whether they will become investigations. Very importantly, we settled three reprisal cases through conciliation so far this year. Conciliation represents, in my mind, particularly notable success, as the parties involved are able to move on with their careers and their lives.

We are seeing an increase in the number of disclosures received over the last two years. I believe this is attributable to several factors, including increased awareness of the regime following this Committee's review of our legislation, as well as the publication of our last case reports and our research paper that I shared with you last year. I believe this is also attributable to what I observe to be an increased consciousness and acceptance of coming forward because of larger social forces, such as the #MeToo movement.

The number of disclosures we receive is, in my view, a clear indication of success, regardless of their outcome, as it indicates people know about our Office and are confident in coming forward. I think that this underscores the ongoing need for education and awareness, and my Office continues to focus time and resources on doing so. Any and all further support in this regard, particularly from the Treasury Board, which is expressly responsible under my Act for education and awareness of the regime, is welcome. I fully understand that resources and time are always stretched, but I do wish to emphasize the need for more concerted efforts, while acknowledging with thanks the efforts that are already being made.

Mr. Chair, I trust this information is of use to Committee members. I appreciate this Committee's ongoing interest in the work of my Office. Thank you.