



ASSOCIATION  
*of* **LABOR RELATIONS**  
AGENCIES

# ALRA Advisor

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## June 2025

ALRA Promotes:

- ▶ Cooperation and high professional standards
- ▶ Public interest in labor relations
- ▶ Improved employer–employee relationships
- ▶ Peaceful resolution of employment and labor disputes
- ▶ Information exchange for improvement and administration of agency services

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The ALRA Advisor is published biannually. On occasion, special issues are produced on an ad hoc basis.

### Deadlines

Deadlines for submissions are communicated to member agencies via email.

### Articles and Photos

All articles are subject to editing for length and clarity. Images should be high resolution.

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Special thanks to

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Board

Vanessa Smith  
Executive Assistant,  
Washington State Public  
Employment Relations  
Commission

## FROM THE PRESIDENT



Sylvie  
Guilbert

What a difference six months can bring . . . In our last ALRA Advisor, I was enthusiastically inviting all of you to Montréal for what was going to be a very interesting 73rd edition of ALRA's Annual Conference. Our planning was underway. We secured a great hotel in a great location. We had many volunteers with great ideas for both the professional development content and interesting topics and speakers in mind for Advocates Day. We had even found musicians for the receptions and, very importantly, we had plans in place to showcase Montréal's food scene with poutine, smoked meat sandwiches, and Montréal-style bagels—amongst other culinary delights, of course.

Then things changed. Drastically.

We saw some agency's mandates severely reduced. Longtime ALRA friends were no longer employed. Budgets were significantly cut. The border between Canada and the USA became an issue. In short, the world of ALRA and of its neutral labour relations agencies members as we knew it took a turn.

As a non-profit organization with a big mandate and a small budget made up solely of dues paid by our member agencies, ALRA has very limited resources. Knowing that it was now impossible to host an in-person conference with sufficient numbers to cover the operating costs, ALRA's Executive Board had to make a very hard decision: hold an in-person conference with extremely limited participation—a proposition that could decimate ALRA's finances—or cut the losses on the in-person conference and pivot to hosting an online half-day program which would be much more accessible to all ALRA delegates.

We chose to cancel the in-person conference and pivot to a half-day conference scheduled for July 22, 2025, from 12:30 p.m. to 5:00 p.m. Eastern Time.

Luckily, our hard-working co-chairs of the Professional Development and Program Committees quickly came together, worked their contacts, and rescheduled speakers to offer the following agenda for this half day under the theme **"Innovate, Adapt, Succeed"**:

- A fireside chat with Justice Elizabeth Walker of the Canadian Federal Court of Appeal.
- A roundtable discussion on aviation labour relations with representatives from Canadian and American airlines and unions.
- Professional development breakout sessions for mediators, heads of agencies, decision-makers, and general counsels on topics specifically focused on their day-to-day duties within their agencies.
- The ALRA Annual General Meeting.

Details on registration can be found at [www.alra.org](http://www.alra.org). The registration fee is \$200.00 USD per member agency (for a group of participants at one email address) or \$50.00 per individual participant.

I invite you to register in large numbers for this half-day conference.

ALRA is a big community made up of dedicated professionals who care about the parties they serve and the colleagues with which they serve. We are now missing a large number of those colleagues and see some key agencies reduced to a minuscule workforce or mandate. This is hard to understand and can lead us to feel uncertain and scared and to even question where this is all going. After almost 15 years of involvement in ALRA and quite a few changes in the structure of the agencies I have served or the legislative schemes within which I have operated, I know that I benefit from meeting fellow ALRA delegates in times of turmoil. There is no better source of counsel and creativity than fellow mediators, heads of agencies, decision-makers, and general counsels who all work as neutrals in labour relations.

Therefore, I invite you to join us on July 22, 2025. Together, we can innovate, adapt, and succeed. Together, we can also support each other as we navigate uncharted waters. Together, we can help each other.

Thank you for your continued support for ALRA. I look forward to welcoming you online on July 22, 2025!

Kind regards,

—**Sylvie M.D. Guilbert**, Vice-Chairperson,  
Canada Industrial Relations Board; ALRA  
President 2024–2025

## IMPORTANT CHANGE

### Annual ALRA Conference July 22, 2025 – WEBINAR

As most of you know, there have been important changes in the world of labour relations in 2025. As a result, many of ALRA's member agencies have seen significant reductions in human and financial resources and others have been limited in their scope of activities.

Therefore, with regrets, ALRA has decided to cancel its in-person annual conference which was to be held from July 19 to 22, 2025, in Montréal, Canada.

However, ALRA is hosting an online half-day conference on July 22, 2025 (12:30 p.m. to 5:00 p.m. ET) for delegates from its member agencies under the theme **"Innovate, Adapt, Succeed."**

The agenda will include

- a fireside chat with Justice Elizabeth Walker of the Canadian Federal Court of Appeal;
- a roundtable discussion on aviation labour relations with representatives from Canadian and American airlines and unions;
- professional development breakout sessions for mediators, heads of agencies, decision-makers, and general counsels on topics specifically focused on their day-to-day duties within their agencies; and
- the ALRA Annual General Meeting.

Details on registration can be found at [alra.org](https://alra.org)—\$200.00 USD per member agency (for a group of participants at one email address) or \$50.00 per individual participant.

ALRA hopes to host a further virtual event in the fall or winter bringing together advocates from both labour and management with delegates from member agencies to discuss key workplace issues of the day. Stay tuned for more details!

UNITED STATES

REDUCTIONS AT THE FEDERAL MEDIATION AND CONCILIATION SERVICE–U.S.

*By Javier Ramirez, Former ALRA Board Member & Former FMCS Deputy Director for Field Operations*

The United States Federal Mediation and Conciliation Service (FMCS), long a cornerstone of U.S. labor relations, is facing a severe operational crisis. Following a March 2025 executive order issued by President Donald Trump aimed at shrinking several federal agencies to their statutory minimums, FMCS was reduced to a skeleton crew—over 90% of its staff were placed on administrative leave, and all field offices were shuttered. Only a handful of mediators remain active, all based in Washington, D.C. This drastic downsizing has raised alarm across the labor-management community and prompted multiple legal challenges from major unions, including the AFL-CIO, AFGE, and AFT. These organizations argue that the executive order undermines Congress's constitutional

authority to establish and fund federal agencies. They are seeking court injunctions to block the order and restore FMCS's full operations.

While the Administration maintains that the agency continues to fulfill its statutory functions, its capacity to handle the thousands of labor disputes it historically managed is in serious question. Additional challenges are looming: the upcoming FY25–26 federal budget is widely expected to formalize these cuts, with appropriations likely to match the agency's current minimal staffing. This signals not a temporary pause, but a long-term retrenchment. With labor tensions on the rise nationwide, the erosion of FMCS's capacity to mediate complex disputes could lead to increased work stoppages, costly delays, and a weakened national labor relations infrastructure. ■



MASSACHUSETTS DEPARTMENT OF LABOR RELATIONS AND THE COMMONWEALTH EMPLOYMENT RELATIONS BOARD

Personnel Update

The Commonwealth Employment Relations Board (CERB) is a three-person appellate body within the Massachusetts Department of Labor Relations (DLR) charged primarily with making final agency decisions on appeal of probable cause dismissals and hearing officer decisions related to prohibited practice charges. The Chair of the CERB is a full-time employee and the two remaining members are per diem.

Last fall, former ALRA President and longtime Chair of the CERB Marjorie Wittner retired after over 20 years of service to the Commonwealth. To our great appreciation at the DLR, she has returned as part-time Special Counsel to the department. She has also started a labor arbitration practice.

In January 2025, Massachusetts Governor Maura Healey reappointed Phil Roberts as DLR Director and appointed Lan Kantany as the new Chair

of the CERB. Ms. Kantany was first hired by the DLR as a hearing officer/mediator/arbitrator and then was promoted to Chief Counsel, where she served for nearly three years before being appointed. In her role as Chief Counsel, she defended the CERB's decisions in briefs and at oral arguments in the Massachusetts Appeals Court in over ten cases. She also represented the CERB in numerous injunction proceedings during a wave of teachers strikes that are prohibited by the Commonwealth's law making it unlawful for public-sector employees to strike.

Before joining the DLR, Ms. Kantany was an associate for six years at a law firm in Western Massachusetts, representing unions in initial and successor contract negotiations, mediations, and arbitrations and in state court and administrative agencies. Growing up in Massachusetts as a first-generation immigrant and first-generation college student, she graduated summa cum laude with a Bachelor of Science (B.S.) from Fitchburg State University and cum laude from Western New England University School of Law with a Juris Doctor (J.D.).

### Legislative Update

In November 2024, the voters of Massachusetts passed Ballot Initiative No. 3, which creates a new Chapter 150F statute that authorizes eligible "Transportation Network Drivers" who drive for rideshare companies such as Uber

and Lyft to form an industry-wide union. The CERB is charged with determining whether the union seeking to represent the drivers has sufficient support, either through card check process or election, to certify it as the exclusive representative of all drivers. Chapter 150F also establishes unfair work practices that are similar to the unfair labor practices established under M.G.L. Chapter 150A and 150E.

After a union has been certified, the Transportation Network Companies and the union will bargain over wages, benefits, and terms and conditions of work. If the parties do not reach an agreement and the negotiations are at an impasse, the CERB will appoint a mediator to assist them and if mediation is not successful, the CERB may refer the dispute to an arbitrator. Any agreement and/or any determination reached by an arbitrator shall be subject to review and approval by the Massachusetts Secretary of Labor and Workforce Development.

The DLR is in the process of implementing Chapter 150F, including meeting a new statutory requirement to accept electronic showings of interest and increasing its capacity to conduct an election involving tens of thousands of drivers by electronic voting.

A copy of the ballot initiative can be found [here](#). ■



## WASHINGTON STATE PUBLIC EMPLOYMENT RELATIONS COMMISSION

### New Legislation Impacting PERC

Earlier this year, House Bill 1141 was passed and signed into law granting collective bargaining rights to agricultural cannabis workers and assigning the Washington State Public Employment Relations Commission (PERC) with the responsibility to administer the

new law. These workers, who are exempt from coverage of the National Labor Relations Act, are agricultural employees of the approximately 100 registered cannabis producers in Washington's regulated cannabis sector. This will become the 11th collective bargaining statute administered by PERC. The new law takes effect on July 27, 2025.

PERC Implements AI Tool for Website

At the 2024 ALRA conference, there were several sessions that touched upon AI. One of those sessions explored how agencies may incorporate AI tools. Following on those presentations, PERC began exploring integrating an AI chatbot into its website. In February, PERC launched the new AI chatbot. The chatbot is designed to assist visitors to the website with questions regarding PERC's services and processes and the laws administered by PERC. The chatbot is restricted to looking only at information in PERC's website, so the answers given will only be as good (or bad) as the information on our website.

Representation Activity Remains High

The number of representation petitions filed in 2024 was the second highest in PERC's history. This continues the consistent upward trend of representation activity since 2018. Of all the representation petitions filed in 2024, 80% involved creating new bargaining units or adding unrepresented employees to existing bargaining units. The pace of representation cases continues in 2025. The number of representation petitions filed through April is a significant increase over the average of the last five years. ■

ALRA MEMBER UPDATES

CANADA



ADMINISTRATIVE TRIBUNALS SUPPORT  
SERVICE OF CANADA

Creation of a New Canadian Labour and Human Rights Secretariat

The Administrative Tribunals Support Service of Canada (ATSSC) is entering a new phase of transformation to better support the tribunals it serves. Effective April 1, 2025, ATSSC will restructure into three secretariats, reinforcing the advantages gained from previous business unit mergers. A key aspect of this restructuring is the establishment of the new Labour and Human Rights Secretariat (LHRS).

This streamlined framework will enhance efficiency in supporting tribunals and in providing access to justice for Canadians. The restructuring reflects our commitment to realizing ATSSC's original vision as an integrated service provider. By implementing these changes, we will continue to improve operational effectiveness, optimize resource allocation, and provide

employees with expanded career opportunities through cross-training and flexible workforce deployment.

The newly created LHRS will support three key tribunals:

- Canada Industrial Relations Board (CIRB)
- Federal Public Sector Labour Relations and Employment Board (FPSLREB)
- Canadian Human Rights Tribunal (CHRT)

Sara Bennett will serve as Executive Director and Senior General Counsel of the LHRS, bringing leadership and legal expertise to this critical initiative. The new secretariat will have a Mediation and Dispute Resolution Services (MDRS) Directorate, led by Jean-Daniel Tardif as its Senior Director. MDRS will ensure continued

excellence in dispute resolution services across the tribunals under LHRS.

The CIRB regional offices will remain represented within MDRS by their current regional directors:

- Annabelle Machabée St-Georges (Montreal office) – Responsible for Quebec, the Atlantic Provinces and the Nunavut
- Jesse Peters (Ottawa office) – Responsible for Ontario and the National Capital Region
- Lindsay Foley (Vancouver office) – Responsible for the central and western provinces, the Northwest Territories, and Yukon

Additionally, Julie Beauchesne will continue to lead the FPSLREB MDRS as its Director.

All MDRS directors will report to Jean-Daniel, ensuring consistent leadership and coordination across the regions. The restructuring is not only about improving tribunal support but also about fostering a more dynamic and fulfilling work environment for ATSSC employees. By implementing cross-training initiatives, we will enable employees to develop broader skill sets and increase the organization's flexibility in responding to tribunal needs. This approach ensures that our workforce remains agile, engaged, and better equipped to support the administration of justice in Canada. ■



# CANADA INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS BOARD

## Leadership Transition Announcement

The Canada Industrial Relations Board (CIRB) is in a period of transition as Ginette Brazeau concludes her term as Chairperson of the Board.



Ms. Brazeau's term concluded on April 30th, 2025. Last year, she had informed the Minister of Labour that she would not be seeking reappointment to another five-year term. Ms. Brazeau's decision to step away from public service follows a distinguished career spanning 29 years in the Federal Public Service, including 16 years with the CIRB. She expressed deep gratitude for her time at the Board, noting that while the past decade has brought substantial change and challenges, it has also been an exhilarating period to serve as Chair of the Board.

Reflecting on her departure, Ms. Brazeau emphasized her confidence that it is the right time to pass the leadership to a new Chairperson who will bring fresh perspectives and an inspiring vision for the Board's future. She looks forward to

focusing on her well-being, spending more time with her family, and exploring new professional interests.

## Welcoming the New Chairperson

The CIRB is pleased to announce that the Governor-in-Council has appointed Maryse Tremblay as the next Chairperson of the Canada Industrial Relations Board. Ms. Tremblay's appointment took effect on May 1, 2025.

Ms. Tremblay brings over 32 years of experience in labour and employment law, with a focus on the federally regulated sectors. She has built a distinguished career as a partner with the law firm Borden Ladner Gervais (BLG), where she has represented clients before administrative tribunals on matters relating to labour relations, grievance arbitration, collective bargaining, and personnel management.



Notably, Ms. Tremblay began her career in the CIRB's legal services group before transitioning to Air Canada, where

she worked for seven years. She later joined Heenan Blaikie and subsequently BLG, further solidifying her expertise in federal labour law and alternative dispute resolution mechanisms.

With her extensive knowledge of the Canada Labour Code and her commitment to

effective dispute resolution, Ms. Tremblay is well-positioned to lead the CIRB into the future. The Board is confident that she will bring strong leadership, stability, and a clear vision to support its ongoing mandate. ■

## CONCIILIATION AND MEDIATION SERVICES—NOVA SCOTIA

Over the 2024–2025-year the Nova Scotia Government Conciliation and Mediation Services has developed new offerings for clients to work on improving the Union-Management relationship. These programs include Modified Traditional Bargaining (MTB) and Relationship Development for Workplace Leaders (RDWL).

Union-Management groups interested in exploring alternatives to Traditional Collective Bargaining are encouraged to participate in a full-day interactive program on MTB. MTB is a facilitated, collaborative approach to reaching a collective agreement. Parties come with a list of workplace issues—not proposals. Solutions and associated language are generated together. This workshop explores the basics of MTB, and other forms of bargaining, including when they are (and are not) appropriate. It provides the opportunity to reflect on and discuss how your last round of bargaining went and explore hopes and fears pertaining to changing your approach. The remainder of the day focuses on walking

through the MTB process from start to finish using a hypothetical issue. Following this the parties can determine if MTB is the best option for their next round of bargaining.

After hearing from a number of union and management groups that they would like to see more focus on building (or rebuilding) trust we decided to revisit our flagship RDWL program. The program hadn't been substantively changed in over five years. We looked at the program's objectives (original and current) and new developments in the field of labour management relationship development. As a result, we've added new information, activities, and elements, including a deeper dive into workplace communications with more opportunities for practice and reflection. An entirely new afternoon session focused on labour-management building blocks like trust and how to develop them. Facilitated union and management breakout discussions and a joint discussion to plan next steps. ■

The Nova Scotia Government Conciliation and Mediation Services would love to hear your Management-Union success stories! Whether they be relating to collective bargaining, the ongoing relationship, or regarding a specific event. We would love to hear how groups continue to improve their labour relationship.

If you have any successes you wish to share or any questions please contact Lindsey Harrington: [lindsey.harrington@novascotia.ca](mailto:lindsey.harrington@novascotia.ca).