

## SUMMARY<sup>1</sup>

The Ethics Commissioner's Inquiry Report on Mr. François Bonnardel, House Leader of the Second Opposition Group and Member for Granby

September 27, 2018

### **CONTEXT**

On August 2, 2018, Mr. Claude Surprenant, Member for Groulx ("the Member"), filed an inquiry request with the Ethics Commissioner in which he claimed to have reasonable grounds to believe that Mr. François Bonnardel, House Leader of the Second Opposition Group and Member for Granby ("the House Leader"), had violated sections 15 and 16(1) of the *Code of ethics and conduct of the Members of the National Assembly* (CQLR, c. C-23.1) ("the Code").

He claimed that the House Leader had hired an intern at his riding office who was also a member of the executive of the Coalition Avenir Québec ("the CAQ") in Granby and the person in charge of the finances of the Commission de la Relève de la CAQ ("the CRCAQ"). The Member alleged that the House Leader had derived partisan advantage in hiring the intern, who simultaneously had responsibilities within some of the party's decision-making bodies.

### **FACTS**

The documents and testimonies received reveal that the intern served as a student staff member at the Granby riding office during the summers of 2016 and 2017 and had been involved with the CAQ's local action committee in the same riding since 2012. He had also held various offices or posts in the CRCAQ since 2015, including that of Vice-President and of person in charge of finances in parallel with his work as a student at the Granby office. According to the testimonies, no partisan work was performed by the intern during the hours he worked for the Granby riding office.

### **ANALYSIS OF THE FACTS AND APPLICABLE LEGISLATION**

For the purposes of the request received, the Commissioner had to determine whether, under section 15 of the Code, the House Leader had placed himself in a situation where his private interests might have impaired independence of judgment in carrying out the duties of office, and also whether, under section 16(1) of the Code, the House Leader had acted so as to further his private interests or to improperly further those of another person.

It is important to first clarify that holding a student staff member position in a riding office while simultaneously holding another office or post, whether partisan or not, does not in itself violate the *Rules of conduct applicable to the staff of Members and House officers of the National Assembly* (Office of the National Assembly, Decision 1690) ("the Rules"). The Rules do not contain provisions on incompatibility of posts or offices in the case of Members' staff.

---

1. The Ethics Commissioner's official position and conclusions are included in the inquiry report. If there are any differences between the summary and the report's content, the latter prevails.

To allege a possible violation of the Code in relation to this situation, the Member had to submit elements making it reasonable to believe that, for example, the House Leader had allowed his employee to work on CAQ local action committee or CRCAQ files during the hours he worked for the Granby riding office. However, this was not what was alleged in the case in point.

The Member did not submit elements in support of his inquiry request that substantiated the allegations made against the House Leader. In fact, the inquiry request established no links between the facts submitted and the alleged violations of sections 15 and 16(1) of the Code. In addition, when invited to provide further information in connection with his request, the Member was unable to clarify or substantiate his allegations regarding the alleged violations.

### **END OF PROCESS**

In light of the verification findings, the Commissioner concludes that the inquiry request filed by the Member on August 2, 2018 was unfounded, thereby terminating the inquiry process in accordance with section 95 of the Code.

Furthermore, the Commissioner notes that an inquiry request filed by a Member under section 91 must state the grounds making it reasonable to believe that another Member has committed a violation and be based on arguments that, at least to some degree, pertain to the alleged violations.