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AUDITOR GENERAL--Review of Richmond MLA Michel Samson's Entitlements as Outside Member

Richmond MLA Michel Samson qualifies as an outside member of the House of Assembly and is entitled to claim related living and travel expenses, Auditor General Jacques Lapointe concludes in a special report released today, Aug. 2.

The issue of Mr. Samson's residency arose when he asked the Speaker of the House of Assembly to examine his eligibility for benefits as an outside member. The speaker concluded Mr. Samson is not eligible because he lives in Halifax. Subsequently, the speaker asked the auditor general to examine this further. The auditor general concluded that Mr. Samson lives in both Halifax and Arichat but nevertheless qualifies as an outside member.

Mr. Lapointe said the House of Assembly Act defines residency for the purpose of qualifying as an outside member within the meaning of the Elections Act. Under that act, an election officer determined, after the speaker's decision, that Mr. Samson is registered as a resident of Arichat for voting purposes. This means Mr. Samson is considered under the House of Assembly Act to reside in Arichat for purposes of eligibility as an outside member.

However, the auditor general said the regulations specify that only apartment rentals qualify for reimbursement. Since Mr. Samson rents a house, his housing expenses technically are not eligible for reimbursement.

Mr. Lapointe also questioned the appropriateness of rules with respect to per diem and constituency claims, noting it is not clear what expenses they are intended to cover.

"Legislation and regulations related to members' residency and constituency expenses lack clarity," Mr. Lapointe said. He recommended the House of Assembly Management Commission review allowances and benefits to members to service their constituencies and revise them to ensure fairness and clarity.

The 23-page report is available at www.oag-ns.ca.

FOR BROADCAST USE:

In a special report released today (August 2nd) Auditor General Jacques Lapointe says Richmond MLA Michel Samson is eligible to claim living and travel expenses as an outside member of the House of Assembly.

The report notes that while Mr. Samson divides his time between Halifax and Arichat, he qualifies as an outside member because the House of Assembly Act defines residency for this purpose within the meaning of the Elections Act. Since an election officer has determined that Mr. Samson is registered as a resident of Arichat for voting purposes, he is an outside member.

However, the auditor general concludes that Mr. Samson's housing expenses technically do not qualify for reimbursement because he rents a house rather than an apartment.

Mr. Lapointe says the House of Assembly Management Commission needs to review allowances and benefits to members to service their constituency and revise them to ensure fairness and clarity.

The 23-page special report is available on the auditor general's website.

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