



News Release

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MPPS GIVE SPENDING OVERSIGHT PROCESS MIXED REVIEWS: AUDITOR GENERAL

(TORONTO) A number of MPPs say the process by which they review annual ministry spending estimates is worthwhile because it lets them question ministers but is not that effective in allowing for meaningful scrutiny of government spending plans, Auditor General Jim McCarter says in his *2012 Annual Report*, released today.

“We asked nine current and three long-serving retired members of the Legislative Assembly whether the Standing Committee on Estimates process was merely a rubber stamp for the government’s spending plans,” McCarter said following the report’s release. “While the members said the hearings of the committee provide the only real chance for MPPs to directly question ministers outside of the Legislature’s question period, they acknowledged that the process could be improved.”

The provincial government spends about \$120 billion a year on public services, and it must seek approval of the Legislature for its spending plans. Ministry spending plans are summarized in a document called the Estimates, which represents the government’s formal request to the Legislature for spending approval. Ministers and senior staff from ministries appear before the Committee (made up of MPPs from the three parties) to answer questions, and the Committee then reports back to the Legislature.

Research by the Auditor General’s Office did not identify any Westminster-style parliaments that appear to have a truly effective estimates review process, and many of them wrestle with the same issues that MPPs raised. A 2005 International Monetary Fund study said that Westminster parliaments tend to have more limited budgetary oversight than jurisdictions like the United States. It ranked the parliaments of Canada, Australia, the United Kingdom and New Zealand as having the weakest budgetary oversight processes of any Western countries.

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