



November 28, 2018
For Immediate Release

Discipline Committee imposes sanctions against Ordinary Member for Hopedale

An ad hoc disciplinary committee of the Nunatsiavut Assembly has determined that the Ordinary Member for Hopedale, Rachael Saunders, had breached several sections of the Code of Conduct Act for elected officials. The committee had investigated two formal complaints regarding the conduct of Ms. Saunders.

The committee was chaired by the Speaker of the Nunatsiavut Assembly, Edward Blake-Rudkowski; Deputy Speaker Carlene Palliser, Ordinary Member for Rigolet; and AngajukKâk Barry Andersen of Makkovik.

The Code of Conduct Act is an Inuit Law that applies to elected officials, with the expectation that leaders and representatives of the Inuit will lead lives deserving of respect, give guidance, act wisely and fairly and be respectable and considerate of all people. The expectation is that elected officials will be leaders who will set a good example by their own behavior and will not engage in personal conduct that brings discredit to their offices.

If an individual feels that an elected official has breached the Code of Conduct he or she can submit a complaint to be dealt with by the Speaker of the Assembly. If the Speaker feels that the complaint has merit, he or she can establish an ad hoc Discipline Committee of the Assembly for an investigation and determination of the matter. If the Discipline Committee finds a member guilty of misconduct it has the authority to impose penalties.

Under the Act, the decision of the Discipline Committee is final, binding, and not subject to appeal or review.

The committee met, via tele-conference, on three separate occasions – November 19, 20, and 21 – to investigate the complaints. *Below are the details of each meeting, as well as the sanctions being imposed:*

Monday November 19

Interviews with the complainant, witnesses, and Rachel Saunders were conducted. The committee meeting concluded almost immediately after the last interview was conducted with instructions for members to reflect upon the testimony that had been heard.

Tuesday, November 20

The ad hoc committee reconvened to determine if the Code of Conduct had indeed been breached. There was unanimous consent that the Code of Conduct was breached. In addition to the interviews conducted the committee had been given screen shots of Facebook posts made by Rachel Saunders and those posts were used as evidence during deliberations.

Wednesday, November 21

The third day of deliberations revolved around the determination of an appropriate sanction, given the nature of the Code of Conduct breach. Committee members were reminded of the three possible outcomes: (1) reprimand; (2) suspension without pay; or (3) recommendation of removal from office.

FINDINGS OF THE AD HOC COMMITTEE

The ad hoc committee found that the following sections of the Code of Conduct were breached:

Section 2.2 - Every Elected Official shall act with integrity. Acting with integrity includes: (a) being honest; (b) being truthful...

The Facebook post put out by Ms. Saunders implied that an injustice had been perpetrated by the Hopedale Housing Committee (HHC) and that a members of her family was the victim of that injustice. Ms. Saunders post ignored the fact that the HHC had presented valid reasons for their decision and outlined policy which justified their conclusion and as such propagated a "half-truth".

Section 2.4 - Elected Officials must not engage in personal conduct that would tend to bring discredit to their offices. Avoiding discredit includes: (f) promoting and supporting ethical conduct by leadership, by example, and by following the Code of Conduct.

Ms. Saunders swore in the Assembly building and stomped out of a meeting that was in progress. Furthermore, she chose to air her frustrations on Facebook. None of these constitute behaviors which we expect and demand from our Elected Officials. Elected Officials must be beacons for ethical, and appropriate behavior at all times.

Section 2.6 - Elected Officials must treat colleagues, constituents, public servants, and members of the public with the courtesy and respect that is their due.

Ms. Saunders used the term "colonizers and oppressors" when referring to the HHC. The HHC board included elders and residential school survivors who were very understandably upset by this characterization.

SANCTIONS

Given the breaches of the Code of Conduct listed previously, the ad hoc committee is imposing the following sanctions:

- (1) One week suspension without pay commencing December 3, 2018;
- (2) Ms. Saunders will write a letter of apology to the Hopedale Housing Committee and directed to those who served on that committee at the time of the infraction;
- (3) Ms. Saunders will write a letter of apology directed to all members of the Nunatsiavut Assembly and read this letter at the next sitting of the Nunatsiavut Assembly;

- (4) Ms. Saunders will write a letter of apology to her constituents and post that letter on the Facebook page Hopedale News; and
- (5) Ms. Saunders will apologize to those Assembly staffers who were present when she swore out loud and acted out in the Assembly Building.

With the exception of the apology to the Assembly all other letters should be written by the end of November 2018.

Media Contact:

Bert Pomeroy
Director of Communications
Nunatsiavut Government
709-896-8582, 709-899-0049