



House of Commons
CANADA

Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration

CIMM • NUMBER 016 • 2nd SESSION • 40th PARLIAMENT

EVIDENCE

Tuesday, May 12, 2009

—
Chair

Mr. David Tilson

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•(0905)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. David Tilson (Dufferin—Caledon, CPC)): I'm going to call the meeting to order, ladies and gentlemen.

This is the Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration, meeting 16, Tuesday, May 12, 2009. The orders of the day, pursuant to Standing Order 108(2), are for a study of ghost consultants and migrant workers.

We have, by way of video conference, the first set of witnesses, who are the Caregivers Support Services. Members of the committee, there are three members of this group: Pura Velasco, Magdalene Gordo, and Richelyn Tongson, who are before us today to give testimony. Also present with these members is the group's counsel, Charles Sinclair.

Mr. Sinclair, I want to make quite clear to you the process of standing committees in this place. That is, that you have the right to advise your clients, but you do not have the right to ask questions, answer questions, or indeed make statements. Your only right is to advise your clients, which you have the right to do.

Are you clear about that, Mr. Sinclair?

Mr. Charles Sinclair (Attorney, As an Individual): We understand that. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Sinclair.

It is also customary that we allow groups up to ten minutes to make an opening statement before members of the committee ask questions. You can ask questions on either of the topics that are before us, which are the subjects of ghost consultants and migrant workers.

Is there anyone there who wants to make an opening statement on behalf of the Caregivers Support Services?

Mr. Charles Sinclair: Mr. Chair, just so that we're clear, you said ten minutes. Is that a total of ten minutes for all three?

The Chair: That's up to ten minutes for all three, yes.

Mr. Charles Sinclair: Okay.

Mr. Chair, Ms. Velasco is going to start with a statement.

The Chair: Thank you very much. The clock is running.

Ms. Pura Velasco (Member, Caregivers Support Services): Good morning to the members of the standing committee on immigration and employment.

The time is very short, but we have submitted to you our brief in the previous days, so I'll maybe just focus on what we would like to tell you.

The Chair: I'm sorry to interrupt you. I don't think we have that brief, just so you're aware of that.

Ms. Pura Velasco: I submitted a brief.

Mr. Charles Sinclair: And when was that submitted?

Ms. Pura Velasco: Yesterday, and they said they would give it to the committee.

Mr. Charles Sinclair: And who did you give it to?

Ms. Pura Velasco: Denise....

Mr. Charles Sinclair: According to Ms. Velasco, it was given to the clerk's office.

The Chair: I'm sorry to interrupt you, but we do not have your brief. But you can proceed.

Ms. Pura Velasco: Okay.

In the interests of time, I will just focus on what we would like to inform you of.

Because of the exposé of the conditions and status of live-in caregivers in Toronto and in some other places, we would like to say to the committee that we think it is the responsibility of elected officials to level the unequal playing fields that exist between employers and workers, and that the inaction of both the federal and the provincial governments of all political parties further accentuates the power imbalance that imperils migrant workers into a position of vulnerability.

It is imperative that this committee hear this evidence and evidence from other grass-roots organizations, such as Justice for Migrant Workers, and from temporary foreign workers engaged in the industry.

We have the following demands that we would like you to act upon: first, that all temporary foreign workers should be given immediate permanent residency; second, that there should be an end to the mandatory live-in requirement; third, that there be an end to all recruitment and placement fees charged by agencies and recruiters, including employers, and that the federal government develop strategies to prevent third-party recruiters from charging migrant workers recruitment placement fees in other jurisdictions, including foreign countries.

Thank you.

●(0910)

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Charles Sinclair: Mr. Chair, Ms. Gordo is going to make a statement now.

The Chair: Thank you, sir.

Ms. Magdalene Gordo (Member, Caregivers Support Services): Good morning to everyone. My name is Magdalene Gordo. I am a caregiver under the federal live-in caregiver program. I am also a member of the Caregiver Support Services.

In January 2008 I met Lyda Alvarez. I asked her if she knew of a place or an agency. Then she told me about the Akemi Taniguchi agency. Lyda Alvarez accompanied me to the Akemi Taniguchi agency. After I had been interviewed by Akemi regarding my status in Canada and other pertinent information, she asked me whether I would like to go for a job interview with Ruby Dhalla in Mississauga, and I said yes.

On January 30, 2008, Akemi informed me through Lyda that I had a scheduled interview with Ruby Dhalla on February 1. Akemi called Lyda, because at the time I did not have a telephone yet. On February 1, Lyda accompanied me to the Dhalla residence. I thought she was just keeping me company, as I was not familiar with the area. It turned out that she was there to get her unpaid wages from when she quit.

When we reached the Dhalla residence, Tavinder Dhalla, the mother of Ruby, let us in and asked us to wait for Ruby Dhalla. When Ruby came down, she invited us to sit with her in the family room. Before dealing with me, Ruby had settled her under-the-table transaction with Lyda Alvarez. She paid Lyda her unpaid wages. Once their transaction was over, Ruby started to interview me. She asked me about personal information, contact information, and my immigration status in Canada, my arrival date, and the other pertinent information.

During that interview, Lyda and Ruby's uncle were also sitting in the family room. Tavinder, who let us inside the house, went upstairs as soon as Ruby came down to greet us.

At the interview, Ruby asked me whether I'm a caregiver. I told her that I am and that I was under the federal government live-in caregiver program. She asked me where I came from, to which I answered that I came from the Philippines, but I had applied to participate in the LCP in Taiwan, because I was working there at the time.

Ruby asked me more questions about myself, and then she started discussing with me the job description and the conditions to be made. At this point, Tavinder came to join us and started to list down my duties and responsibilities every day. The list included cooking, serving their meals, doing the laundry, vacuuming, cleaning the whole house from the second, first, and the basement floors, organizing the clothes, bed-making, and all the household chores. Those included cleaning all the washrooms, toilets, and baths every day and mopping up the hardwood floors on hands and knees.

After the enumeration and listing of the jobs with Ruby and her mother Tavinder, I asked Ruby if she could sponsor me, and Ruby said, "Absolutely, I am a member of Parliament and I could easily

apply for a work permit for you." Upon hearing her promise, I was excited, and very happy to have passed the interview. Ruby then asked me to come back on Sunday night, on February 3, 2008. She also asked me to start working on February 4, 2008.

On her way home, Lyda told me the reason she quit working for Ruby Dhalla. She told me that she was upset that Ruby Dhalla had wasted her time by not fulfilling her promise of applying for a labour market opening for Lyda.

On February 3, 2008, at 6 p.m., a friend of mine dropped me off at the Dhalla residence. I introduced my friend to Ruby, who was in front of the house with her relatives. She told me that she was happy I had come.

After she introduced me to her relatives, she took me to the kitchen and asked me to clean and organize the kitchen cabinets. "I love to see things in order and very clean", she said. And on my first night of work, she commanded me as to what I would be doing next and the job that I had to do next in the morning. She told me how to prepare breakfast and the rest of the jobs that I would have to do the next day. She wanted me to do good work.

The next night, Ruby celebrated her birthday, exclusively attended by her family and relatives. The birthday party ended at two o'clock the following morning.

The whole day was with Madame Tavinder. She told me that I should call her Madame Tavinder and that I should call Ruby and Neil "Doctor Ruby" and "Doctor Neil". Madame Tavinder showed me how to prepare breakfast for Dr. Neil and then oriented me about how the general cleaning of the house could be done. She instructed me that on Wednesday I would be cleaning Sonia and Sukhbir's basement apartment.

●(0915)

Wednesday came, Sonia picked me up in the morning, and instructed me how to clean her apartment that she shared with Sukhbir. She instructed me how to do the laundry and cook dinner. Madame Tavinder, at the end of the day, dropped me back at Dr. Ruby Dhalla's residence. That was the start of my cleaning Sonia's house every Wednesday. I felt like a vacuum cleaner being on loan to Sonia.

Dr. Ruby told me how much she appreciated my efforts in cleaning her cousin Sonia's apartment. She told me how pleased she was with my work performance. Ruby was home every Thursday and Friday until Monday. I asked her when she would file for a labour market opinion for me. She told me how she could start processing my LMO, when she could sense that I was hesitant to give her my passport.

Both Dr. Ruby and Madame Tavinder had asked for my passport several times, but I did not want to give it to them. I was convinced it was not right for them to ask for my personal documents.

On February 8, 2008, Madame Tavinder asked me to clean their chiropractic clinics, and I refused to do it. I told Madame Tavinder I would not clean the chiropractic clinics because I did not want to catch an illness from patients. I thought Drs. Ruby and Neil were medical doctors. I did not know they were chiropractors.

As the days went by, I felt uncomfortable and overworked, working from 7:30 a.m. until 11 p.m. doing various household chores, not caregiving jobs. I did not see any proof that she would fulfill her promise of sponsoring me. She did not fill out the advertisement required for filling in the LMO. She and her mother repeatedly insisted on asking for my passport.

There was one time when she angrily called me from her office in Mississauga, demanding that I should submit my passport. I told her I left it in my apartment. Ruby angrily shouted back with an order, "If you don't give your passport, then I will never sponsor you". From this day on, I became concerned and terribly worried about my situation working for Dr. Ruby Dhalla without the proper documentation. I was worried about wasting my time and not being able to fulfill the 24 months within 36 months.

Dr. Neil was never involved in interviewing me, orienting me with job responsibilities, nor supervising me. He never introduced himself as my employer. He did not discuss employment issues with me. Akemi also did not have any transaction with Dr. Neil in regard to my hiring. The only interaction with him I had was when he showed me how to shine several of his shoes and how to prepare his suits daily. The only thing I remember of Dr. Neil was when he looked at me in a dirty and insulting way one morning when I was cleaning several pairs of shoes.

One morning Madame Tavinder all of a sudden commanded me to quickly wash the exterior and vacuum the interior of Dr. Neil's car. When he saw me wiping the mirror of his car with a smooth cloth, he yelled at me, "No, no, no, no, don't you ever touch my mirror; you might scratch it badly. You're stupid. Do I still have to tell you this simple thing? You must go through car wash training first."

The Chair: Excuse me.

Mr. Sinclair, I'd like to interrupt for just a minute. We're well over ten minutes. Is it the intention that the other witness wishes to make an opening statement as well?

Mr. Charles Sinclair: It is, Mr. Chair. Perhaps I could ask Ms. Gordo to wrap her statement up and then Ms. Tongson to perhaps summarize her statement. I appreciate we're over time already.

The Chair: Do I have the committee's permission to allow these people to go on a little further?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: Okay. We're well over, but you carry on. Thank you.

● (0920)

Mr. Charles Sinclair: Please summarize, because we're over time already.

Ms. Magdalene Gordo: One Wednesday after I cleaned the house of Sonia and Sukhbir and then Sukhbir dropped me off at Ruby's house, it was already 12 o'clock in the morning, and Tavinder asked me to shovel the snow. I was forced, because she was really upset, because she told me that Ruby Dhalla was coming very soon. It was a snowstorm at the time and the flight was delayed. Tavinder told me that the man who used to do this was on a vacation and he was not in Toronto at the time.

What else? On February 21, I—

The Chair: We have a time problem, Madam. Could you conclude? If Ms. Tongson wishes to make a statement, you'll have to wind up. Members of the committee want to ask questions.

Ms. Magdalene Gordo: Okay.

On February 21, I quit. When I quit I asked Ruby Dhalla to give me my salary because I was not comfortable or happy there any more and she did not fulfill her promise to apply for the LMO for me and obtain a work permit for me. So I decided to quit. She started to yell at me and called me an opportunist. She started to say I'm stupid and am nothing here and she started to threaten me.

I said, "I just want to get my salary. I'm really not happy here." Then I left. But I left my luggage in her residence, telling her that I would come back to get my salary, if she was ready to give it to me. On March 1, on the third day, I came back. Richelyn opened the door and she gave me the luggage.

The Chair: Okay. I'm going to ask Ms. Tongson if she has a few brief comments to make, Mr. Sinclair, if you could emphasize that to her.

Mr. Charles Sinclair: Certainly, sir.

Ms. Richelyn Tongson (Member, Caregivers Support Services): Good morning to all of the members of the committee.

My name is Richelyn Tongson. I am 37 years old, married with four children. I arrived in Canada on October 9, 2007.

I started to work in Ruby Dhalla's residence on February 22, 2008. My brother accompanied me there in his car. Ms. Ruby Dhalla opened the door. She shook hands with my brother and me. "I am the nanny from Akemi's agency," I said. She introduced herself as MP for Brampton. My brother left her house.

Ruby Dhalla interviewed me in the livingroom. She asked me if I knew how to cook, and I said that I can follow recipes. She asked me if I am married and I said yes, with four kids. She asked me if I am hard-working and I said as long as I can do my duties. She asked me if I knew how to cook stir-fried noodles, and I said yes. Then, while she was lying on the couch in the living room, I took all the vegetables needed for stir-fried noodles. When I finished cooking, she took some noodles and liked them.

She talked to me, saying I would start at 7:30 a.m., but did not say what time I'd go to bed. The first trial she wanted me to do was clean the kitchen and organize the cupboards and do the laundry in the laundry room. She told me to put my things in the basement room.

Neil Dhalla came home with Sonia that night. She introduced me to her brother Neil and Sonia, saying that I was sweet and the stir-fry I made was tasty. Then Sonia asked me to take the stuff from the car into the house and put it into the basement. It was all detergent and paper towels.

As the test goes, Neil asked me to do some work for him, to shine his shoes. He showed me how. He said I had to wipe the shoes with a dry cloth first, then put the Kiwi on and brush it well until it looked shiny. He said he needs his shoes shined before he would go to work.

Then Ruby Dhalla asked me to also clean Sonia's house every Wednesday, once a week. "It is just a small basement," she said. I said, "It's okay."

Sonia ate dinner with Ruby and Neil that night, inside the house. The next day, Ruby showed me all over the house and told me everything must be organized. She asked if I could clean her washroom the way she wanted, and she liked how I did it. Then I started doing things in the kitchen. She asked me to cook for her.

The whole day Ruby was in the computer room and sometimes asked me to prepare food for her. She showed me how to make coffee the way she likes it. Dr. Neil Dhalla taught me how to make tea so I could give him tea when asked. I learned that all the dishes must be hand-washed, and I had to wipe the floor kneeling and using my hands. I had to dust all the furniture every day. All the washrooms had to be cleaned and sanitized, as Dr. Neil likes them to be.

Their mother wasn't home for a few days. In the days when the mother wasn't there, I was the one who served Ruby and Dr. Neil.

• (0925)

The Chair: I'm sorry, Ms. Tongson, we're going to have to end this. I'm going to ask you to pick out a couple of points. Members of the committee will want to be able to ask questions, and we're literally running out of time. Please conclude.

Thank you.

Ms. Richelyn Tongson: Okay. When their mother came back, it started that I had to follow everyone's orders about what to do. She was with me all the time in the house and drove me sometimes to the clinic at night after the clinic hours.

Dr. Ruby started asking me about my documents.

Mr. Charles Sinclair: Richelyn, if you could summarize, Mr. Chair wants—

The Chair: Okay. I'm sorry—

Mr. Charles Sinclair: Mr. Chair, I'm sorry. I'm asking her if she can possibly summarize. Obviously this is difficult for her.

Ms. Richelyn Tongson: Okay. Dr. Ruby said all the documents needed for my papers are birth certificate, marriage contract, and passport. I handed all my documents to her last March 15, I think in the morning before she goes somewhere else, to her office or somewhere. But she said I would receive my work permit in only one week's time.

The Chair: That's it. Thank you very much.

Ms. Richelyn Tongson: Thank you.

The Chair: Okay. Each caucus has seven minutes.

Mr. Bevilacqua.

Hon. Maurizio Bevilacqua (Vaughan, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I'd like to thank the witnesses for appearing in front of us.

We are indeed studying this important issue related to migrant workers. I do have some questions in order to better understand the circumstances surrounding the statements we have just heard.

The first question is to both Ms. Gordo and Ms. Tongson, just to establish a few things for the record.

Did anyone help either of you prepare for today's committee appearance?

Ms. Magdalene Gordo: Yes. Pura Velasco prepared for us.

Hon. Maurizio Bevilacqua: It's a simple question. Did anybody help you?

A voice: Pura Velasco.

Hon. Maurizio Bevilacqua: Pura Velasco. Okay.

Ms. Magdalene Gordo: Pura Velasco helped us.

Hon. Maurizio Bevilacqua: Have either of you had any contact with anyone from Minister Kenney's office or other federal officials over the last two or three weeks?

Ms. Magdalene Gordo: I never had any contact with a minister or anyone or with a politician. I never had any connection.

Hon. Maurizio Bevilacqua: The question was, have you had any contact with anyone from Minister Kenney's office or other federal officials over the last two or three weeks?

Ms. Magdalene Gordo: I personally never met and never had any contact with Minister Kenney. We don't have any contact with him.

Hon. Maurizio Bevilacqua: Does that apply to both of you?

Ms. Richelyn Tongson: No, I don't have any contact with Minister Kenney, only with Ms. Pura and Magdalene.

Hon. Maurizio Bevilacqua: Okay.

On April 26, 2009, Minister Kenney hosted a public forum about scams and dishonest immigration consultants at his regional office in Toronto. Did any of you attend this forum?

Ms. Magdalene Gordo: Unfortunately, I was not able to go there because I was not invited there.

Ms. Richelyn Tongson: We were working.

Ms. Magdalene Gordo: We don't have to go there—

A voice: [*Inaudible—Editor*]

• (0930)

Hon. Maurizio Bevilacqua: I'm not hearing this very clearly. I'm only hearing one person.

Is that correct, Mr. Chairman?

Voices: [*Inaudible—Editor*]

The Chair: Mr. Sinclair, I'm going to ask for your help. Only one person can speak at a time. We're having trouble hearing you.

Mr. Charles Sinclair: Certainly. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Ms. Tongson is going to answer the question.

Were you present at the April 26 meeting with the MP, Mr. Kenney?

Ms. Richelyn Tongson: No, I don't attend that meeting. I'm not there.

Mr. Charles Sinclair: Did the committee hear Ms. Gordo's answer to that question?

Hon. Maurizio Bevilacqua: Ms. Velasco, how long have you known Ms. Gordo and Ms. Tongson?

Ms. Pura Velasco: Ms. Gordo is a member of our Caregivers Support Services and Richelyn is a friend of Magdalene.

Hon. Maurizio Bevilacqua: My question was, how long have you known them?

Ms. Pura Velasco: How long have I known them? I've known Ms. Gordo for four months, but I never knew about Richelyn at all.

Hon. Maurizio Bevilacqua: You just met her?

Ms. Pura Velasco: No, I've not met Richelyn at all.

Hon. Maurizio Bevilacqua: Just now, you mean.

Ms. Pura Velasco: I only met her—

Hon. Maurizio Bevilacqua: Ms. Velasco, did you attend the April 25 public forum with Ministers Wynne and Fonseca, where Ms. Gordo and Ms. Tongson raised these complaints?

Ms. Pura Velasco: Just to correct what really happened, Magdalene Gordo was present, but Richelyn Tongson was never there.

Mr. Charles Sinclair: The question was, were you there?

Ms. Pura Velasco: I was there.

Hon. Maurizio Bevilacqua: You were there.

According to some media reports, Minister Kenney has offered each of you immunity for coming forward with this information. I quote: "Mr. Kenney's Citizenship and Immigration Department has told lawyers acting for the women that they will not be penalized for acting as whistleblowers or for providing information about offences." That's from *The Globe and Mail*, May 11, 2009.

This committee, I'm sure, would be very interested if you could share the details of this arrangement with us. When was this arrangement made?

Ms. Pura Velasco: There's no arrangement, as far as we know. From my end and from the other women, there has never been any arrangement that was made to us.

Hon. Maurizio Bevilacqua: Is this an inaccurate statement by *The Globe and Mail*? Is that what you're saying?

Ms. Pura Velasco: Yes, there was no arrangement.

Hon. Maurizio Bevilacqua: There was no arrangement, but you were at the meeting.

Ms. Pura Velasco: Yes, I was at the meeting—

Hon. Maurizio Bevilacqua: As well as Ms. Gordo?

Ms. Pura Velasco: Okay. I was at the meeting.... Ms. Gordo and I were at the Peter Fonseca meeting, and there was no arrangement.

Hon. Maurizio Bevilacqua: The meeting of the 26th is what we are talking about.

Ms. Pura Velasco: Okay. The meeting on the 26th was organized by the Filipino community with Jason Kenney's ministry, and there was no arrangement. He was even noncommittal to the recommendations that we presented.

Hon. Maurizio Bevilacqua: Okay, I have some more questions here.

As of today, has either of you filed an official complaint concerning your treatment by any member of the Dhalla family, or is either of you in the process of doing so?

Ms. Pura Velasco: Can I answer that question?

Hon. Maurizio Bevilacqua: I think you should all answer the question.

Ms. Magdalene Gordo: I called the nanny hotline.

Hon. Maurizio Bevilacqua: Pardon?

Mr. Charles Sinclair: She called the nanny hotline.

Hon. Maurizio Bevilacqua: Have you filed a complaint?

I'd like an answer from both of you, if it's possible.

Ms. Richelyn Tongson: Yes. We filed a complaint in the nanny hotline.

Hon. Maurizio Bevilacqua: What was the name of the agency you worked for?

Ms. Richelyn Tongson: It was Akemi's agency.

Hon. Maurizio Bevilacqua: This agency is run by Akemi Taniguchi, correct?

• (0935)

Ms. Richelyn Tongson: Right.

Hon. Maurizio Bevilacqua: Do you still work for her today?

Ms. Richelyn Tongson: No.

Hon. Maurizio Bevilacqua: Typically, were you paid by Ms. Taniguchi, or the members of the Dhalla family? Did you sign a contract with the agency, or with the Dhalla family?

Ms. Richelyn Tongson: No—

Ms. Magdalene Gordo: I signed no contract—

Hon. Maurizio Bevilacqua: No—

The Chair: I'm sorry, you're over.

Hon. Maurizio Bevilacqua: Well, we've got to get some answers here.

The Chair: Okay, we'll have the answer, but that's it for questions.

Mr. Charles Sinclair: I'm sorry, Mr. Bevilacqua, would you remind stating the question again? Perhaps we could have one question at a time.

Hon. Maurizio Bevilacqua: Typically, were you paid by Ms. Taniguchi or by members of the Dhalla family, and did you sign a contract with the agency, or with the Dhalla family?

Ms. Magdalene Gordo: I never signed a contract with the agency, neither with the Dhalla family.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Bevilacqua.

Monsieur St-Cyr is going to ask some questions. Before he does, I'd like to say a couple of things to your clients, Mr. Sinclair.

Contrary to what I said, I have now been informed that the clerk did receive your brief yesterday from Ms. Velasco at 2:14 p.m. The problem is that it's in translation; once translated, it will be circulated to the membership. We did get it, but we got it in just one of the two official languages.

Finally, I'm sorry I had to cut your clients off. We have a time problem here.

Mr. Sinclair, when your clients were making full statements, I cut them off. If you could make those statements available to the clerk, it would be appreciated. He will distribute that information to the members of the committee.

Go ahead, Mr. Sinclair.

Mr. Charles Sinclair: We can certainly do that, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Go ahead, Monsieur St-Cyr.

[Translation]

Mr. Thierry St-Cyr (Jeanne-Le Ber, BQ): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I wish to thank the witnesses for being here today.

I would first like to clarify one thing: who was the employer in this story? According to you, if I understand correctly, you had the hiring interview with Ms. Ruby Dhalla and basically you took orders from her. Is that right

[English]

Ms. Magdalene Gordo: Right.

[Translation]

Mr. Thierry St-Cyr: Therefore, it was clear to you that the employer was Ms. Ruby Dhalla. When you were asked what sort of work you did, who your employer was, for you, your employer was always Ms. Ruby Dhalla.

[English]

Ms. Magdalene Gordo: When I was interviewed by Ruby Dhalla in their house, she was always addressing me that, "I will sponsor you".

Neil Dhalla was never introduced to me as my employer. And Neil Dhalla never had a direct transaction with me or with Akemi, the agency. So in my mind, Ruby Dhalla was my employer because she was the one who interviewed me, and she was the one who hired me, and she was the one who supervised me, and I never had any conversation with Neil Dhalla.

Ms. Richelyn Tongson: It was April 14, 2008, when I asked Ruby Dhalla, "Who will sponsor me?" She said, "I will sponsor you", and she called Akemi Taniguchi. They did it together with Akemi Taniguchi on the phone line, and Ruby Dhalla was filling out the papers. She told me, "I have the full...." She was naming the sponsorship because he has lots of business. And she said to me, "You will be sponsored immediately. Is that right, sweetie? Now cheer up."

[Translation]

Mr. Thierry St-Cyr: Regarding pay, I have had some trouble keeping everything straight. So that I can finally understand

properly, were you paid, at least in part, for the work that was done? If so, what form of payment was used?

[English]

Ms. Magdalene Gordo: I quit on February 21. After quitting, she started to yell at me. I was asking Ruby Dhalla to please give me my salary, but she said, "I am not going to give you your salary now, because I have to talk to Akemi. Also, your salary is not enough to pay for the ticket of my mother, because my mother was already scheduled to go to Winnipeg."

I said, "What is the connection between my salary and the plane ticket of your mother? I worked hard for this money." She said, "I'm not going to give it to you." But after threatening.... I kept on trying to come back—two times—to get my salary, but she never gave it to me until the taxi driver helped me get it through another official called Khalid. Khalid intervened and called the office of Ruby Dhalla. After one month, on March 24, Tavinder met me at the MacDonald's at Square One and gave me \$400.

•(0940)

[Translation]

Mr. Thierry St-Cyr: I must interrupt you because we don't have much time. I simply want to know whether you received any pay at all. If so, how much did you receive and how was it paid to you? Was it by cheque, direct deposit, credit card or whatever?

[English]

Ms. Magdalene Gordo: I received \$400 in cash.

Ms. Richelyn Tongson: I was receiving money every 15th and 30th of the month from Madame Tavinder. I had to sign the receipt before she would give it to me.

[Translation]

Mr. Thierry St-Cyr: That's fine. So it was cash in both cases. In the second case, I didn't understand. In all, that came to more or less how much money?

[English]

Ms. Richelyn Tongson: On every 15th and 30th of the month, it was \$500. It was \$500 on every 15th and \$500 on the 30th.

[Translation]

Mr. Thierry St-Cyr: How long did that last?

[English]

Ms. Richelyn Tongson: I started February 22, and until March 1 it was \$215. And then March 1 to March 15, \$500; March 15 to March 30, \$500; and then April 1 to April 15, \$500; and then April 15 to May 1, \$500; May 1 to May 15, \$500; and then May 15 to May 30, \$500.

[Translation]

Mr. Thierry St-Cyr: You were there from mid-February to mid-May. Is that right?

[English]

Ms. Richelyn Tongson: I quit on May 30 at noon because Dr. Neil was yelling at me and he said he doesn't like me because I called the Intercede, and I called my brother to pick me up because I was thinking I wasn't going to stay there any more.

[Translation]

Mr. Thierry St-Cyr: If I do a quick calculation, we're talking about \$3,000 in total, in cash, for that period.

[English]

The Chair: That's the last question.

Ms. Richelyn Tongson: I did not calculate it, but maybe you are right. I did not calculate.

The Chair: Okay, thank you very much.

Ms. Mathysen is going to ask some questions.

Ms. Mathysen, you have seven minutes.

Ms. Irene Mathysen (London—Fanshawe, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I would like to say thank you to Ms. Gordo and Ms. Tongson for coming to the committee. I know that it can be very intimidating, and I admire your courage in coming before this committee.

I have some questions. I would like to start with Ms. Velasco.

What is the nature of your advocacy for live-in caregivers? What precisely is it that you do?

Ms. Pura Velasco: I came in as a live-in caregiver myself in the 1990s. What we do is basically provide support to caregivers who are dealing with immigration and employment concerns. We also advocate; for example, we talk to certain politicians about our issues because a lot of our caregivers have problems with health, and a lot of caregivers have problems with employment and immigration concerns.

• (0945)

Ms. Irene Mathysen: And is that the nature of your advocacy for Ms. Gordo and Ms. Tongson at this time?

Ms. Pura Velasco: Yes.

Ms. Irene Mathysen: Thank you.

I'd like to ask a question of both Ms. Tongson and Ms. Gordo. There has been a great deal of concern among parliamentarians, particularly at this committee, and at my committee, the committee on the status of women, in regard to how migrant workers and live-in caregivers are treated.

I wonder, what could the federal government do right now to protect you, to offer you a better circumstance?

Ms. Magdalene Gordo: I would pray and wish they could grant landed status for caregivers, because we are very vulnerable to abuse from employers.

Thank you.

Ms. Irene Mathysen: And Ms. Tongson.

Ms. Richelyn Tongson: I would suggest that please do the landed status so that there would be no employer who would harass us, threaten us, for we wish only for our immigration here in Canada.

Ms. Irene Mathysen: Thank you.

If there were a program to explain things to you, to provide you with information about your rights, would that be helpful as well? Should the government do that?

Ms. Pura Velasco: Can I answer that question?

Ms. Irene Mathysen: Yes, please.

Ms. Pura Velasco: I think providing education is good. Over the years, I've been a volunteer on this issue. Over the years we've discovered that despite the education the government provides to the live-in caregivers and other temporary foreign workers about their rights, a lot of caregivers are not able to assert their rights. For example, the mandatory live-in requirement of the live-in caregiver program provides employers with extra intimidation power. When you're talking about employment rights, just like what happened to these two women, they are not able to assert their rights inside the home, because it's the boss who says what they should do and what they can do. It's very difficult for them to say no to long working hours, difficult jobs to do, or even violations of the provisions of the live-in caregiver program. Because it's the boss who will say to do this or do that. The situation at the house is not equal. We think it is important that the caregiver should be given landed status so that the playing field in the house is equal. If they want to go and look for other employment, they can easily do that, because they have landed status. They don't have to fear being deported.

Ms. Irene Mathysen: Thank you.

Ms. Gordo and Ms. Tongson, did you feel intimidated? Did you feel afraid or insecure when you were working in the Dhalla household?

Ms. Magdalene Gordo: Yes, we did. I was mentally tortured and physically stressed.

Ms. Irene Mathysen: Could you explain how you felt physically stressed and mentally tortured?

Ms. Magdalene Gordo: We worked very early in the morning and we ended up working until eleven o'clock or midnight, working very long hours. You're being insulted. You can see the difference. They intimidate you. They show you that you're really a slave. They do not show you love or compassion.

Ms. Richelyn Tongson: Can I answer that?

• (0950)

Ms. Irene Mathysen: Yes, please.

Ms. Richelyn Tongson: Dr. Ruby Dhalla doesn't know how I really suffered. I kept on asking for my documents, every time she came home, every Thursday night, saying my time is at risk, because I need the sponsorship or else I will go back home. She's holding my documents. She doesn't know how I feel. When I call the Intercede I keep telling them I'm not.... I am working illegally. I don't know if it's right to tell you, or are you going to deport me right now, but I need all my documents, and please help me so that somebody will sponsor me.

I can assure you that I cannot go back home, because I have four kids to support. My husband is jobless. They need to go to school. My eldest is in high school. I don't need them to suffer. I don't want to go back home, because they will be living in poverty. I don't want to see them starving. I want to stay here. Even if they want me to work until eleven at night, I will do it, because for me my happiness is to send money back home. My husband is—

The Chair: That's it. I'm sorry.

Ms. Irene Mathysen: Can I say thank you?

The Chair: No.

We're going to suspend for a couple of minutes.

- _____ (Pause) _____
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The Chair: The meeting is continuing.

Ms. Wong, you have seven minutes.

Mrs. Alice Wong (Richmond, CPC): Good morning, everybody.

First of all, I would like to thank Ms. Gordo and Ms. Tongson for coming to this meeting. I appreciate your courage and I understand how much you have gone through. I also appreciate the challenges immigrant women can face in this country, or indeed in any country. We're here to listen, so don't feel scared. You'll have the freedom to speak the truth.

The first question is for the caregivers, for Ms. Gordo and Ms. Tongson, as well as for Ms. Velasco. Did you or anyone associated with this issue receive threats after this issue came to light?

Ms. Pura Velasco: I received harassing phone calls.

- (0955)

Mrs. Alice Wong: Can you repeat your answer? We didn't hear it very well. My question was whether you or anyone associated with this issue received threats after this issue came to light. Please repeat your answers. We didn't hear clearly.

Ms. Pura Velasco: I received harassing phone calls on Saturday afternoon, and they went on until about 8:45 in the evening. It was my daughter who answered the last call, because I was already getting upset. We reported it to the police.

Mrs. Alice Wong: What did they say?

Ms. Pura Velasco: The person said that they believed that I've been known to be doing good for caregivers; that my reputation would be in jeopardy if I went to Ottawa; that I should not believe the story of Richelyn and Magdalene Gordo, because they are lying; and that their lawyer has a lot of documents against them to prove that they are lying.

Mrs. Alice Wong: So they threatened you about coming to Ottawa. Am I right in saying that? Yes? Thank you.

What about Ms. Gordo and Ms. Tongson?

Ms. Magdalene Gordo: I received three phone calls from different women. The first caller asked me if I was going to Ottawa to testify, and I said that I had no comment. She kept on asking me whether she could give me an envelope before I went. She asked to meet me so she could give me an envelope. I said that I didn't want

to meet her, and that I had no comment. Then she said that if I went, I would be at risk. I hung up.

An hour later, another woman called me. I asked how they got my number. I asked for her name and she said "Jenny". The second caller asked me if I had ever had any direct contact with Mr. Jason Kenney, and I said that I didn't have any comment. She then asked for Richelyn's telephone number. I said that I couldn't give her any information. She asked if I was going to Ottawa to testify, and I said that I had no comment. Then she asked me if I could meet her, and she promised that it was safe. She said that she was going to give me some useful information, so that I could win this issue. She said it was against Ruby Dhalla. I said that I had no comment, and that I wasn't interested in meeting her. She was a stranger and I didn't want to meet her.

The third caller called two hours later. She asked me if I was going to Ottawa, and I said that I had no comment. She asked me if I had ever had direct contact with Jason Kenney or any politicians. I said that I had never had any connection with any politician, and that I had no other comment.

Mrs. Alice Wong: Thank you.

Ms. Richelyn Tongson: I don't have any....

Mrs. Alice Wong: Thank you.

Could you finish your statement? We were cut off just now because of time constraints, and I understand, Ms. Tongson, you did not finish your statement. Can you pick up where you stopped and finish your statement? I'll give you my time, 30 seconds.

- (1000)

Ms. Richelyn Tongson: When their mom came, that was the start; I had to follow mom's every order in what to do. She met me all the time in the house and dragged me to the clinic after clinic hours. I also was the first when their mom asked me to do it, because Dr. Neil doesn't want his car dirty. Dr. R. keeps on asking me about my documents. She said it's necessary for processing my papers. On March 15 I gave all my documents to Dr. Ruby Dhalla—passport, birth certificate, and marriage contract. That day I received salary from Tavinder. She said when she comes back she will give me a work permit, since she is working in Parliament and in immigration law. I waited for Dr. R. to come every Thursday night and began asking what happened to my documents. Sometimes she said they were in the immigration process. I kept asking every week. Sometimes she said she was tired, that she would give them my work permit when she came home.

On April 14 at noon, I was so sad and crying: "Dr. R., my status is at risk. What's happening?" So she dialed someone and I asked what was happening to my documents, and she answered she was already processing my papers by placing my name in the newspaper. I said to her that is not the right way of processing. I asked Dr. Ruby to talk to Akemi and ask how to do the paperwork, so she phoned Akemi and did the paperwork while Akemi was on the phone.

The Chair: Oh, come on.

Mr. Sinclair, I'm going to have to cut your client off. We're well over the time. We have another witness at 10 o'clock.

Mr. Sinclair, I'm going to ask you and your clients to sit there for one minute. I'm going to suspend the meeting and I will get back to you in one minute.

Thank you.

The meeting is suspended.

- _____ (Pause) _____
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- (1005)

The Chair: We're going to reconvene the meeting.

Mr. Sinclair, I want to thank you and your clients for coming.

Ladies, it's been a very difficult time for you, and on behalf of the committee I want to thank you. It is possible that the committee may want to see you again, but I do want to thank you for appearing this morning and giving your testimony to members of the committee. Thank you very much. But do keep in mind that we may call you back at a later date.

Mr. Sinclair, thank you very much.

Mr. Charles Sinclair: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Ms. Dhalla, welcome to the committee. Thank you very much. You're appearing before the committee on this topic.

Mr. Levitt, I'll give you the same comments that I made to the other witnesses. You're here to provide advice, if you wish, to Ms. Dhalla. You are not permitted to make a statement. You are not permitted to ask questions. You are not permitted to answer questions. But we do welcome you to the committee and you're quite free to advise your client at any time.

Ms. Dhalla, you have up to ten minutes, if you wish, to make an opening statement. Thank you very much for coming.

Ms. Ruby Dhalla (Brampton—Springdale, Lib.): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Chair and colleagues, thank you so much for accepting my request to come and speak to you this morning. The work this committee is undertaking is vital to the building of our nation, in which there is equality, fairness, and justice. In fact, it is fairness that brings me here before you today: fairness for those bringing forward the allegations; fairness for all foreign workers, who have a right to be welcomed and to be treated well in our country; and fairness for anyone who has been accused of wrongdoing, like me.

I'm here today to speak to you about an issue that has really taken on a life of its own, an issue that has been based on innuendo and allegations that are false and unsubstantiated. Politics have really been in large supply, and fairness has really been hard to find. Reporters have been reporting on this, journalists have been writing about it, and political parties have been using this issue to exploit it in their own sensational ways, for their own partisan purposes.

You can only imagine what it's like to have been the subject of these stories, to have your character and your conduct maligned without an opportunity to even have the chance to fairly defend your name. Can you imagine how it feels to have the very values and beliefs that have defined you as an individual, as a person—values

and beliefs that you have championed as a family—put into question?

But I'm here today, my colleagues, to put the record straight and to ensure that the facts are brought to light—not based on allegations, but based on facts and proof and evidence.

I, Ruby Dhalla, did not employ Magdalene Gordo or Richelyn Tongson. I, Ruby Dhalla, did not sponsor Magdalene or Richelyn. I did not pay the salaries of Magdalene or Richelyn. I was not the person to whom care was provided by Magdalene or Richelyn. And I had no involvement from an immigration or employment perspective.

I did have one involvement, though, and that was as a daughter, a daughter who made an initial phone call to an agency for her mother who required help. And that referral in itself was received from a very good friend. After that initial phone call, it was my mother and my brother who had contact with that agency.

I, like many others, am trying to wonder why these caregivers have come forward 15 months later, after leaving our home on what I thought were good terms. I don't know what their motive is, but I do want to tell all of you today that I have nothing to hide and I have done nothing wrong.

If you take a look at the allegations themselves, Ms. Gordo alleges that she was not paid for her work, but when you take a look at the evidence and the proof, it is Ms. Gordo herself who has signed handwritten receipts stating that she had received the funding, the payments. She also signed a receipt stating that nothing more was owed.

It is Ms. Gordo who says that she worked for three weeks. But again, when you take a look at the evidence, it is she who states that she only worked for a period of eleven days.

Out of those eleven days, she states that I took her passport for two weeks. But today she has stated that she never gave her passport. And let me tell you, my friends, out of the eleven days that Ms. Gordo worked for our home, I have every single boarding card to prove where I was on those particular dates; and out of the eleven, I was only home for three; and in those three days of being in the GTA itself, I was involved with my constituency and the community.

It is alleged that I have had regular contact with Ms. Gordo, but when you take a look at the proof and the evidence once again, and you take a look at all of the boarding cards that I have, I wasn't even physically in the GTA.

They both claim to have shovelled snow, but my mother has hired a snow shoveller for the past five years, and it is this snow shoveller who has given a written statement stating he has never come to the home to find the snow already shovelled.

They claim to have cleaned the clinics. My brother has a professional cleaning service that cleans the clinics on a daily basis, and has done so since the clinics were opened.

•(1010)

Ms. Tongson states that I took her passport, but she has signed documentation stating that it was my brother who took her passport for the purpose of doing her sponsorship. She has also signed a receipt acknowledging that it was my brother she returned that passport to. And the day the passport was returned I myself was on a flight en route from Ottawa to Toronto. Ms. Tongson dated the receipt.

In another effort to advance her claim—and I don't know if this has come out—it was Ms. Tongson who tried to impersonate me to HRSDC.

There is one final item I think is of incredible importance and people have been wondering about. We have taken a look at the stories, and it has been written in the stories that both Magdalene and Richelyn were here in Canada illegally. However, I do want to report to all of you today that the agency has confirmed that both Magdalene and Richelyn were in Canada legally.

After presenting this evidence, it is clear that I, Ruby Dhalla, am not the employer, I am not the sponsor. And to that end, to ensure my good name that I have worked incredibly hard for my whole life, I have personally asked the Ethics Commissioner to investigate this issue, and I will cooperate fully with the investigation.

I am the daughter of a loving and caring mother who was an immigrant to this country. And like these caregivers we are talking about today, my mom also came to Canada with a dream and a desire to make a difference. She, like many other new Canadians, left behind a good life and came with a hope for a better life and better future for her children. My mom came to Canada without a dollar, and she worked dollar by dollar to save and to build a good life for her family and for her children. She overcame the challenges that are faced by so many new Canadians: learning English, getting a job, and learning a new way of life. She struggled, she persevered, and she raised two kids on her own. I remember growing up and watching my mother make all the sacrifices for the well-being of my brother and me. She taught us the virtues of honesty, integrity, and respect.

My mom worked in families. She worked as a caregiver. She has worked as a child care worker, and she has given us opportunities, my brother and me, that we have been so incredibly blessed since. I guess it was in going to an inner-city neighbourhood that I learned that whether one is a CEO, a janitor, or a waiter, everyone deserves to be treated with respect and fairness.

I hear about some of the words that have been used to describe my family this week, and I wish those people could only know my life story. I have learned about valuing people not for who they are on the outside but who they are on the inside. And that is why these allegations that have come forward have gone against every grain of salt for which my family and I have worked for so many years. My mom worked in factories. She worked as a caregiver. She worked as a child care worker. If anyone knows the vulnerabilities that immigrant women face, that single immigrant women face, I know it, because I've lived it and I've experienced it.

You know people so often in this story have used the word “power” to describe those who are in politics and have described the

caregivers as “vulnerable”. But anyone who knows me knows that for me politics is not about power. It's about helping those very women who we saw giving testimony earlier on. It is about helping those women who are struggling to be heard, the voiceless and the powerless. To me, politics has been about their hopes and their dreams.

I want to tell all of you, my colleagues, as many of you know my journey has not been easy. And while all of us know that public life exposes us to a certain amount of openness, it is in events such as this that you experience the extent of it. To have your home, which is supposed to be your sanctuary, described in detail in public is a violation I cannot even put to you in words. To have your mother's health records discussed all over national television, to have your family's home address and phone number, your private sanctuary, flashed all over the world is an intrusion.

I never thought in my lifetime the day would come in Canadian politics when my own personal quest to break down barriers for women, young people, and immigrants would result in my own family—myself, my mother, and my brother—becoming victims.

•(1015)

All of us, as Canadians, and everyone who is watching today must never forget that politicians are people too. Politicians are human beings who have feelings and emotions. And politicians, from time to time, as human beings, make mistakes. I can tell you as a young woman that it is no small challenge to live in the public eye and to climb that steep hill that still stands for young people and for women in their political journey.

While the allegations made against me are false and unsubstantiated, I do believe there are specific reforms that can be made and must be made to ensure that the live-in caregiver program protects both caregivers and employers. And I want all of you to know that I am committed to working with this committee, to working with those women we just saw on TV, to working with advocacy groups and the Canadian Caregivers Association, to ensure that those reforms are implemented, to ensure that not only is there fairness for the caregivers but that there is also fairness for employers, that there is fairness for all. I so strongly believe that is the Canadian way.

In conclusion, anyone who has ever entered my home has always been treated with love, care, and respect. That is why this past week has been so difficult. But I am blessed to have so many constituents from Brampton—Springdale, friends, caucus colleagues, and Canadians, who have called me, who have e-mailed me and written to me. I want all of you to know that your words of support have encouraged me and have given me strength as we move forward to ensure that the facts, the truth, and the evidence come out.

As a member of Parliament, as a daughter, as a sister, and as a Canadian, I want to once again thank you for this opportunity to appear before you again. I would hope that by working together, with each and every Canadian, we will ensure there is fairness for all.

Thank you.

•(1020)

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Dhalla.

You referred to some documents. Did you wish to present those to the clerk at the conclusion of the meeting, perhaps?

Ms. Ruby Dhalla: Yes, I will.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We know the rules.

Ms. Mendes has seven minutes.

Mrs. Alexandra Mendes (Brossard—La Prairie, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you very much, Ms. Dhalla—Ruby. Thank you for sharing this story with us and for putting it in such a straightforward manner. I think it clarifies a lot of things.

To your knowledge, are you the subject of any formal complaint or investigation regarding these allegations?

Ms. Ruby Dhalla: No, I am not, aside from all of the innuendo and allegations that have been written in the newspapers.

Mrs. Alexandra Mendes: And to your knowledge, are any members of your family the subject of any formal complaint or investigation regarding these allegations?

Ms. Ruby Dhalla: No. Other than what's been written in the newspapers, there is nothing.

Mrs. Alexandra Mendes: Dr. Dhalla, did you ever sign a service contract of any kind with Ms. Taniguchi, or with either Ms. Gordo or Ms. Tongson?

Ms. Ruby Dhalla: No, I did not.

Mrs. Alexandra Mendes: Thank you.

Ms. Gordo claims you made an under-the-table payment to Lyda Alvarez on February 1, 2008. Can you share any details about this payment?

Ms. Ruby Dhalla: February 1 was a Friday. It was a constituency day. I would like to know what time she said that was made, because I was at my constituency appointments.

I saw the first caregiver on my way out. I had woken up and come downstairs. I never brought it with me, but my mom actually gave her a shawl as a going-away present. My mom gave her a shawl. I said goodbye to her. She asked if she could take a picture with me. I said that was fine. That picture was taken. Then I went upstairs, changed, and went straight to the office. I had a completely full day of appointments at the office, and I have documents to show that as well.

Mrs. Alexandra Mendes: Dr. Dhalla, did you hire either Ms. Gordo or Ms. Tongson? Was it you who hired them?

Ms. Ruby Dhalla: No, I did not hire them. I have not interviewed them, I have not employed them, and I have not sponsored them.

Mrs. Alexandra Mendes: Did you ever ask either Ms. Gordo or Ms. Tongson to shovel snow?

Ms. Ruby Dhalla: No. In the eleven days that the first caregiver worked, I was only home for a period of three days. And I have boarding cards, as I have said, to prove the fact that I wasn't even physically in the GTA.

When I am in the GTA, I have a very busy constituency office, which is my first priority. I am very busy in the community.

In terms of the third caregiver, who worked for, I believe, a period of three months, out of the three months, I was home for approximately ten days. Hence, the allegations that have been made against me personally have come as a very big shock, because I physically wasn't even in the city.

Mrs. Alexandra Mendes: Dr. Dhalla, did you ever insist that either Ms. Gordo or Ms. Tongson scrub the floors on their hands and knees?

Ms. Ruby Dhalla: No. To be honest, in my time that I am even at home I am always busy with constituency appointments. I usually leave my house around 8:30 or 9:00 in the morning and sometimes don't get back from events until 11 o'clock. On a weekend they were never there, but even on a weekend I do anywhere from 20 to 30 events.

Mrs. Alexandra Mendes: Did you ever ask Ms. Gordo or Ms. Tongson to shampoo rugs?

Ms. Ruby Dhalla: No, I have not done that. The whole main floor of our home is actually all hardwood floors.

Mrs. Alexandra Mendes: It was alleged by both Ms. Gordo and Ms. Tongson that you asked them to clean your cousin's apartment. Can you confirm or deny that?

Ms. Ruby Dhalla: I'm a little bit surprised. I think when I was watching the testimony earlier they were saying that my cousin had cooked dinner at her apartment for both myself and the caregiver. Unfortunately, with my busy life I haven't even been to my cousin's apartment, ever in my life.

Mrs. Alexandra Mendes: Dr. Dhalla, did you ever ask either Ms. Gordo or Ms. Tongson to wash cars owned by your family?

Ms. Ruby Dhalla: No. The cars and vehicles that we have are actually washed at car washes. Once again, I have not done that. I had very limited interaction with the caregivers.

•(1025)

Mrs. Alexandra Mendes: Did you ever ask either Ms. Gordo or Ms. Tongson to clean your cousin Sonia's apartment?

Ms. Ruby Dhalla: No.

Mrs. Alexandra Mendes: Did you ever ask either Ms. Gordo or Ms. Tongson to surrender their passports or other documentation to you?

Ms. Ruby Dhalla: No. I'm getting a little bit confused as to the stories. When the allegations first came out and were brought forward to me by the *Toronto Star* reporter, the first set of questions I believe said that Ms. Gordo had claimed that I had held her passport for two weeks. Today in the testimony that was provided under oath by Ms. Gordo, she states that she never gave the passports at all. So I don't know which version is correct, whether she's stating or making the allegation that the passports were held for two weeks or whether she's saying I never took them.

The fact of the matter is, in the eleven days of Ms. Gordo's employment I was only physically in the GTA for three of those days.

Mrs. Alexandra Mendes: Thank you.

So there was no other documentation at all that was given to you?

Ms. Ruby Dhalla: Nothing.

The Chair: Ms. Minna.

Hon. Maria Minna (Beaches—East York, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Good morning, Ms. Dhalla. It's good to see you.

You said something in your testimony that caught my attention. You said that Ms. Tongson tried to impersonate you at HRSDC. Could you elaborate on that, please?

Ms. Ruby Dhalla: The incident that happened in regard to that is I was actually in Ottawa that day, I believe, and nobody was home. Ms. Tongson received a phone call at home, picked up the phone. About an hour later my brother received a phone call, because he was the employer. Ms. Mendes was asking who was the employer, and when you take a look at the official documents my name is nowhere to be found; it is Neil Dhalla's. Neil Dhalla received a phone call from HRSDC asking him if he only had one sister. "Yes, I do", he said. The person on the other end of the line I believe said something along the lines of "Is that Ruby Dhalla?" He said, "Yes, it is." She said, "Oh, I thought so, because someone with a Filipino accent picked up the phone when we called your home line and claimed to be your sister."

I believe that information was documented by HRSDC. My brother is in the process of receiving those documents. I was hoping to have that before committee today, but we have not received them from HRSDC as of yet. As soon as those documents are received, I hope they will identify that the impersonation was done, and I can forward that to all committee members.

Hon. Maria Minna: I want to go back to another two things very quickly.

It's clear that you said Ms. Gordo did not give you any documents. Ms. Tongson claimed that on March 15 she gave all documents to you, Ruby Dhalla, to hold and that you held them for a couple of weeks. Could you clarify that with respect to Ms. Tongson?

That's one question. I'll just give you two, because I seem to be running out of time for this round.

The Chair: You have 30 seconds to answer it.

Hon. Maria Minna: Never mind; please answer the question and I'll come back to you later.

Ms. Ruby Dhalla: Ms. Gordo at first said that the passport was held for two weeks, then again today—

Hon. Maria Minna: I'm sorry, I'm asking about Ms. Tongson.

Ms. Ruby Dhalla: Yes, but the testimony of Ms. Gordo switched today, and she's saying that she never gave the passports. Ms. Tongson, who states that the passports were given to me, actually signed documentation, which I will provide proof of to the committee. It states, if I can just read it,

I, Richelyn Tongson, am working...at 1078 Haydon Bridge Court... I gave...my papers and passport to Dr. Neil Dhalla....

Hon. Maria Minna: When was that signed? Could you give us the date?

Ms. Ruby Dhalla: No, but there is a signed document when she received them:

I received my passport and all my papers back on May 29 at 7:20 p.m. from Dr. Neil Dhalla.

I don't know why there was confusion going on in regard to the testimony and the allegations that are being made by the caregivers.

The Chair: Thank you, Dr. Dhalla.

Monsieur St-Cyr.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Thierry St-Cyr: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you, Ms. Dhalla, for being here today.

If I understand correctly, you say that you were not the direct employer of these people. Still, you are obviously aware of what is going on. You documented evidence which in your opinion confirms what you are claiming. You so admit that this was taking place in your home. Therefore, I imagine that, as a good responsible person, you were no doubt at least somewhat aware of what was going on in your home.

[*English*]

Ms. Ruby Dhalla: To be honest with you, I lead a very busy lifestyle. Many of my friends and family members who know me.... I have not even gone to my cousin's house, and she's owned that place for quite a while. My interaction with them was very limited.

To be honest, my mom is usually home by herself. In the limited interaction that I did have with these women, my mom would lie on one couch and watch TV, and the caregiver would be lying on the couch beside her also watching TV. I saw many times in my home, in the limited interaction that I had.... Usually it's the caregiver who takes care of the person who needs the help, but my mom would actually be cooking her dinner. My mom would actually be making food for her.

In terms of how they were treated, these allegations have come as a shock, because they were treated with love, compassion, care, and respect. Anyone who has ever gone into my home can vouch for that.

• (1030)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Thierry St-Cyr: I know that you have a busy life. You realize of course that this is the case of the 12 members sitting around this table. You talk about your sanctuary, your house; so you must be somewhat aware of what is happening.

[*English*]

Ms. Ruby Dhalla: They were treated, from what I saw in a limited interaction, with love, care, and respect. I was not the employer, and I was not the sponsor, sir.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Thierry St-Cyr: The people who have testified tell us they were paid cash for the services they provided. Is that right?

[*English*]

Ms. Ruby Dhalla: Yes.

[Translation]

Mr. Thierry St-Cyr: We were told about amounts of over \$3,500 in some cases. What led you, you or your brother, the employer, whoever, to pay workers cash?

[English]

Ms. Ruby Dhalla: I wasn't the employer or sponsor. When you take a look at all of the receipts and the documentation as well, the payments were made by my mother. I can tell you, because I inquired further, why that was done. The caregivers did not want cheques, as they did not have bank accounts. I heard the question of Ms. Gordo, who apparently was paid after she had left. The reason she was paid after she had left and not on that day is that she demanded cash, and my mom didn't have the cash on her. My mom said she would pay them by cheque, but these women refused to take any type of cheque payment.

[Translation]

Mr. Thierry St-Cyr: You state therefore that you paid them cash at their request. That didn't sound an alarm for you or for anyone else in your family? It wasn't a problem that workers were demanding to be paid cash?

[English]

Ms. Ruby Dhalla: I think we have to go back to my original statement, from when I first spoke. The fact and the reality of the matter is that I was not their employer, and I was not their sponsor. I was not involved in giving them any payments. When you take a look at all of the documented receipts that we have, which we can provide to the committee, every single documented receipt has my mother's handwriting, and it clearly states that the payments were made by Mrs. Tavinder Dhalla, and they have been signed by the caregivers themselves.

[Translation]

Mr. Thierry St-Cyr: That's fine.

In your statement, you talked about the importance of improving our laws and changing our policies so as to protect such people better. One of the proposals on which the committee gave an opinion and which it has often heard during consultations was aimed at enabling people who had been swindled by recruitment agencies charging illegal fees to be reimbursed. It has often been proposed that people who have had to pay recruitment fees to agencies—which are often abroad and thus difficult to monitor—be reimbursed first by the employer, who is the closest person, and then that the employer seek reimbursement from the agency he or she has dealt with. This would improve the chances of someone who has been swindled being reimbursed. Would you agree on such a measure?

[English]

Ms. Ruby Dhalla: I think there needs to be a number of reforms. Unfortunately—

[Translation]

Mr. Thierry St-Cyr: But do you agree on this specific measure?

[English]

Ms. Ruby Dhalla: I think it's something that needs to be explored. I would have to examine further details for it. But for myself, before this issue, I had received a number of recommendations from caregivers' associations themselves and advocates to bring

it forward to this particular committee and to our Liberal women's caucus, and I hope to do that.

[Translation]

Mr. Thierry St-Cyr: When an employer deals with an agency, don't you think that he or she should share the risk, assume responsibility? If this agency commits illegal acts, shouldn't the employer who made the conscious choice to deal with the agency also be held responsible? People who come from the other end of the world and who have dealt with agencies that may not even be based in Canada have no recourse if they've been swindled in their country of origin. If the local employer shared responsibility, people would have some recourse.

Don't you think it's a good idea?

• (1035)

[English]

Ms. Ruby Dhalla: I think it is very important to have regulations and measures in place that are going to protect, first and foremost, the worker and also the agency, but at the same time the employer. Because of the type of political scenario we're in, and this story has turned into a bit of a sensational story, all based on allegations, I have had so many employers call me, e-mail me, and say they are also victims in this. I think there's a great window. Aside from the fact that this case has been sensationalized, you also need to listen to the other hundreds of complaints that have come forward to try to come up with a system that's going to be effective and provide fairness.

[Translation]

Mr. Thierry St-Cyr: Still, it's...

May I have five seconds more?

[English]

The Chair: No, Monsieur St-Cyr.

Before we proceed with Ms. Mathysen, Dr. Dhalla, you referred to notes when you were making your opening statement. Could you make that written statement available to the clerk?

Ms. Ruby Dhalla: I definitely will make all the documents available, Chair.

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms. Mathysen, you have seven minutes.

Ms. Irene Mathysen: Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you, Ms. Dhalla.

You made reference to allegations and innuendo, political and media motivations, and I'm wondering what exactly you are saying. What exactly are you alleging in regard to this theory that there are motivations beyond what perhaps are legitimate?

Ms. Ruby Dhalla: Thank you for asking me that question.

The reason this was so difficult for myself and my family, and hurtful, is because it goes against the grain of everything I have championed as an individual.

Usually, when employees and employers, like all human beings, have any issues, they're either discussed at the particular time or immediately after the employment you will get feedback that this person was upset, or they'll contact you, or some sort of complaint will be made.

In this particular case, all three caregivers 15 months later have come forward with identical allegations, and the dates that these allegations are being made are dates personally against myself. There are times and dates mentioned when I wasn't even physically in the city. We all know that the meeting took place on April 25 between Minister Fonseca and Minister Wynne. There was not only this case, but there were 25 other cases that were discussed. On the 26th, a meeting took place with Minister Jason Kenney. I don't know what the dynamics of that meeting were. I don't know who was present at that meeting. But I do know that I saw Mr. Kenney on the 26th, because we actually had a Vaisaiki parade and he was accompanied by my Conservative opponent. He was also accompanied by his staff members. So I don't know who participated in the subsequent meetings afterwards.

One does not know who has been in contact with whom. When we take a look at Minister Kenney's statements that took place on *Question Period* on CTV and were subsequently documented by media reports, in particular in *The Globe and Mail*, it states very clearly that the department officials have promised these three women, or the two women—I don't know how many—that the time spent at the Dhalla residence will be counted toward their permanent residency.

Today, when the question was asked to the women, have you ever met with Minister Kenney or with any other department officials, they deny meeting with any other department officials. So I don't know why Mr. Kenney, as the minister—

Mr. Rick Dykstra (St. Catharines, CPC): Point of order.

If you're going to make statements, you have to make sure they're true, Ruby.

Ms. Ruby Dhalla: I'm guessing. She asked me for my opinion. I'm just giving my opinion.

The Chair: That's not a point of order.

Carry on, Dr. Dhalla.

Ms. Ruby Dhalla: Thank you.

So I don't know. Minister Kenny is stating, on the one hand, that the department officials have met with them and have given them assurances of permanent residency, and the women are saying no one has met with them. As an individual, I just very sincerely hope—and I don't know the facts, and I don't know for sure—that my name and my family's name is not being used in any way, shape, or form to gain permanent residency into Canada. As members of Parliament, we all want to help Canadians, we want to help constituents, but I think all of us would feel as I do, as a victim, if we were being exploited.

• (1040)

Ms. Irene Mathysen: Thank you.

If an employer is found to have abused a caregiver, broken the law, transgressed the rights of that individual, there is provision for a

jail term or fine, or both. Should these employers be prosecuted to the full extent of the law?

Ms. Ruby Dhalla: I think it is a responsibility of every Canadian citizen, regardless of who they are, to abide by the law.

Ms. Irene Mathysen: Should they be prosecuted, then?

Ms. Ruby Dhalla: They should go through due process, and the outcomes of that due process, either through legal proceedings or whatever the due process is, should definitely be respected, yes.

Ms. Irene Mathysen: I notice you made reference to documents. You had a statement, and I believe it was a statement that you said Ms. Tongson signed. Did she write that document, or simply sign that?

Ms. Ruby Dhalla: She signed that document.

Ms. Irene Mathysen: So who wrote it?

Ms. Ruby Dhalla: My mother.

Ms. Irene Mathysen: Is this usual practice? Why would you have this kind of documentation?

Ms. Ruby Dhalla: Anyone who knows my mother knows she's very meticulous with her affairs. She's very street-smart, and she's been through a lot in her life. Anyone who ever comes to our home receives complete written documentation of any types of transactions that are taking place. I can say, thankful for my mother's due diligence and organization, that these documents proving Ms. Tongson gave the passport to my brother, received it back from my brother, were kept.

Ms. Irene Mathysen: I wonder why you sent your file of this situation to the Ethics Commissioner.

Ms. Ruby Dhalla: I have sent it to the Ethics Commissioner, Irene, because I really believe in transparency. I believe in accountability. I can tell you with everything in me, the women who spoke today, these are the same women I have been trying to help.

When you take a look at the stats of the number of women who are in Parliament—we're at 22%—and you take a look at the number of ethnic women and then you break that down into young women, we don't have very many, and there's a reason for that.

I've championed initiatives in my own riding. I've created organizations to empower women to talk about domestic abuse. I've created a Brampton—Springdale Youth Advisory Council to empower youth, to give them a voice.

It is these women who I am trying to help, and have spent my whole career and sacrificed my life for. That is why, Irene, in closing, I have sent this to the Ethics Commissioner to prove, to ensure that for the sake of the truth that I, my office, my staff have never been used in any way, shape, or form. My brother was the employer. We have the expertise in our office to be able to assist people. Constituents come in with these concerns. An outside agency was called. So I hope the Ethics Commissioner is going to investigate this and my name will be cleared.

The Chair: I'm afraid time is up, Ms. Mathysen.

Thank you, Dr. Dhalla.

Mr. Dykstra.

Mr. Rick Dykstra: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

From our perspective and my perspective, this has been quite an experience. And Ruby, on behalf of this side of the table and on behalf of the government, I do want to indicate to you that I know that what you are going through is a struggle.

Let it be known to you that our intention here is simply to make sure that the recommendations we make from this committee, the work that we do on this committee, brings us to a better and more fulsome result at the end of the day for those people who come to our country under the auspices of becoming a Canadian, under the auspices of understanding what our Charter of Rights and Freedoms allows that they don't have in their countries.

I want to make that clear, because one of the concerns I have.... I've listened, and I have obviously read a lot about what you've gone through over the last number of days. And I must say, I do find it unfortunate that one of the things you've done in reaction to this is create, or at least from a communications perspective indicate, that there is some sort of witch hunt.

I am parliamentary secretary of this ministry. I take that personally. So I feel a little bit of what you're going through. I guess what I'm asking you to do is understand that this minister, this parliamentary secretary, this side of this table, and our government have no intention whatsoever of creating anything that you may have suggested. I just want to make that very, very clear from the outset.

One of the things I want to be clear on.... Even in your first remark, you indicated that you made a request to come to this committee. In fact, that is not the case. We requested that you come to this committee. I just want to be clear. I know that you're trying to drive the communications—

• (1045)

Ms. Ruby Dhalla: I requested it for today—sorry.

Mr. Rick Dykstra: —and you and I have sat on lots of panels together, and I understand your abilities in terms of communicating. So I just want to be clear. We are trying to get to the facts here. Just saying that you came here because you requested....

Ms. Ruby Dhalla: Sorry. I mentioned the word “today”.

Mr. Rick Dykstra: Right. Okay. Thanks.

I have to ask you this, and I'll take what you're saying at face value in terms of wanting to better the system. When you heard and knew that these allegations were going to come forward publicly, why did you not go to the Ethics Commissioner before this became public? Why did you wait until this became a public issue before you requested the Ethics Commissioner, or even made anyone in your party aware of what was happening?

Ms. Ruby Dhalla: First of all, Rick, I want to say thank you for your comments. You're an individual I have a lot of respect for on the other side of the House. We've worked very closely together since I've been elected.

I have two points. First of all, you talked about wanting to make reforms. It's something I greatly believe in. The country has been obsessed with the Dhalla case, but there are thousands of other vulnerable workers out there—we must never lose sight of that—

who are going through situations that perhaps are true and need to be verified and rectified.

I was made aware of these allegations for the first time 15 months after these women had left the home, and who I have had limited interaction with, by a *Toronto Star* reporter about a week—not even a week, about five or six days—before the report came out.

Mr. Rick Dykstra: I'm just going to ask you....

The Chair: Mr. Dykstra, let her finish.

Ms. Ruby Dhalla: He asked for verification, Rick, in terms of providing proof, because the manner in which the questions were presented through e-mail were all directly related to me, saying that I own the clinic, saying that it was my home. You know, it was all Ruby, Ruby, Ruby, because all the allegations had been directed at Ruby. We asked for the opportunity to provide this individual with the appropriate facts, because those were just allegations that were false and unsubstantiated. And you know as well as I do, Rick, that when you're in public life, people can say anything they want—

Mr. Rick Dykstra: Sure they can.

Ms. Ruby Dhalla: —so I actually provided....

Mr. Rick Dykstra: I don't deny that. I don't deny that.

Ms. Ruby Dhalla: Sorry, I'm just giving you the full information, Rick.

Mr. Rick Dykstra: I know, but I have seven minutes. You have to go quick.

Ms. Ruby Dhalla: We provided them with information, and I thought that was substantial proof for refuting all these allegations, because we had documents.

Mr. Rick Dykstra: So what you're saying is that you answered questions from a reporter and then did nothing after.

Ms. Ruby Dhalla: No, because they were allegations that were being made.

Mr. Rick Dykstra: Fair enough.

Very quickly, this is a copy of the request for the work permit. It's online. You can see it. It's a public document. Your mother filled in the top portion. Ms. Tongson filled in this portion. Your brother filled in this portion.

Is this your handwriting?

Ms. Ruby Dhalla: I haven't seen that document. Sorry.

No, it is not.

Mr. Rick Dykstra: Very quickly, one of the other things you indicated was that both ladies were not here illegally. We don't question that. The Minister of Immigration does not question that. What is in question is whether they were working in your mother's home illegally. That's what's at question here. Please understand that if they were in your home illegally, that's what is at stake here.

Ms. Ruby Dhalla: Rick, I was not the employer and I am not the sponsor.

Mr. Rick Dykstra: But you live in the home.

Ms. Ruby Dhalla: I am at the home sometimes, yes.

Mr. Rick Dykstra: That is your place of residence.

Ms. Ruby Dhalla: Yes, I visit the home.

Mr. Rick Dykstra: But is that your place of residence?

Ms. Ruby Dhalla: Yes, it is.

Mr. Rick Dykstra: Thank you.

I'm going to be very quick here. Did you have a conversation with Agatha Mason of Intercede about this issue?

Ms. Ruby Dhalla: Thank you very much, Rick, because I want to clarify this particular question that's been going on.

I have learned subsequently that Intercede is an agency that helps caregivers. I did receive a call from the Intercede agency, as has been stated publicly, in regard to a passport. That call was facilitated and directed by Ms. Tongson herself. When that call was made to my Ottawa office, Ms. Tongson and the woman from Intercede were advised to contact the employer, who was my brother. I originally received the phone call and redirected it to the appropriate person, unlike a circumstance where you would have a child picking up the phone at home and giving the phone to their dad or to their mother.

Mr. Rick Dykstra: So you've never had a conversation outside of redirecting the call. That's the only conversation you've ever had?

• (1050)

Ms. Ruby Dhalla: From my recollection, I just had that one phone call, which was redirected to my brother, who was the employer.

Mr. Rick Dykstra: Thank you.

How much time do I have?

The Chair: You're out of time.

Okay, now each caucus will have two minutes, which means one question.

Ms. Minna.

Hon. Maria Minna: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I was going to thank you for the clarification on the Intercede discussion, because they claim you had the passport and came down.

I wanted to ask one other question. The agency you consulted to get the nannies said all their dealings were with you. Is that the case?

Ms. Ruby Dhalla: Which one?

Hon. Maria Minna: The agency you called for referral says all their dealings were with you. Is that the case?

Ms. Ruby Dhalla: No, it's not. I had made the initial phone call. Again, I can't remember the exact number of times. I think a few times, perhaps, the woman called me. She was redirected to my mother and my brother. My mother and brother had all the subsequent dealings with the agency.

Ms. Minna, can I just bring up the passport issue at Intercede? Again, the woman has clearly stated in signed documentation that the passport was received back from Dr. Neil Dhalla.

Hon. Maria Minna: Ms. Gordo claims that when she quit, she told you first. Do you have any recollection of that conversation?

Ms. Ruby Dhalla: The day Ms. Gordo quit, I actually wasn't even at home.

Ms. Gordo stated as fact today that when she started, a few days later it was my birthday. My birthday is actually February 18. Ms. Gordo started on February 4, and the day Ms. Gordo started I was actually in Ottawa for that particular week. So there's a lot of inconsistency going on in the facts and the allegations, unfortunately, that are being made.

Hon. Maria Minna: During all this time, did you have any knowledge of complaints from either of these women or that there were problems at the home? Did you ever, throughout the overall time of the two women working...?

Ms. Ruby Dhalla: From my interaction, from feedback from my mom, my mom used to be the one who used to cook for them many times—

Hon. Maria Minna: But from the women? Sorry to interrupt. We are running out of time. Did they ever complain to you when you were at the house?

Ms. Ruby Dhalla: To myself, no, and I can unequivocally state this: neither to my mother nor to my brother. Some of the caregivers actually accompanied my mom to concerts. My mom paid for the tickets to take them with her, because my mom is usually by herself because my brother and I are extremely busy working.

The Chair: Thank you, Dr. Dhalla.

Monsieur St-Cyr.

[Translation]

Mr. Thierry St-Cyr: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Ms. Dhalla, in the context of my previous question, I asked you what your position was with regard to the possibility, a request that has frequently been made of us during our hearings, of making employers who deal with recruitment agencies responsible in order to help people who have been swindled by these agencies so that they can recover their money more easily. If I understood rightly, you told me that you would like to study the question, that you do not, a priori, have a position on this subject. This is surprising, because your three colleagues from the Liberal Party to your right are clearly against this measure.

Recently a report was produced that contains a whole series of recommendations. Among these recommendations, which ones do you find the most interesting for improving the quality of life of these live-in domestics?

[English]

Ms. Ruby Dhalla: I think the recommendation that the committee has made.... There are a number of them, and I think that everyone around this table is going to be on the same page when it comes to providing fairness for the workers, providing fairness for the employers and also for the particular agencies.

[Translation]

Mr. Thierry St-Cyr: Which ones?

[English]

Ms. Ruby Dhalla: There is an issue with caregivers getting their landed status, needing to have 24 months of work within three particular years. In cases where women haven't achieved that 24 months of full employment, they are not eligible to get the permanent residency they need.

That really hit home to me as an individual when I saw the comments that were being made in the media, and I read about the *Globe and Mail* article, stating that department officials had given assurances to these women that their qualifying time for permanent residency will be met for the duration of time that they spent at the Dhalla home.

It's obviously a huge issue if the department is also discussing it with these particular women to get permanent residency into Canada.

The Chair: Thank you, Dr. Dhalla.

Ms Mathysen.

Ms. Irene Mathysen: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Thank you, Ms. Dhalla.

You've been very clear in your remarks, I believe, that there should be rule changes in place, very specific rule changes. We've heard this for a number of years, to be quite frank. So would you support things like a transparent impartial appeal process, dispute mechanism, removing the mobility restrictions in regard to caregivers? Should they be allowed to live outside the employer's home? And would you say that caregivers should come to Canada as permanent residents, instead of temporary workers?

•(1055)

Ms. Ruby Dhalla: I think there are a lot of changes that need to be made, and I can tell you for the past week I've been inundated with phone calls from every advocacy organization across the country. In particular, I am referring to the Canadian Caregivers Association, but many other support groups, not only for the caregivers but also for the employers. There are victims on all sides.

I hope we can come up with recommendations that can be implemented immediately to ensure that there is effective change, so that people are no longer victims, and people don't have to make allegations that may be false, unsubstantiated, for the purpose of gaining residency in Canada.

Ms. Irene Mathysen: Do you believe that many caregivers are indeed victimized?

Ms. Ruby Dhalla: I think there are caregivers who are victimized, and also there are employers who are victimized. I met an employer on my first day out after being under siege for five days straight. I went out for dinner and the waiter came up to me at the restaurant and told me to stay strong. He wanted to share his personal story.

He was an employer, and he told me a story about how he and his wife, who have four young kids, were actually exploited by one of the caregivers they had. They had to give them money, to ensure that the caregivers would follow up on all of the lists of suggestions that they had with the employer, and they had to pay out all of this money. He gave me his name and number and said that if I needed any help, or if I wanted him to come before committee or to help me in any way, to let him know.

Bringing it back home, I think that there are windows where the caregivers are victims, there are windows where the employers are victims, and there are also agencies that are doing good work, but then there are the agencies that are not. One bad apple creates a bad name for everyone.

The Chair: Thank you, Dr. Dhalla.

Mr. Dykstra.

Mr. Rick Dykstra: I give my time to Mr. Del Mastro.

Mr. Dean Del Mastro (Peterborough, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

There are so many questions I'd like to ask, but so little time. Perhaps you can dwell on the first question for a little bit. If this wasn't about vulnerable people and taking advantage of them, why not hire a Canadian company, like Molly Maid or something like that, to look after the home? But I don't have a lot of time for that.

You've stated things like you couldn't have possibly been in Toronto because you were flying from Ottawa. I took the flight from Toronto to Ottawa yesterday at 9:10 and I was standing in my office at 10:30, so I do think you could have been in two places at once.

I'm very concerned. You said that everybody who's ever come to your house has been treated with love and respect and that it's a wonderful environment. You said that the lady who was working there.... One of the brief moments that you ever had an opportunity to go home, you witnessed them sitting on the couch, your mother had cooked them a nice meal, and maybe they were watching an episode of *Survivor* together. It's a loving time. But they only stayed for eleven days in this tremendous environment, this wonderful, loving environment, and they left on good terms.

The Chair: Give her time to answer the question. You're running out of time, Mr. Del Mastro.

Mr. Dean Del Mastro: Can you balance that out for me, why somebody who is being treated so lovingly in such a wonderful environment and being paid, I assume, a fair wage—because we know you've always championed that—would leave in eleven days?

Ms. Ruby Dhalla: You know what, the woman who left after eleven days was repeatedly asked for her papers, again and again and again by my mother. Every time she went home on the weekend, she said she would bring the papers back, proving she was on an open work permit. She did not bring the papers. She was asked a second time, and she stated to my mother, "When I come back, I will definitely bring my papers". And when this persistence continued, apparently on the 19th in the morning, she woke up and told my mom that she was going to go to work at the hospital. And my mom said, "Hospital?" She said, "Yes, I have a relative and I got a job at the hospital."

I don't know, Dean, how many employers these women have been through in their 24 months, but I can tell you that they were treated with love, with care, compassion, and respect.

And if I can just add in closing, Mr. Tilson, anyone who has been to my home will see the accommodations these caregivers lived in. It is a beautiful basement apartment—1,500 square feet, furnished with a 60-inch flat-screen TV, mahogany furniture, beautiful carpets, state-of-the-art technology, and a kitchen—all for the caregivers to live in by themselves, because there are only three people in my house: me, my mother, and my brother. I'm usually in Ottawa, my brother is usually at work, and my mom is at home by herself.

•(1100)

The Chair: Thank you, Dr. Dhalla.

I want to thank you for coming this morning, and Mr. Levitt as well. We may ask you to come back another time. We'll see how things go.

Ms. Ruby Dhalla: Chair, if I could just add a very brief comment, you're inviting me back, and it will be a pleasure to come back—

The Chair: Well, no, I haven't invited you back.

Ms. Ruby Dhalla: If you ever do....

But regarding the other instances or 29 other cases we've heard about, and the hundreds of others, I hope we also get a chance, as parliamentarians, to hear their stories.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Dr. Dhalla.

This meeting will be adjourned until Thursday at 9 a.m. Thank you very much.

The meeting is adjourned.

Published under the authority of the Speaker of the House of Commons

Publié en conformité de l'autorité du Président de la Chambre des communes

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