

Jones calls for review of accommodation allowances

By Bill Rea

Changes are needed to the rules governing how MPPs are reimbursed for accommodation expenses they run into.

Dufferin-Caledon MPP Sylvia Jones has called for a meeting of the Board of Internal Economy (BOIE) to look into it.

Jones, Chair of the Progressive Conservative Caucus at Queen's Park, sent a letter to Speaker of the Legislature Dave Levac Friday requesting such a meeting.

Jones confirmed Monday her action was prompted by the issue involving Thornhill MPP Peter Shurman, who found himself in hot water last week after it was reported he had claimed more than \$21,000 in housing expenses last year for a Toronto apartment after moving to Niagara-on-the-Lake a couple of years ago.

Tory Leader Tim Hudak removed Shurman from his post as Finance Critic Sunday.

Taxpayers have expressed concern with the current system and know that it needs to be fixed immediately, Jones stated in her letter to the Speaker. Tim Hudak and the Ontario PC Caucus agree. We fully support the need to tighten the rules about MPPs housing allowances.

It is our duty to ensure that we protect limited taxpayer dollars, she added. It is time to take action and create a system that taxpayers want and deserve.

Jones reported Monday the most recent development on the issue was Premier Kathleen Wynne had issued a statement indicating support for changing the rules.

That is a step forward, she said.

Jones explained the way the rules are currently written, if an MPP's primary residence is at least 50 kilometres away from Queen's Park, that person is eligible to be reimbursed for rent of an apartment or hotel room. She added there are no references to where the Member's riding is located.

Jones said she lives almost 100 kilometres from Queen's Park. While she doesn't have a dwelling in the city, she sometimes takes a hotel room if the hours of work require it.

That's the nature of a minority government, she said. You have to be down here for votes.

She also said measuring the distance between Queen's Park and the boundaries of the riding might be a place to look when it comes to considering changes to the rules.

Jones also thought Hudak acted properly in the Shurman matter.

I think Tim, as the leader, acted quickly and properly, she remarked.