Samara Centre for Democracy Advises on Artificial Intelligence and Canada's Democratic Institutions

On November 17th, 2026 our Director of Research Beatrice Wayne, provided the following statement before the Standing Committee on Procedures and House Affairs for its study on the current state of Artificial Intelligence and Canada's Democratic Institutions.

Thank you for having me here today.

My name is Beatrice Wayne, and I am the Director of Research and Policy at the Samara Centre for Democracy. We are Canada's leading non-partisan charity dedicated to strengthening Canadian democratic culture through research and public engagement.

I'm here with two recommendations for how we can best address the diverse and dramatic ways AI technologies are challenging our ability to maintain a trusted information ecosystem, a crucial building block for Canada's democratic institutions. These recommendations are drawn from the Samara Centre's Verified project which monitors online political conversation in Canada to identify democratic threats within our digital information environment. We are currently writing a peer-reviewed book based on this research.

My first recommendation is to enhance the digital media literacy of legislators. In over 160 interviews, through the Samara Centre's MP Exit Interview Project, we have heard former legislators speak about their desire for much stronger support and training in navigating our digital media ecosystem. The introduction of AI tools within government makes the necessity of robust digital media literacy an urgent matter. Legislators need informed, evidence-based support to understand not only how to use different AI tools, but, crucially, how to evaluate these tools, and to ask critical questions about them. This is vital because ultimately, it is elected officials who will be accountable for the decisions made by these AI models.

Members of Parliament, their staff, and public servants need to be equipped to capably answer questions about why certain AI models were used for analysis. They need to understand what data these models have been trained on, and how this data was acquired. Legislators do not need to be experts in the code, architecture or weights of AI models being used, but they need to know whether this information is publicly accessible. They should have a clear understanding of how bias is baked into training data and mitigation strategies for this bias.

It is crucially important for public trust, for example, to be able to answer why the government has chosen Copilot for its pilot project - that includes explaining how Microsoft has addressed

the issues with racial and gender bias demonstrated in recent research. It also means having a clear understanding of the implications of the CLOUD act for the security of Canadians' data, and the digital sovereignty and national security implications of incorporating Copilot into Canada's public service.

Our second recommendation is to establish a standing AI mini-public with rotating citizen membership. This would offer a non-partisan and meaningful approach to public participation in AI governance across Canada. This would demonstrate to the Canadian public that their perspective and input on the issue of AI governance is valued. It would create a channel for direct communication between policy makers and members of the public. We advise that it be structured as an independent, evidence-based standing body created by statute with a secretariat reporting to Parliament. It would offer several benefits: it insulates the institution from political winds, ensures democratic expertise exists within the general public at all times, and is constantly building up a cohort of citizen-experts that then return to the general public when they cycle out.

This body would build public trust, demystify a complex issue, and ensure that the public's concerns are heard – because AI's impact will be multifaceted. This would not replace legislators, but rather empower them to legislate and help them better represent their constituents. A standing body would ensure we have citizens ready to respond to any rapidly developing situation, permitting the government to be actively responsive to this emerging technology.

In addition, we strongly support the testimony presented by our colleagues about the need for platform accountability legislation that scopes in major AI platforms, and holds all major digital platforms accountable for their AI features.

Our recommendations are aimed at strengthening and evolving our democratic institutions from inside and out. And we would be pleased to offer our support for potential next steps as the Committee sees fit.

This is a critical moment for securing Canadian sovereignty and culture, and we can respond by enhancing our democratic capacity to meet the needs of this moment. Democracy, like Artificial Intelligence, is a technology that Canada should invest in.