

## Resident questions MPP's stance on Anti-SLAPP legislation

On December 8, our current Newmarket-Aurora MPP Chris Ballard rose in the Provincial Legislature to deliver his inaugural speech.

In it, he stated:

To friends Ken Whitehurst and former Aurora mayor Phyllis Morris, who incubated and encouraged my political ambition to be a Town Councillor and, later, an MPP: Thank you.

Two days later, on December 10, MPP Ballard rose once again, to speak in support of an important bill, Bill 52: An Act to amend the Courts of Justice Act, the Libel and Slander Act and the Statutory Powers Procedure Act in order to protect expression on matters of public interest.

Otherwise known as the Anti-SLAPP legislation. (SLAPP: Strategic Litigation Against Public Participation)

Referring to Bill 52, MPP Ballard stated: But for those who don't have the backing of a large organization, it is extremely anti-democratic to be able to pour cold water on a citizen's right to talk and to raise important issues.

Shortly thereafter, MPP Sylvia Jones rose to offer her support of Bill 52, citing many examples of the damages a SLAPP action can have on the public and our democratic right to free speech.

At one point she stated:

I'm going to go to my next example. This offers perhaps the most startling but also clear case of a SLAPP example that I can discuss here today. In this case, the claimant was the mayor of an Ontario town - so, a politician - and the defendants were members of the town's news media. One of them was also a former town councillor. In essence, Speaker, one of the defendants was known for commenting on the town's municipal issues, not unusual in our local papers. He frequently wrote articles dealing with municipal issues as a recurring column that was published on the Internet on a local website focused on current events in the town. The other defendant was a former town councillor and was the website's moderator.

MPP Jones goes on in her statement, detailing the pertinent issues regarding the 2010 Morris lawsuit, to which she is referring.

The entire record, including both MPP Ballard's and MPP Jones' full statements, can be found at this Legislative Assembly of Ontario link: <http://tinyurl.com/ola-dec10>

So to the point of my letter:

Prior to, and while an Aurora Town Councillor, Chris Ballard made it very clear that he supported ex-mayor Morris in her ultimately failed lawsuit.

In fact, when the newly-elected 2010-2014 Aurora Town Council tabled a motion to cease Ms. Morris' access to taxpayer dollars funding her very anti-democratic SLAPP action, then-Councillor Ballard voted against this motion.

To this day, I believe he still maintains that Ms. Morris' actions were not a SLAPP, despite the Ontario court's ruling otherwise.

Now as an MPP, and within a 48-hour span, MPP Ballard praises the ex-mayor, then goes on to support stronger anti-SLAPP legislation, a bill moved by his current bosses.

I am not surprised at the

contradictory stance taken by our Newmarket-Aurora MPP. It is my personal opinion that he will continue to capitulate to whatever body is most strategically positioned to feed his political ambition.

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Aurora