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(Hansard)**

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des débats
(Hansard)**

F-60

**Standing Committee on
Finance and Economic Affairs**

Protect, Support and Recover
from COVID-19 Act
(Budget Measures), 2020

1st Session
42nd Parliament

Tuesday 1 December 2020

**Comité permanent
des finances
et des affaires économiques**

Loi de 2020 sur la protection,
le soutien et la relance
face à la COVID-19
(mesures budgétaires)

1^{re} session
42^e législature

Mardi 1^{er} décembre 2020

Chair: Amarjot Sandhu
Clerk: Julia Douglas

Président : Amarjot Sandhu
Greffière : Julia Douglas

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Service linguistique et des publications parlementaires
Salle 500, aile ouest, Édifice du Parlement
111, rue Wellesley ouest, Queen's Park
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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

**STANDING COMMITTEE ON
FINANCE AND ECONOMIC AFFAIRS**

**COMITÉ PERMANENT DES FINANCES
ET DES AFFAIRES ÉCONOMIQUES**

Tuesday 1 December 2020

Mardi 1^{er} décembre 2020

The committee met at 0900 in room 151 and by video conference.

**PROTECT, SUPPORT AND RECOVER
FROM COVID-19 ACT
(BUDGET MEASURES), 2020**

**LOI DE 2020 SUR LA PROTECTION,
LE SOUTIEN ET LA RELANCE
FACE À LA COVID-19
(MESURES BUDGÉTAIRES)**

Consideration of the following bill:

Bill 229, An Act to implement Budget measures and to enact, amend and repeal various statutes / Projet de loi 229, Loi visant à mettre en oeuvre les mesures budgétaires et à édicter, à modifier ou à abroger diverses lois.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Good morning, everyone. We're meeting today for public hearings on Bill 229, An Act to implement Budget measures and to enact, amend and repeal various statutes.

We have the following members in the room with us: We have MPP Cho. The following members are participating remotely: We have MPP Kramp, MPP Shaw, MPP Mamakwa, MPP Roberts, MPP Smith and MPP Hunter.

As a reminder, I ask that everyone speak slowly and clearly. Please wait until I recognize you before starting to speak. Are there any questions or business before we begin?

Pursuant to the order of the House dated November 23, 2020, each presenter will have seven minutes for their presentation, and after we have heard from all presenters, there will be time for questions from members of the committee. This time will be broken down into two rounds of seven and a half minutes each for both of the recognized parties and two rounds of four and a half minutes for the independent member.

**CANADIAN ENVIRONMENTAL LAW
ASSOCIATION**

**ONTARIO ENGLISH CATHOLIC
TEACHERS' ASSOCIATION**

**CROWE VALLEY
CONSERVATION AUTHORITY**

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): I will now call upon our first presenter of the day, the Canadian

Environmental Law Association. If you can please state your name for the record, and you will have seven minutes for your presentation.

Ms. Kerrie Blaise: Thank you. My name is Kerrie Blaise at the Canadian Environmental Law Association.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): You may start.

Ms. Kerrie Blaise: Thank you. The Canadian Environmental Law Association welcomes this opportunity to speak to Bill 229. My name is Kerrie Blaise and I am CELA's northern services legal counsel. Also with me today is Anastasia Lintner, special projects counsel, Healthy Great Lakes program at CELA.

CELA is a public interest law group that is based in Ontario with a public interest mandate spanning the province. For 50 years, we have provided legal services to communities who have been disproportionately exposed to adverse health impacts from pollution, and we advocate on behalf of low-income individuals to further access to justice and the public's right to full and fair decision-making processes.

Today, we will discuss Bill 229, an omnibus budget measures bill. Bill 229 not only upends the legal protections that are in place to safeguard endangered species and watersheds, but removes tools the government has to enforce its environmental laws, such as the issuance of orders when there is imminent danger to an already declining species. In our presentation today, we will highlight our primary concerns in support of CELA's recommendation that schedules 6 and 8 be withdrawn in their entirety from Bill 229.

I will make two points before turning to Dr. Lintner. First, the government is expediting Bill 229 through the legislative process, despite there being no prior public and First Nations engagement, and the potential for public debate and dialogue is limited at best. Within this very narrow opportunity for public consultation, First Nation communities, who are among CELA's clients, are among those most left out. The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated pre-existing challenges with respect to housing and clean water, and Ontario has not engaged in a way which enables First Nations participation, in a context of crisis management and under-resourcing. Indigenous leadership must be able to consult directly with their members in order to discuss impacts to their rights and interests, and there must be equal access to virtual alternatives, such as remote communication and video conferencing, which are not feasible in many remote northern communities.

CELA submits that this fast-track approach is both unacceptable and unwarranted, and the text of Bill 229 misrepresents these amendments as being a necessary part of COVID recovery. Given the tight timelines, CELA has not been able to fully analyze and assess all of the potential changes to environmental laws.

Second, if enacted as currently drafted, schedule 8 of Bill 229 will permanently exempt forestry operations from the prohibitions against killing and destroying species at risk in their habitat. The footprint of forestry operations in Ontario encompasses about two thirds of the province's land base and it is precisely because of the Crown Forest Sustainability Act's application to the majority of Ontario that the rollbacks proposed in schedule 8 are so significant and objectionable from a public interest perspective.

If enacted, schedule 8 will remove the legal protections for endangered species and their habitat as currently contained in the Endangered Species Act. Despite Ontario being home to over 240 species that are at some level of risk of disappearing from the wild, these amendments exempt forestry operations, when carried out on public land, as part of a forest management plan or a forest resource licence, from the Endangered Species Act prohibitions on killing, harming or harassing a listed species and damaging or destroying their habitat, which is necessary to their survival and recovery.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Three minutes.

Ms. Kerrie Blaise: More alarmingly, schedule 8 removes the ability of the Minister of the Environment, Conservation and Parks to issue a species protection order or a habitat protection order to halt or alter forestry operations, even in circumstances where significant harm to an endangered species will result.

These amendments, reviewed alongside the earlier actions by the province in July of this year which exempted forestry from the requirements of the Environmental Assessment Act, leave species at increased risk of extinction, jeopardize their ability to recover and tie the hands of the Minister of the Environment, Conservation and Parks to issue orders at a time when we need more protection of biodiversity and the ecological services forests provide.

These actions also stand in direct opposition to the findings of the Auditor General, who just last month reported that Ontario's wild plants and animals are under increasing threat from human activities and that the ministry has not met its objective of improving outcomes for species at risk.

Before turning to my colleague Dr. Lintner, I close by noting that among the commitments in the Made-in-Ontario Environment Plan was a promise to protect species at risk and their habitats. In CELA's view, this is not a commitment which has been fulfilled in light of a process that minimizes public attention and scrutiny and fast-tracks sweeping changes to environmental laws.

Dr. Anastasia Lintner: Thank you, Ms. Blaise. My remarks are directed at schedule 6, the proposed changes to the Conservation Authorities Act and consequential amendments.

As Ms. Blaise said, my name is Anastasia Lintner. CELA submitted our preliminary analysis of schedule 6 with our request to appear before this committee—as well as a more detailed written submission on schedules 6 and 8—last Friday. In the brief amount of time that we have for opening remarks, I just want to restate our overall conclusion regarding schedule 6.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): One minute.

Dr. Anastasia Lintner: While a small number of the proposed changes, including improved transparency through publicly available information, may be supportable in principle, the majority of the proposed amendments are regressive in nature and contradictory to both fulfilling the purpose of the Conservation Authorities Act and the desire to set the course for climate-resilient communities in the future.

It is our opinion that the watershed approach and the conservation authority model that Ontario's special adviser on flooding lauded will be stripped down and made unrecognizable. We know that you have heard from Conservation Ontario, the Toronto and Region Conservation Authority and Credit Valley Conservation so far about these measures, and we endorse their submissions.

In closing, given the short amount of time—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you. I apologize to cut you off. The time has come up.

I will move to our next presenter, Ontario English Catholic Teachers' Association. If you can please state your name for the record, and you can get right into your presentation.

Ms. Liz Stuart: Thank you. I am Liz Stuart, the president of the Ontario English Catholic Teachers' Association. I am joined today by our general secretary, David Church.

Thank you for allowing me to speak with you today. I'm here representing the 45,000 professionals who teach kindergarten to grade 12 in publicly funded Catholic schools across Ontario.

These are truly unique and difficult times. Ontarians are facing tremendous challenges and making enormous sacrifices. The situation has underscored the importance of strong public services, including publicly funded education. Since March, Ontario's teachers have been doing everything they can to help students and families navigate these new experiences, from an immediate turn to remote learning in the spring, to managing in-class teaching amid new protocols and constraints, to helping students deal with learning gaps and mental health struggles brought by the pandemic. Teachers have risen to the challenge and shown themselves to be consummate professionals, but this year is taking its toll. Teachers are stressed, anxious and exhausted. They're concerned that the extraordinary pressures they are under are preventing them from helping every student realize their full potential.

0910

Teachers want nothing more than to do the job they love in a safe and productive environment. But to be at their best, they need support. Specifically, they need a government that respects their judgment and that puts in place the

necessary investments to make school as safe and productive as possible.

The government says that Ontario has the most robust plan in the country. But as any teacher would tell any student, the real test of achievement is not whether you have beat your peers, but whether you have done everything you could do to complete your task to the best of your ability. By almost any measure, it is clear that that is not the case in Ontario.

I don't want to talk about numbers. As has been pointed out to the Minister of Education many times over the past few weeks, the lives of students, teachers and education workers cannot be reduced to mere data points or dollar signs. Instead, I want to highlight what the lack of action from the government means for our schools and tell you what teachers and students across the province are experiencing.

The most obvious problem is the lack of physical distancing, one of the most important controls to prevent the spread of COVID-19. Even the SickKids report, on which the government claims to have based its school reopening plan, recommended smaller class sizes as a priority strategy. Still, we continue to see schools with class sizes of upwards of 30 students, like three elementary schools in North York which had to close last week due to outbreaks of COVID-19.

Similarly, Ontarians have heard from experts that proper ventilation is crucial for combatting the spread of COVID-19, but the funding provided so far is nowhere near sufficient to match the scale of the problem in our schools. We have recently seen teachers sharing photos of their classroom windows propped open, despite the cooler temperatures outside and with sub-zero temperatures on their way.

The list goes on. From new nurses, custodians and education workers—funding for which amounts to one nurse per 13 schools and one additional custodian per five schools—to transportation protocols that leave drivers and students at risk, it's simply not accurate to say that the government has invested in every reasonable precaution to prevent the spread of COVID-19 in schools.

Teachers very much want schools to remain open, and we know the government shares this goal, but the situation is at its breaking point. All we are asking is that the government invest in the same kinds of health and safety protocols as are expected in every other public space across the province. Instead, with the 2020 budget, they have remained content to hold the course and hope for the best.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Three minutes.

Ms. Liz Stuart: I also need to speak a bit about the learning conditions many students and teachers are facing, because here too we see what a lack of resources provided by the government really means on the ground. Specifically, I want to focus on what has become known as the hybrid learning model.

Because school boards were given insufficient resources to plan for this school year, many have been making drastic changes on the fly. In some cases, as families have left in-person learning due to the lack of confidence in the

government's planning for a second wave, boards have been implementing a learning model that has teachers delivering in-class and remote learning simultaneously. It should go without saying that this is an unproductive and unsustainable model which, in many cases, may exacerbate learning gaps, especially among students from vulnerable populations. We already knew about the many drawbacks of synchronous online learning and about the challenges of delivering in-class learning under the constraints of the COVID-19 protocols. Now we've combined the worst of both worlds into a learning model that serves absolutely no one.

In addition, inconsistencies between provincial and local public health advice puts extraordinary pressure on teachers. Many members of my association have expressed genuine concern about burning out, but at the end of the day, it is not for their own sake that teachers object to these learning conditions. Rather, they are primarily concerned about the effect they have on their students. As one teacher from York region put it, "It's just physically and logistically impossible to do" hybrid learning "and provide equitable education for all kids."

What this all comes down to is a matter of choices. Certainly, nobody would argue that the choices the government has had to make are easy. But now, perhaps more than ever, it's essential to invest in strong public services. Prioritizing safe and healthy schools will enable them to remain open, which is imperative to getting the economy back on track.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): One minute.

Ms. Liz Stuart: The choices that have been made thus far have not set us up for success. As the real experiences of students and teachers show, much more could and should be done to make schools safer and ensure a quality education for all students.

On behalf of Ontario's 45,000 Catholic teachers, I strongly urge the government to reconsider this budget and to put the resources in place that will enable schools to stay open and students to thrive. Thank you.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you. We'll move along to our next presenter, Crowe Valley Conservation Authority. If you can please state your name for the record, and you will have seven minutes for your presentation as well.

Ms. Catherine Redden: Good morning, everyone. My name is Catherine Redden. As chairperson of the Crowe Valley Conservation Authority, I welcome the opportunity to bring comments in response to the proposed amendments to the Conservation Authorities Act.

I'm also a councillor in the municipality of Trent Hills and bring greetings from our council and Mayor Bob Crate this morning. Trent Hills is a small, rural municipality, nestled in the northeast corner of Northumberland county, straddling the historic Trent River and made up of the villages of Warkworth and Hastings and the town of Campbellford, surrounded by some of the best agricultural land in Ontario.

I want to begin by recognizing that there has never been a year like this one in terms of the challenges faced by

Trent Hills, like those faced by similar municipalities across the province. This is definitely a time for all levels of government to be working together to develop and implement well-thought-out plans, resulting in the realization of a strong, long-term economic recovery for the citizens we all represent, so thank you for affording me the opportunity to speak this morning.

As mentioned earlier, I chair the Crowe Valley Conservation Authority, which is situated two hours northeast of the GTA, 50 minutes from Peterborough and 45 minutes from Quinte West and Belleville. This rural watershed is covered with countless wetlands, natural riverbank corridors and forests. About 85% of its 2,006 square kilometres are covered by the rugged terrain of the Canadian Shield, the remaining 15% blanketed by rolling farmlands and limestone regions lying south of Highway 7, with a few small villages and towns dotting the landscape.

This authority is small from a financial perspective, and operates with a bare-bones budget of just over \$1 million. There is virtually no funding allocated to non-core programming at the Crowe. In fact, our per capita levy is approximately \$69 per person, while the provincial average is approximately \$10 to \$15. Our services and programs are delivered in an efficient and effective manner by seven staff and one manager. There are no additional support staff, such as engineers, biologists, GIS technicians or communications staff. We have created an informal network of shared resources with other authorities that we rely upon to create efficiencies.

The Crowe is one of the few authorities operating water control structures. We have 15 of them, and they're located across our watershed for multiple purposes, including flood mitigation. I'd like to point out that all current staff, including the office secretary, are trained as dam operators and can perform those hands-on duties as required.

Our member municipalities have recognized that the value of the programs and services we deliver are essential for this area, despite the pressure it puts on them for financial support, and in turn the authority is able to provide them with planning and technical advice which assist them in fulfilling their own land use planning responsibilities.

So why am I here today? Well, primarily it's to ensure that the voice of a very small, rural conservation authority is heard. You're likely aware of the flurry of communications received from authorities across Ontario, and there is no doubt that many of the proposed amendments will make a significant change to the way they currently operate, particularly to the larger ones.

At this point, I should make it known that my board has endorsed repealing section 6 to allow for additional consultation, debate and study. There's concern that a number of changes introduced have the potential to decrease the ability of the board to manage its roles and responsibilities effectively, and we want to ensure these are positive—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Three minutes.

Ms. Catherine Redden: —steps forward without unintended consequences.

We'd hope that any amendment to the act would improve and continue to honour the province's long-standing partnership with conservation authorities and provide us with the additional necessary tools and financial resources we need to effectively implement our watershed management role. We do recognize, however, that the provincial government has many financial challenges of its own, and this budget needs to be dealt with in a timely manner.

0920

We support the stated objectives of the province to modernize the Conservation Authorities Act, and we participated in consultations with the Ministry of the Environment, Conservation and Parks last November, and in the round tables in February.

Our staff were heartened by Ontario's flooding strategy released earlier this year that suggested this government was prepared to address the long-standing need for updated mapping and improved technical guidelines. Having these important tools available will assist in providing streamlined and consistent decision-making, keep people and property out of high-risk areas, as well as not aggravating or creating new flood risks.

Despite limited resources, we strive to ensure our current permitting process is timely, provides for necessary consultation and allows requested development as much as possible. Our staff make every effort to ensure that natural hazards and the heritage and water features will not be negatively affected by proposed development, but at the same time, we work to ensure the completed project itself will not be impacted by hazards, including flooding.

The Crowe Valley has always promoted the right development in the appropriate location, to minimize loss of life and property while balancing the development needs of its small, rural communities. Since 2017, we have processed 917 permits—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): One minute.

Ms. Catherine Redden: —with eight board hearings, and only one of them resulting in a denial. Typically, if there's a hearing, compromise is the end result.

It's our sincere hope that the proposed permit process amendments will assist in reducing red tape and create additional conditions for growth. And we're more than willing to implement the revised changes to the CA Act after further consultation, which will aid in the overall development of what we currently believe is a good permitting process.

It's the goal of the Crowe to balance the needs of the environment with the requirements of watershed residents and visitors. As a small authority, we can provide many on-the-ground lessons to assist you in finding workable solutions for the challenges that lie ahead. Please feel free to consult with us at any time, and thank you for the opportunity to address you today. Thank you.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you so much. We'll start with the questions now.

MPP Barrett, can you please confirm your attendance before we go to the questions?

Mr. Toby Barrett: Yes, Chair. Toby Barrett in Port Dover. I'm still trying to get on my computer, thank you.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you.

All right, so we'll start the questions with the opposition. MPP Shaw?

Ms. Sandy Shaw: Thank you, Chair, and good morning. Thank you to all the presenters this morning; I really appreciate you being here.

I'm going to start my questioning with the Ontario English Catholic Teachers' Association. I want to again thank you and your members for all the work that you are doing to teach our kids and to keep them safe in these really difficult times.

I share with you the disappointment that this government—current figures say that they are sitting on \$9.3 billion of unspent money that could have been put into classrooms to keep kids safe. They could have capped class sizes at 15 early on to make it safe.

We're also very disappointed, for example, by the Auditor General's report that came out saying that this is a government that is not listening to their public health experts. And then rather than consult with organizations like yourself, who understand classrooms, they chose to spend millions of dollars hiring American consultants to advise them. We're disappointed by the performance of this government so far when it comes to public education.

But I have to say, one of the things I want to ask you very specifically about—and I get calls in my constituency office and speak to teachers and parents who hear that they are getting conflicting and inconsistent advice or guidelines—or protocols, I guess, would be the word—when it comes to handling COVID cases. It seems to me, I could be wrong, but there are not clear guidelines. That's one of the complaints that people have around schools where they have COVID-19 cases. It's also a complaint in general. Is that your experience, that it's not clear to teachers and parents alike what the protocols are if there is a COVID-19 case?

Ms. Liz Stuart: Absolutely. That has been something that we have certainly heard from our members and something that we have seen, and something that we have been stressing since day one, that we needed to have clear direction and consistent protocols across the province, because the virus doesn't change depending on what community you're in. Maybe the viral load in terms of how many may change, but the virus itself does not. So there should be standard protocols.

I'll give you one very quick example. We had a teacher, who is an itinerant teacher, going from classroom to classroom. One of their classes was placed on home quarantine, and the teacher was told by local public health, "No, you're low-risk, so you can go to school. You can go back to work." So they did; they followed that advice—only to receive a call days later from Ontario Public Health saying, "Oh no, you should have stayed home."

Those are the types of inconsistencies that raise real concerns and also really heighten anxieties, because

teachers in classrooms aren't quite sure what advice they're supposed to follow, because it isn't clear and it isn't clearly laid out.

I have begged and I have pleaded and I am not above doing it again: Include us in the conversation. Let us be part of the discussions. Let us help, because we all want the same thing, which is for our schools to be open and safe and sustainable. That's all we're asking for, is to have a voice at that table.

Ms. Sandy Shaw: Let me just pick up on that, having a voice at that table, because you represent tens of thousands of members who have years and years of experience in teaching. It can't be more underscored, as you said earlier, that this is a job that your members, your teachers love to do, and they're doing their best in these times.

I have to say, it doesn't seem to me that this government acknowledges that you are partners in resolving the problems and coming up with solutions when it comes to COVID-19. The government—I've heard them comment recently about teachers obstructing COVID-19 efforts. I find that very disrespectful. It adds the kind of confusion—it's the kind of noise that we don't need when we're all trying to do our best.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Three minutes.

Ms. Sandy Shaw: I don't know if that's something you wanted to comment on.

Ms. Liz Stuart: Absolutely. It's not helpful. It doesn't move us forward. It's just that continual effort to distract and to divert from what the true issue is, and the true issue is, how do we keep our students safe? How do we keep the workers safe in that environment every day? What can we do together? Because as a practitioner—I myself am one; not currently, but I certainly will be in September—I have a very different perspective of how schools operate every day. Teachers in schools can give some really valuable input around what works and what doesn't work, and what is the best way we can keep everybody safe. That's what they've been asking for.

I was a classroom teacher during H1N1 and during the SARS pandemic, when we had those conversations then. I can tell you, lining students up every day to wash their hands four or five times a day when I didn't have a sink in my classroom because I was in a portable was really problematic. Saying that we'll just have hand sanitizer is not a quick and easy fix, because in schools, that doesn't last very long.

There are all of these other issues that educators really would have liked to have been able to give input on to talk about the practicalities of how we can make this work. There's this real focus that union bosses—which apparently is what I am—aren't able to give that true input. Well, if you don't trust me, then let me bring together a team of classroom practitioners and listen to them. Ultimately, the message will be the same because it's their lived life experience. That is what I continue to try and bring forward for them. So we'd really like to cut through all of that rhetoric. Let's just focus on the job at hand.

Ms. Sandy Shaw: Thank you. In the time that we have left—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): One minute.

Ms. Sandy Shaw: —I want to say that we, Ontario's official opposition NDP, put forward an opposition day motion to cap class sizes at 15. The government turned it down. We have been saying it's never too late to do the right thing, never too late to spend the money to keep our kids safe. Specifically, it's never too late to do proper testing in schools, especially now with areas, represented, for example, by MPP Hunter, where they're seeing asymptomatic cases and they're seeing outbreaks in classrooms. Would you like to see this government do the right thing and invest more to keep our kids safe?

0930

Ms. Liz Stuart: Absolutely. We'd love to have that happen, but we'd also just love to be able to have a conversation. Let's talk about how we can do things, because we have solutions, and we have offered solutions that have been ignored about how we can do certain things that wouldn't cost us much money. There are things that we can do to make schools safe, and we just want to be part of that conversation. We're not here to obstruct in any way.

Ms. Sandy Shaw: Thank you very much.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you so much.

We'll move to the independent members now. MPP Hunter.

Ms. Mitzie Hunter: Thanks very much to all the presenters today. I want to start with the Catholic teachers. I really appreciate you being here, Liz. I know that you, as well as the other federations—we heard from OSSTF and ETFO yesterday—have really been kept out of the safe back-to-school. I'm not sure why, given the depth of experience that you and your members have and the fact that you are really the ones on the front line; your members are the ones on the front line each and every day. I want to also thank you for the work that you are doing to make sure that learning happens for students across the province.

I want to ask you specifically about the toll that students, families and teachers are under in terms of their mental health and well-being. What are you hearing from your members about how they are handling all of the pressures this year, including the endless amounts of changes to learning modules and to configurations of schools, largely because the province has not given the resources to our education system to keep the virus out of schools?

Ms. Liz Stuart: That's a huge question, and I'll be honest: It's a pan-Canadian situation right now. The CTF currently ran a survey where a high response of teachers—I think it was well over 70%—responded back that they feel under a great deal of stress and strain right now. A lot of what we hear from our membership is centred in security. It's not as simple as, "I go to school and I know that these are the kids that I'm teaching and this is what I'm going to be teaching," because it changes.

I just want to tell you how asinine it is right now in some of our boards where they brought in this hybrid model. I want you to imagine for a moment that you're trying to run

a child's birthday party, maybe for 30 five-year-olds. You have 10 of them in the room with you and 20 of them doing it at home remotely, and you need to try and keep all of those kids on task and supervised all day. That's what some kindergarten teachers are being asked to do, along with their ECE partners. It's just unconscionable.

What's really taking its toll: These teachers are doing it. They are coming up with so many different inventive ways to try to reach out, to try to make sure they're connecting, but their frustration is that they know they're not. They know that there are students they're not going to be able to connect to, and it's going to be their most vulnerable. That is happening in many boards from K to 8.

And then, in our high schools, we have kids who are already starting to disconnect from learning and teachers who are desperately trying to keep them involved, engaged and enrolled in school. It's difficult to track when students are there—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): One minute.

Ms. Liz Stuart: —it's difficult to track the work that they're producing and it's difficult to provide them with the necessary supports that they need. I think that one of the biggest emotions we feel from our members is complete and utter frustration, exasperation. They are exhausted, because it's truly exhausting trying to be innovative every minute of the day, which is what they're trying to do right now.

All I can do is continue to advocate on their behalf and say that they're asking for help. They're just asking for help, for someone to listen to them about what's needed to help their students—and, quite frankly, to help them, because I have real concerns around their health moving forward and around keeping that robust, innovative energy that teachers bring every day to their classrooms. That's exhausting, and I'm worried that they're not going to be able to keep that up. They can't keep that up.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you.

Ms. Mitzie Hunter: Thank you so much.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): We'll move to the government side now. MPP Kramp.

Mr. Daryl Kramp: Once again, welcome to each and every participant here today. It's great to have the opportunity, of course, to listen to many, many sides of the equation. We all have been going through some unbelievably challenging times, there's no doubt about it.

I would like to share my time with my colleague from Peterborough. I'll just ask a brief question, though. I'd like to address my comment and question to the Crowe Valley Conservation Authority, to Catherine Redden, who I have known over the years. Catherine, I must say right off the bat, I represent a number of the conservation authorities, being in that "cottage country," per se, whether it's from the Great Lakes through the Bay of Quinte, to the Crowe, to the Moira, to the Salmon, to the Rideau, and I can honestly say kudos to your organization. You really are the model of efficiency and effectiveness. With the smallest budget by far of all the conservation authorities, you have been unbelievably effective, and so let me just thank you

on behalf of our entire community—certainly, our government, but all the people of the province of Ontario.

I only wish that we could have that kind of effectiveness all across the province. But of course, your size gives you that opportunity as well, because you're right: Everybody knows everybody, and you have that personal contact, that you're able to be able to deal with not just emotions but circumstances. As you said, you've found the opportunity to be flexible, to provide the compromise when necessary, to certainly bring forward the protection of our environment, of our watershed, but also with the people who use it.

In this COVID time now, we're into a whole different situation, where, obviously, it is much more safe if we can be outdoors, if we can enjoy the great outdoors, if we can share the best of what nature has to offer. And yet, of course, unfortunately, too many people don't have that opportunity. But when you do, your summer is extremely engaged and involved. In the off-season, I'm wondering, has there been any thought within your conservation authority to try to either access or highlight winter activities within your conservation authority's outreach?

Ms. Catherine Redden: Thank you, MPP Kramp. I'm very pleased to see your happy face here this morning. As you said, we've known each other for a while, and we've also had the opportunity, on behalf of the authority, to meet with you and discuss the various issues and challenges of operating a small authority.

And yes, there is a considerable amount of attention being paid, particularly, as you know, to the trails—the Trans Canada Trail and the Hastings trail—that run through our conservation authority. North Hastings and parts of Peterborough and Haliburton are all year-round tourist draws, whether it's snowmobiling or other motorized vehicles on the trails or just walking, and horses. Then in the summer, of course, we saw our numbers swell beyond what we were able to handle.

But certainly, we are making every effort to find ways to better utilize the natural resources we have and to ensure that those businesses and services in that part of the community also benefit from the individuals who visit. Many of them depend on the seasonal, whether it's summer, winter, fall or the shoulder months, of having individuals come. I must say that this year we saw a huge, tremendous increase. I can speak from the partnership of Trent Hills and Crowe Valley on the Crowe Bridge Conservation Area, which, in actual fact, sadly had to close itself, fence itself in, due to the overflow and the stress of the individuals who came to escape the city, escape COVID and take advantage of what we enjoy on a regular basis.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Three minutes.

Ms. Catherine Redden: If there were anything, I would say, in terms of our discussions today, it would be in particular that the smaller conservation authorities, the ones in the rural areas that people are flocking to and come out and enjoy—that we're able to find some method of financing or some funding stream that could enhance the sort of work that we do now. We are planning for the

spring, whether it's at the Gut, at McGeachy, whether it's at Callaghan's Rapids or even the Crowe. We have to put in those facilities that individuals are looking for when they come from the city. That's our biggest pressure right now, as well, as you say, keeping up a good authority and keeping our communities well served.

0940

Mr. Daryl Kramp: Thank you, Catherine. I'll turn it over to my colleague from Peterborough.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): MPP Smith.

Mr. Dave Smith: How much time is left?

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Two minutes.

Mr. Dave Smith: Two minutes?

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Yes.

Mr. Dave Smith: Okay. I'm not sure I can get into too much in-depth on this one, so I'll probably pick it up more in the second round.

I'm going to jump completely off topic because there isn't an awful lot of time left. I'm going to jump over to Kerrie Blaise, if I could. Kerrie, we're in the middle of a renovation and the barn doors behind you are exactly what my wife has been looking for. Whereabouts did you get them?

Ms. Kerrie Blaise: Thank you, MPP Smith. We're actually in a state of renovating as well. They're not actually hung yet; they're just for show. They are difficult.

I welcome speaking to any of your questions regarding CELA's submission that we withdraw schedules 6 and 8 in its entirety, but thank you.

Mr. Dave Smith: I will, absolutely, in the next round when we have some time to actually get into depth. Do you mind if I reach out to you afterwards to find out where you got those doors? Because, like I said, that is exactly what my wife wants.

And, Mr. Chair, I'll defer then to the second round. Thank you.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you so much.

We'll go back to the independent members for their second round. MPP Hunter.

Ms. Mitzie Hunter: Perhaps, Kerrie, you can speak to the concerns that you have for schedules 6 and 8. You've asked for them to be withdrawn. I'm just wondering, from your perspective, what this means, should the government not listen to so many people who have come forward to committee, and others, to withdraw those schedules. What's the impact?

Ms. Kerrie Blaise: Thank you, MPP Hunter. In response, I'll just note that the proposed amendments in Bill 229 would result in the status quo of habitat loss and degradation being upheld. Protecting the environment and Ontario's biodiversity requires that we direct and encourage economic growth towards less damaging practices. Without timely and meaningful protection and restoration actions through our provincial laws, these endangered species will be lost.

We're also experiencing the interrelated and twin crises of climate change and biodiversity loss. Unless forestry, which is contained in schedule 8 of Bill 229, is brought in

line with the Endangered Species Act in its purposes of species protection and recovery and the prohibitions around killing, harming and harassing endangered species, there is no other way or, indeed, there is no other statute in Ontario that fills that gap with those objects and those goals to respond to the ever-increasing threats to species and their habitats.

I'd like to invite my colleague Dr. Lintner to respond to the schedule 6 changes.

Dr. Anastasia Lintner: Thank you.

Thank you, MPP Hunter, for your question. What we're concerned about with schedule 6 is that the means and changes to the scope and the breadth and the procedures, and the still continued uncertainty about what regulations will be made in support of it—it's a system that has been working well, particularly around the land use planning permits, as Councillor Redden was speaking to. It's a system that's working. To the points that things are not working, there's a very passionate public and municipalities and conservation authorities who want to continue that partnership with the province and have those conversations.

In this particular budget, there are no spending requirements associated with these two schedules. Removing them and having more dialogue does not prevent the province moving ahead with the budget proposals that are in place.

Ms. Mitzie Hunter: That's great. Maybe we can switch to Councillor Redden. You mentioned that between 2017 and 2020, 900 permit applications were processed and only one was denied. Do you believe that the ministry—or the minister, really, because the powers are being ascribed to the minister—will have the capacity to do that level of processing in an appropriate way that protects local watersheds, wetlands—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): One minute left.

Ms. Mitzie Hunter: —and systems?

Ms. Catherine Redden: Sorry, I have to apologize. I didn't catch the first part of that question, but I think you're asking, if the changes were implemented, would there be the same effectiveness in what we're currently doing?

Ms. Mitzie Hunter: Yes.

Ms. Catherine Redden: Well, as I said, we are very effective in what we're doing—and I can only speak for our authority at this point—because we're very hands-on. Our staff go out. They visit. They consult. They work. And—I guess I'm bragging—we have a very good record of approvals using that process.

I guess it's a little difficult for me to speak to what the minister would do, primarily because it isn't well laid out. I would hope and trust that those plans would be there. Our concern currently is—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you. Sorry to cut you off. The time has come up for independent members.

We'll move to the government. MPP Smith.

Mr. Dave Smith: Thanks, Chair. I'm actually going to start with Liz Stuart from OECA. Liz, you talked about

a fair bit about hybrid learning and so on. What are your thoughts on e-learning itself?

Ms. Liz Stuart: Well, as you know, we have some considerable concerns around e-learning and always did when the government first brought forward the concept of mandatory, only because we have such real concerns around the inequity and the gaps in learning. Students, traditionally, have not been successful in that format.

So that underscores our real concerns with the online learning that we have all had to sort of plunge ourselves into—which, absolutely, when it was necessary, when everybody had to be home. It was not optimal, but it was better than nothing and it allowed some connections to occur.

Our concern now is that when you're working in a hybrid model, so when you have students, some who are at home and some who are sat in front of you in the classroom, and you're trying to teach both at the same time, it's just not feasible because there are going to be gaps. Unfortunately, a lot of the time it's our most vulnerable students who fall through those cracks. Because it's just not possible to keep track of everything and everyone when you are trying to—we have teachers who have upwards of three devices operating in their classroom at any one time. They have one device that they use so they can project onto their Smart Board, they have one device so that they can keep track of their students who are working at home, and then they have another device that they're using so that they can interact, plus they're trying to work with students who are physically in front of them, and this is with younger students. Even with high school students that's a real struggle, because it's difficult. Even when you're physically in a space with students, keeping their attention and keeping them focused is a skill, and it's a skill that teachers across this province have.

Mr. Dave Smith: Respectfully, as the former system administrator for the Virtual Learning Centre of Trillium Lakelands District School Board, e-learning is one of those delivery methods that can be very effective, and it can be less than effective. I will agree with you 100% on that. If it is treated in the same way that the Independent Learning Centre is, where the thought process is that the student is not engaged in synchronous learning, that it is all asynchronous, then, yes, you do not see as good a result from it because the student is not engaged. However, when a teacher is involved and it is a synchronous delivery of it, you're seeing significantly better results from it, and in a lot of cases, it is as good or better than in-classroom. That is what the statistics bear out from, and I can speak first-hand to it, having been the system administrator for a virtual learning centre.

You talked about the desire to have 15 students per classroom. Do you have any idea how many teachers need to be hired in order to do that across Ontario?

Ms. Liz Stuart: The reality is, it would depend upon the solution we come up with. That's one of the things that we wanted to engage in when we wanted to have those dialogues around other creative solutions—because we

heard loud and clear everybody needed to be flexible—other creative solutions that wouldn't mean that we had to do this mass hiring.

0950

We actually wanted to be part of that conversation, because there are some solutions that were put forward. It did involve modifying school days, but at least it would have enabled for sustainable learning to take place, and it would have made sure that we could keep cohorts truly cohorted so that we could have kept class sizes smaller. We just wanted to be part of the conversation.

Mr. Dave Smith: Forty-five thousand teachers and ECEs would have needed to have been hired to reach the goal that you talked about. We hired 2,700 teachers across Ontario and about 140 ECEs so far. Do you have any data or statistics that could demonstrate where—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Three minutes.

Mr. Dave Smith:—find that many qualified teachers to meet the requirements of that?

Ms. Liz Stuart: As I said, that's if that's the model you go with. There are numerous other models that can be put into place where we can work to bring those class sizes down. Those are the exact conversations—just as you and I are having now, that's what we want to have, in a meaningful way, at a table where we're able to talk about what all of the options are. Let's put them all out there and let's really talk about how we can make the system work, how we can make sure that we're engaging with all students and all students have an opportunity to partake and be safe. That is our primary concern. We're merely asking for that.

Mr. Dave Smith: You don't have any data, then, that would demonstrate where we could find those teachers.

Could you [*inaudible*] what a qualified teacher is? What's OECTA's definition of a qualified teacher?

Ms. Liz Stuart: A qualified teacher? It's as per the college of teachers. You need to hold your B.Ed. You need to have your bachelor of education.

Mr. Dave Smith: We made a change to regulation 274, because you're correct: Right now, the definition of a qualified teacher is someone who has a bachelor of education, not that they have any expertise in the subject area that they would be teaching. It is highly possible and probable, and actually has happened, where you have a posting for, say, English, but the five most senior people on the list don't have teachables in English, and the principal, then, is required to hire the person who had basically sat around the longest time without being hired full-time.

Ms. Liz Stuart: That actually is not accurate, because part of the component was that you had to have the qualification.

Mr. Dave Smith: A qualified teacher, according to you guys, is a teacher who holds a bachelor of education.

Ms. Liz Stuart: No. In general—please let me explain.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): One minute.

Ms. Liz Stuart: In general, absolutely: That's a qualified teacher. But if I'm applying for a particular position, one of the things that I have to have is the qualifications

for that position. I'm an elementary classroom teacher. I can't apply to teach high school English because I'm not qualified. I'm not senior qualified. It's not on my card. I'm not able to do that.

Just to be completely clear, we're talking about apples and oranges. To be a qualified teacher under the college of teachers and to be licensed in Ontario, I need to have one set to be—

Mr. Dave Smith:—area of expertise needs to be either primary-junior, intermediate-senior—

Ms. Liz Stuart: That's right. And in order to apply for a position with a school board, I need to hold the qualifications for that position within the school board. That's the way it actually works.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you so much. We have to move to the opposition side now. MPP Arthur.

Mr. Ian Arthur: Given that this is the public's sole opportunity to provide feedback on a once-in-a-generation pandemic budget, I will try to use the time for something other than remodelling my home and engaging in what can only be called mansplaining to the very qualified person representing teachers in the Catholic school board.

That was borderline offensive. You interrupted her constantly. There are many people I respect in this Legislature, and I started out respecting you, Mr. Smith, but how you conduct yourself on an ongoing basis has completely undermined it, to the point where I find you one of the most distasteful people in that Legislature.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): I will remind the members to be respectful to the members and maintain the decorum of the committee. Please focus on asking the question to the presenters and direct any comments through the Chair, please.

MPP Arthur?

Ms. Mitzie Hunter: Hi, Chair. Can I speak? It's MPP Hunter.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): It's the time of the opposition, MPP Hunter, unless you have a point of order.

Ms. Mitzie Hunter: I believe it is a point of privilege, Chair. I just really do need to speak.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Do you have a point of order?

Ms. Mitzie Hunter: Yes, Chair.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Please, go ahead.

Ms. Mitzie Hunter: Chair, I do believe that the witnesses have come forward today and they're doing everything we ask them to do. Some of the lines of questioning this morning have been out of line. I do want it to stay with the review of Bill 229 in a respectful manner for all witnesses, and I ask the Chair to please reinforce that to all members.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you, MPP Hunter. This is not a valid point of order. However, I will remind the members to keep their comments on the topic, please.

Ms. Mitzie Hunter: Thank you, Chair.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): I'll go back to MPP Arthur.

Mr. Ian Arthur: Thank you very much, and thank you, MPP Hunter.

I will start with the Canadian Environmental Law Association. The schedule in particular—I want to compare this to schedule 10 of Bill 66. It has undertones that are very, very similar in schedule 6, the readjustment of conservation authorities. One could, I think, fairly reasonably argue that the goal at the end of both of these initiatives is the same, and same with the changes to the Endangered Species Act and so forth. They failed in court on this numerous times, and there are challenges being brought forward against this bill.

Why do you think the government keeps making the same mistake again and again and again in not respecting the Environmental Bill of Rights and pursuing these avenues that are in conflict with the law? Either Kerrie or Anastasia.

Ms. Kerrie Blaise: Thank you for your question, MPP Arthur. Time and time again, as you point out, we are seeing that the Environmental Registry is not being used for the purpose that it was established for under the Environmental Bill of Rights. The Environmental Registry does provide a means of giving information and providing information to the public about decisions which are environmentally significant.

CELA and others have been very vocal in their opposition to the misuse or abuse of the Environmental Registry. Bill 229 is a perfect example of that, because this is not a proposal that was on the Environmental Registry. There was no mandated public consultation, and what we're seeing is that these amendments are being fast-tracked lacking that public input.

To our point regarding the ability of Indigenous communities to engage, the province has heard from First Nation communities on other related environmental matters that they are unable to participate due to the COVID-19 pandemic. So to move forward with amendments when the crown's constitutional duty is almost certainly not able to be met, and we're not going to have the critical, valuable Indigenous and public information on social and environmental rights, is a huge deficiency within the government's own decision-making process.

Mr. Ian Arthur: The opposition to this is incredibly widespread. We had, again, a very similar group to schedule 10 in Bill 66. AMO came on board yesterday, and the Ontario Federation of Agriculture. They were the two that led to the tipping point of the government withdrawing the last schedule.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Two minutes.

Mr. Ian Arthur: I hope that there's a similar response to this as they recognize how widespread the opposition to it actually is.

Ms. Stuart, I'm going to move to you now quickly. Data points are good, but can data points reflect in-classroom experience with different learning styles and the needs of children?

Ms. Liz Stuart: No, absolutely not. The reality is that our students come to us with many different needs, from many different homes and with many different requirements. It's difficult enough in our regular schools, before

we had all of these changes, to meet the needs of all of those students.

I think we need to be very careful when we just point to numbers and data and use a spreadsheet rather than talking about the people who are impacted every day, those little bodies that come into our classrooms each day. How do we make sure that we're keeping them safe? How do we make sure—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you. I apologize to cut you off. Unfortunately, this is all the time we have for this morning. Thank you to all three presenters for coming this morning and for your presentations.

The committee is now in recess until 3 p.m. this afternoon. Thank you.

The committee recessed from 1000 to 1500.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Good afternoon, everyone, and welcome back. We are continuing public hearings on Bill 229, An Act to implement Budget measures and to enact, amend and repeal various statutes.

GRAND RIVER
ENVIRONMENTAL NETWORK
ONTARIO COLLEGE OF TEACHERS
MERIT OPENSHP CONTRACTORS
ASSOCIATION OF ONTARIO

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): I will now call upon our first presenter this afternoon, Grand River Environmental Network. If you can please state your name for the record, and you will have seven minutes for your presentation. Unmute, please.

Mr. Greg Michalenko: Okay. My name is Greg Michalenko. The Grand River Environmental Network is a voluntary, non-profit association of residents of the Grand River watershed whose objective is to safeguard and improve the environment of the watershed. We'll talk about the Grand River Conservation Authority as a model river basin management entity.

The GRCA, the oldest authority in Canada, was created by the government of Ontario in 1946. By and large, the work of the conservation authorities has been effective. Under the care of the GRCA, our local Grand River has been transformed from a seriously polluted and industrially contaminated stream to a watershed with greatly reduced flood threats and vastly improved water quality.

We are greatly concerned that schedule 6 is a counter-productive approach that will seriously damage the valuable work and accomplishments of our conservation authorities. Much of their success is due to the evolution from the original top-down administrative format to a far more effective and financially economical model that recognizes that successful outcomes of leading-edge management of large river basin systems only occur if there is widespread public acceptance of and involvement in the programs of the authorities.

The GRCA knows how to promote and nurture productive relationships with community groups. Here are a few illustrated examples of their expertise. I'd like you

to look at pages 5 and 6 of my text, which show a couple of photographs.

The Township of Woolwich Environmental Enhancement Committee has for over 25 years benefited from what they acknowledge as invaluable services from the GRCA provided to two committee groups: the Clean Waterways Group and Trees for Woolwich. Staff from the GRCA offered their expertise and local knowledge to help make possible the planting of over 50,000 trees. Here is what the land looked like to start with. You can see it's badly eroded and has very many problems. They conducted hands-on visits with the volunteers. They helped the groups to establish collaborative relationships with farmers. They helped Trees for Woolwich establish their own volunteer tree nursery. The chair of the committee has written, "The GRCA is an essential part of our past and future success as volunteers dedicated to greening" Ontario. Here are the results of that same piece of land 15 years later. This was done through a voluntary initiative and it was nurtured by the GRCA.

In 1971, and again in 1974, floods caused much damage in Cambridge and Brantford. The Ontario government ministries announced there would have to be a dam built at a cost of \$300 million. The GRCA, with its intimate knowledge of the area and experienced staff, were able to design a flood control program that was far more sophisticated, much less intrusive and considerably less expensive. Money was saved.

The benefits of the GRCA's programs are also financial. Studies by the province indicated that a very expensive water pipeline would have to be built to bring water from Lake Erie to bolster the limited groundwater resources of fast-growing Kitchener, Waterloo, Cambridge and Brantford. Fortunately, under the leadership and wisely chosen policies and programs of the GRCA, in collaboration with municipalities, the goodwill of residents was easily recruited to address water consumption. The result has been a voluntary 50% reduction in water use, and an estimated \$2-billion expenditure has been averted. We don't need to build a pipeline, and residents save money on their water bills now every month.

Collaborative administrative models are the key to success in leading-edge river basin management. The collaborative—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Three minutes.

Mr. Greg Michalenko: Okay, I'll leave that off.

The GRCA's finest moments: In 1999, an Australian company, Thiess Environmental Services, established the Thiess International Riverprize to recognize outstanding river basin management worldwide. Submissions were made to be judged by several fundamental criteria: a long-term, approved strategy or watershed plan; collaborations and partnerships are required both financially and from a volunteer perspective; stakeholder engagement through effective communication and outreach must be demonstrated.

The GRCA entered a submission. Its preamble was, "Ours is a story of the recovery of the Grand River from years of degradation and industrialization and how we are working together to keep it healthy for future generations."

They put in a submission, and in July 2000 learned that it had won. They sent several representatives on September 6, 20 years ago, to Brisbane, Australia, with, of course, a spectacular award ceremony occurring the next day and, finally, a celebration. Chairman Krause recalls, "It was the moment of a lifetime. Imagine standing on a stage at the other side of the world, in front of the world's most respected authorities on river management, and being told that this year you are the best!"

Australians love big celebrations, and the Thiess organization was no exception. First, the Riverprize citation was read: The GRCA "has shown remarkable achievement across the range of judging criteria. The authority offers important lessons for river managers everywhere. It has delivered remarkable environmental success while also providing for human needs, a delicate balancing act that communities and governments struggle with all over the world."

Next came the celebratory Riverfeast. The Victoria Bridge in the heart of Brisbane was cordoned off, and thousands of guests sat down to a lavish dinner served by the city's leading restaurants. The evening ended with a spectacular fireworks display.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): One minute.

Mr. Greg Michalenko: The media were full of articles and interviews that lavished praise on the guests from Ontario.

The GRCA received many congratulatory letters on winning the Riverprize. Ontario Premier Mike Harris appreciatively and enthusiastically wrote: "The GRCA was the first watershed and river management organization in Canada, and the third oldest in the world. This award reflects the respect and admiration of your industry. The contribution you have made to the community is an inspiration to other organizations and individuals and to all of Ontario."

The Ontario conservation authorities have developed and flourished for 74 years under 11 different premiers from three political parties. The initiating government was that of George Drew. In all this time, the authorities' independence in exercising their designated responsibilities was always respected and appreciated. Unfortunately, it does not appear to be appreciated now. We request—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you. I apologize to cut you off. The time has come up.

Before I move to our next presenter, I would like to do an attendance check. MPP Kusendova, can you please confirm your attendance?

Ms. Natalia Kusendova: Yes. Hi, Chair. This is MPP Natalia Kusendova, and I'm calling from my riding of Mississauga Centre. Thank you.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you.

Our next presenter is the Ontario College of Teachers. If you can please state your name for the record, and you can get right into your presentation.

Ms. Nicole van Woudenberg: Good afternoon, everyone. My name is Nicole van Woudenberg, and I'm the chair of council at the Ontario College of Teachers.

Ms. Chantal Bélisle: Good afternoon, everyone. My name is Chantal Bélisle, and I'm the deputy registrar of the Ontario College of Teachers.

Ms. Nicole van Woudenberg: We are here today to support this groundbreaking legislation that will further help safeguard Ontario's students and modernize the operations of the Ontario College of Teachers. This bill reinforces many of the recommendations the college council has made in recent years. The amendments reinforce the teaching profession's promise to uphold and exemplify its ethical standards of care, trust, respect and integrity. These changes will make it easier for the college to fulfill its mission to protect the interests and well-being of Ontario students. The modernization of the college's governance structure will also better serve the public interest by strengthening trust and confidence in Ontario's teaching profession.

I'll pass it on to Chantal.

Ms. Chantal Bélisle: Thank you, Nicole.

We ask for stronger regulations to protect students. An amendment to make acts of hatred more explicit in regulation further enables the college to help eliminate racism and other discriminatory actions in education. This speaks directly to our long-standing commitment for inclusivity and respect for diversity in work that is currently under way by the college to develop an additional qualification on anti-Black racism and a professional advisory to help guide members' practice.

We ask for stronger penalties and broader definitions for acts of professional misconduct related to sexual abuse and child pornography. By aligning these heinous acts to Canada's Criminal Code, the college can better protect students and only permit those who deserve to teach to do so. These speak directly to our mandate to protect the public interest. Creating a proactive sexual abuse prevention program parallels the college's focus on furthering teacher education. The program will articulate educational requirements for college members and provide clear guidelines for the conduct of members with students.

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We ask for the ability to ensure accuracy during our investigations and hearings process. By making it possible for the college to order medical assessments during the investigation committee stage, we can ensure matters will be properly referred to the appropriate adjudicative committee. This underscores our commitment to fairness, timeliness and efficiency in resolving discipline matters.

We ask to keep all discipline decisions public. By enabling us to do so, the college strengthens its commitment to public accountability and transparency. We are confident that these changes to the Ontario College of Teachers Act will enable the college to meet its mandate to protect Ontario's students.

I'll hand it over to Nicole.

Ms. Nicole van Woudenberg: Thank you, Chantal.

In relation to governance, the Ontario College of Teachers is Canada's largest self-regulatory body. We continue to be at the forefront of professional regulation in Ontario, as well as nationally and internationally. We are

committed to continuous improvement, which is why we commissioned an independent report two years ago to find efficiencies in our governance structure. The review informed our council's recommendations to the government and has resulted in most of the proposed legislative changes you are considering today.

The benefits to the college, the public interest and Ontario's certified teachers are numerous. The college's *raison d'être* is to protect the public interest, and the new governance model will support the college's efforts in this regard.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Three minutes.

Ms. Nicole van Woudenberg: The equal representation on our council and statutory and regulatory committees will more clearly demonstrate self-regulation by including members of the profession and members of the public working together to set the direction in the public interest.

The new structure will enable more individuals to be involved in our work, as council and committee members will be distinct from each other. Moving forward, those who will serve on council and various committees and panels will be required to have the skills and competencies to best serve in those distinct roles. It is a democratic process that recognizes the critical importance of professional expertise and experience in roles that are crucial to safeguarding students. Importantly, our members told us that they would be more likely to take part in the college's work if they could apply for the roles available instead of taking part in an expensive, lengthy and intensive election process.

The college has always been a leader of regulatory changes and trends, and the proposed legislation helps to evolve our governance structure to serve as a model for regulatory governance in Ontario.

I'll pass it to Chantal.

Ms. Chantal Bélisle: Thank you.

In closing, in the coming months, the college will work closely with a transitional supervisory officer to ensure a smooth transition to the new governance structure. The changes proposed in Bill 229 are profound and will have a positive and long-standing impact, not only safeguarding Ontario's students and ensuring the college will continue to fulfill its mandate to protect the public interest, but no doubt influencing the modernization of professional regulation generally.

Thank you for the opportunity to share our thoughts. We would be pleased to answer any questions.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you so much. We'll go to our next presenter, Merit OpenShop Contractors Association of Ontario. If you can please state your name for the record, and you will have seven minutes for your presentation. You may start.

Mr. Mike Gallardo: Mike Gallardo, president and CEO, Merit Ontario.

Good afternoon, everyone. Thank you, Chair and members of the committee, for the invitation to appear today. Today gives me the opportunity to share our members' strong support for measures contained in budget

2020 related to the training of the next generation of skilled trades workers.

My name is Mike Gallardo, president and CEO of Merit Ontario. Our association represents contractors in every trade, across all regions in Ontario. Our association was founded to advocate for the rights of all contractors to bid on all public infrastructure projects, regardless of labour affiliation. We also believe that every worker has a right to a secret ballot vote when choosing that affiliation. We continue that fight for construction workers. Unfortunately, they are the only workers in Ontario who are still denied that right.

The recently announced budget is encouraging to our members, the construction sector as a whole and the many small and medium-sized businesses across this province. The government's focus on addressing gaps within the skilled trades and in apprenticeship training is very welcoming. Merit Ontario looks forward to participating in this conversation. In particular, we want to highlight and commend the government for their unwavering support of the skilled trades and the measures contained in budget 2020.

Of note, we face dual issues in the labour supply for skilled trades: first, attracting people to skilled trades as a career choice; second, encouraging employers to participate toward solving this problem. Many journeypersons are approaching retirement age and not enough young people are deciding on the skilled trades as a career path. We believe the measures contained in budget 2020 will address this while focusing on the second of these challenges: employer participation.

We must encourage employer participation and training. The budget contains specific measures to accomplish this. Our view is that without the buy-in of the employer community, training programs often go unused or do not meet the needs of the labour market. We believe that by encouraging employers and trade associations to take a leadership role on training, the Ford government has addressed this key concern.

The establishment of a new Skills Development Fund, which will provide \$30 million over two years, beginning in 2021, to support a blend of operational capital enhancements for non-college training providers, businesses and associations that train apprentices, will be absolutely critical. This funding will allow for more training centres to be built and for more apprentices to be trained. We believe that this is a real game changer for those entering the skilled trades as a career path. We also believe that the funding will allow Merit Ontario to recruit and support a cohort of up to 450 apprentices, from start to completion, for their apprenticeship training, which can take up to about four years.

Another key initiative contained in budget 2020 is a \$21-million investment in the Achievement Incentive grant to encourage small and medium-sized employers to train apprentices towards program completion and trade certification. This initiative is key as it involves small and medium-sized contractors to ensure that apprentices are employed by their employer-sponsor. They can compete

and go on to become a journeyperson, thus training the next generation. Should this same journeyperson be fortunate to open a small business within the trades, not only will they train, they will also employ the next generation.

Another initiative we wish to highlight is the investment of \$20 million for a new Group Sponsorship Grant to encourage small to medium-sized employers to come together to provide the full scope of training and on-the-job mentorship for apprentices. This announcement has already seen employers and their associations come together to ensure that we can deliver.

Our association is proposing—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Three minutes.

Mr. Mike Gallardo: —to create the trades for tomorrow sponsorship group. Acting as a facilitator for apprenticeship placements, Merit Ontario will provide a set of services to apprentices in all regions of the province to help them successfully complete their apprenticeship training and pass their C of Q, or certificate of qualification, exam. Merit Ontario will also serve employers to alleviate the administrative burden of taking on apprentices, allowing them to focus on providing a high-quality, practical training experience for apprentices.

Small to medium-sized employers often don't have the time or resources for applications for funding, as they're focused right now on operating their businesses, in particular during the current pandemic, COVID-19. Skilled trades positions are going to be in high demand in the medium and small business community. Supporting them at this juncture is critical as they all work to do their part in helping our province's economy recover.

Merit Ontario can deliver this targeted support to contractors across the province in a cost-effective way by delivering resources to employers to help them hire apprentices, effectively train apprentices and support apprentices so that they may complete their training towards their C of Q, or their certificate of qualification. Through its existing membership base, Merit Ontario can quickly target small and medium-sized contractors across the province to ramp up support and to meet the needs and objectives within these funding programs.

Thank you, and I do welcome your questions.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you so much. We'll start with the questions now, and we'll start our first set of questions with the government. MPP Roberts.

Mr. Jeremy Roberts: Thank you so much, Chair, and thank you to all the presenters for coming forward today to take part in this discussion on our budget, Ontario's action plan.

My questions are going to be for Michael with Merit. Michael, thanks for being here. Obviously, the work that Merit is doing and has done consistently to advocate on behalf of the skilled trades is such important work and something that I think is incredibly valuable. One of the first round table meetings I held as a member of provincial Parliament was with a group of representatives talking about how we could do a better job of integrating the

skilled trades into our curriculum, and that work has continued over the past two years.

1520

Obviously, it's such a critical part when we think about those three pillars from this year's budget, the first being protecting our health care, the second being supporting families and businesses and then the third—and this is where I think you guys come in—is laying the foundation for recovery. Making sure we have the right skilled workforce to meet those labour force demands is so critical.

As you noted in your presentation, the budget includes \$100 million for 2020-21 through Employment Ontario for skills training programs for the workers most impacted by COVID-19. I'm wondering if you could perhaps describe what kind of services Employment Ontario can provide to those affected and how this funding can be best used to fill that skilled trades gap that we have in Ontario.

Mr. Mike Gallardo: Thank you, MPP Roberts. I guess the investments made by the government right now are historic. The government has been consistent over the last few years. You've commented how the government has invested a lot of money. Right now, there are a lot of people looking for work, and there are a lot of companies looking for—I want to say—potential employees. I think what the funding will provide is that link needed.

I was talking to a member just north of Barrie. We were reviewing some of the numbers in the budget, and they sense a sense of relief, that they're going to be able to find some of the employees or workers, the skilled trades-people they've been looking for.

I think when you look at the various programs that are going to be rolled out—obviously, we're an employer association. We can play a critical role in linking many of our members to those people looking either to get into the trades or, if anything, transitioning from a company that may be slow with work and looking to work for another company that has a new project on the horizon.

So the investments made I think are encouraging. They're helpful to a lot of people looking at the skilled trades to get rid of that stigma and to look at it as a viable career path. As we recover post-COVID-19, there are going to be a lot of opportunities for a lot of young people to come in and grow with companies, learn and prosper and even possibly one day run their own company. That's one of the things we try to promote as an association as well.

Mr. Jeremy Roberts: Absolutely. As a young Ontarian myself, I look at my friend group. The one of my friends who is arguably doing the best out of the lot of us who graduated high school at the same time is the one who went into carpentry. He's got a truck. He's got his own home. He's working in a contracting business. He's busy non-stop. It's really great to see.

I want to touch on something else that was in the budget. When our finance committee was doing our hearings over the summer with small businesses about how we could best support them in the COVID-19 recovery, one thing that kept coming up time and time again was

that they would love to see an incentive program. They pointed to the home renovation tax credit that had been brought in federally as something that they were very supportive of. This budget brought in something similar but a little bit more targeted, and that's the Seniors' Home Safety Tax Credit. That will provide a 25% tax credit for individuals who want to make upgrades towards accessibility at their home.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Three minutes.

Mr. Jeremy Roberts: I'm just wondering if you could comment on that from the business side of view. How is that going to impact some of our contractors and perhaps stimulate a bit of business for them?

Mr. Mike Gallardo: It's great news. As all of us are homeowners, any opportunities to do some renovations, to look at some incentives, even for contractors to do work—contractors are always looking to provide the best price and provide those services. When you have targeted groups—you mentioned the seniors—it does help stimulate work. It helps stimulate bids. You start to see companies become more active, and it has a trickle-down effect. You see they start to hire a lot of, I would say, young people starting in or even just looking for work. So I think when the small business community asks for those incentive programs, they're looking, really, for assistance to help spur a bit more activity, and then it does have a trickle-down effect, from supplies to a labour supplier hiring young people, to providing—even when you look on the environmental side—new innovations and new products that are being rolled out by suppliers.

I think any incentive that's made available to small business or smaller contractors is always great, because it does help. It's the economic engine of our province, and so I think it's always welcomed. I can't emphasize how important it can be to help our economy.

Mr. Jeremy Roberts: One thing we heard from a few contractors who presented to us before is that they also said it helps bring some businesses out from the underground economy, because it provides a way to be involved in and provide those invoices for tax purposes. Is that something that you guys see as well?

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): One minute.

Mr. Mike Gallardo: Yes. I think when you're looking at the underground economy, of course, sometimes you have deals. Some homeowners are looking to save money. But I think what you're looking at, really, are the contractors. There are very good ones out there, and I think when you see those incentives, it does help being an honest broker, if that's the best way to put it. So it does spur, I want to say, more activity within companies that are already doing it above board. It just gives them more opportunity in front of more people. So I would agree that it does have a positive effect.

Mr. Jeremy Roberts: Great. That's fantastic. Chair, how much time remaining?

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Twenty seconds.

Mr. Jeremy Roberts: Okay. Thanks so much, Michael. I appreciate your presentation, and I'll leave it there, Chair.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): We'll go to the opposition side now for their time of questioning. MPP Shaw.

Ms. Sandy Shaw: Thank you to all the presenters. I really appreciate your time here today.

I'm going to start my questioning with the Grand River Environmental Network. Greg, I want to thank you for your presentation and thank you for the work that you do with the conservation authorities and to keep our environment and our communities safe.

Schedule 6 was a surprise to everyone. No one knows who asked for this to be included in a budget bill. That in itself is a shock. I really remark that you said that CAs have been around for 11 different Premiers, so it shocked me to really understand what it was about CAs that this Premier doesn't seem to like and how they are making such a substantial change that will really, really gut conservation authorities' ability to protect communities, with very little consultation.

With that as a precursor, I would like you to talk a little bit more about the work that you do around the Grand River, specifically around flooding. I think it needs to be underscored that flooding impacts municipalities and impacts residents. The costs are borne primarily by municipal property taxpayers when this happens. If you could just talk a little bit about how the work that you're doing, particularly in rural and agricultural areas, is important to everyone.

Mr. Greg Michalenko: I think the basic flood protections are now in place. That includes both physical structures—some berms. It includes planning and zoning. They demarcated the flood zones and supervise what can go in there or not, so then you don't get things that are damaged and flooding. There are channel improvements in the Grand River so the water could flow more easily down under the bridges of Cambridge and further.

Another matter respecting flooding is to make sure that you don't have so many hard surfaces everywhere in the cities, with water that would ordinarily go in the ground and comes shooting down and masses into the river system.

It's been a comprehensive exercise, and I think one of the keys to its success is they always involve communities and individuals. The GRCA itself says that they credit much of their success as being a world leader—and a recognized one in that Australian prize—in river basin management to building partnerships, and they have hundreds of them. If you ask somebody in our area, "What does GRCA mean?", they'll all know it's the Grand River Conservation Authority, and they love it. The only other thing they could name, if you ask them letters, would be the CRA, and something that's not as pleasant.

We're a leader, and we greatly fear that schedule 6 would gut that. It would take things back to old-style, top-down, ineffective, bureaucratic and almost dictatorial leadership.

1530

Ms. Sandy Shaw: Thank you for that. Also, slipped into Bill 66 was a clause that would essentially open up

the greenbelt to development. We know that this government, particularly Premier Ford, has waged a war against the greenbelt not once, not twice, but this would have been the third time. There was a huge public outcry against what was in Bill 66, and that was withdrawn by this government.

I'm going to share with you that I have received thousands of emails and phone calls regarding this from all walks of life, and all across the province. Mayors across the province and municipalities have spoken out against this, and cities. All kinds of elected officials are saying that this schedule 6 will just be taking people backwards in all of the work that they've done to protect their communities. Also, yesterday we heard from the Ontario Federation of Agriculture, who said very clearly that schedule 6 is a threat—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Three minutes.

Ms. Sandy Shaw: —to farms and it's a threat to food production.

So my question to you is: Are you seeing pushback on this that you think this government should be listening to, about what people are concerned about and about the work that you've done in your community?

Mr. Greg Michalenko: Yes, there has been a lot of pushback, and you see it all over the place. There are various organizations with petitions and showing how to write to your MP or leave a phone call and that. Our newspaper in Waterloo, the Waterloo Region Record, has had six articles about this issue, and editorials and letters have been coming in.

It has been such a successful conservation authority, and it provided a model for 36 others in the province. People are bewildered. It ain't broke; don't fix it. It's a world model. People like to copy it. Why are we knee-capping it? It's embarrassing. When you look at the constellation of water body experts around the world, they keep tabs. When they hear what's going on, that the world model is going to be turned into a disheveled, heavily regimented and unproductive organization—in the past, we built this. We don't deserve to have this be done to us.

Ms. Sandy Shaw: Has your organization been consulted by this government at all on this change?

Mr. Greg Michalenko: In early March, we wrote a letter to Minister Yurek specifically on how two conservation authorities, the Grand River and the Lake Simcoe ones, had both—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): One minute.

Mr. Greg Michalenko: —won a most prestigious international prize, setting us up as world leaders, and explaining some of the reasons for that happening. We researched the letter. We sent it to Yurek. We've never gotten an acknowledgement that it was received. We never got a response to our questions. We never got a response to our request to possibly have a meeting with him.

Ms. Sandy Shaw: Let me congratulate you on your work. We value the work that you're doing, and we hope that your work will be there for another 11 Premiers in the future, so thank you very much for the work that you're doing.

Mr. Greg Michalenko: Thank you.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): We'll move to independent members now. MPP Hunter?

Ms. Mitzie Hunter: Thank you so much to our three presenters today. I do want to start with the Ontario College of Teachers representatives. I know that you spoke about the changes that strengthen the protection for students within the system when it comes to sexual abuse. Of course, that's something that we want to see done at the college of teachers to protect students in the system.

I do note, however, that we had a presentation from the elementary teachers' federation yesterday saying that the representation at the board level will reduce the participation of certified Ontario teachers, and there is a strong concern about that. Is that something that you are concerned about in terms of the very drastic change to the governance of the Ontario College of Teachers, that you're going to actually be dissolved and someone appointed before the board is constituted again?

Ms. Nicole van Woudenberg: Thank you for the question. I'll start and then pass it off onto my colleague. It is the intent to have two different pools of members—so members of the profession and appointed members—fill the positions of council and their associated committees, and then have a separate second pool of individuals fill all the other regulatory and statutory committees, which, in our calculation, increases the opportunity for professional members to participate at the committee level or at the council level. While the council is reducing in overall size, the opportunities that are presented to the members of the profession and to appointed members actually increase, or have the potential for increase, because of the two different pools.

Chantal, I'm not sure if you want to add anything.

Ms. Chantal Bélisle: I concur with Nicole's comments. Thank you for the opportunity to clarify. On the operational side, we also believe it will increase the opportunity for members and public appointees to participate. In the current model, participation on committees was restricted to council and a small roster of panellists. Now we have the opportunity to look at constituting panels and committees from a broader participation pool, so we definitely believe that this will increase the participation of the membership in these adjudicative functions.

Ms. Mitzie Hunter: For clarification, it does not specify that in this legislation, that the different committees and the operational adjudicative areas would have members of the profession within those roles. It doesn't really say that in what's being proposed and what's before us in this bill.

Ms. Chantal Bélisle: So the schedule 33 does outline that all committees would have to have—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): One minute.

Ms. Chantal Bélisle:—a shared membership or equal membership of members and non-members, as well as—there are regulatory committees, statutory committees, and so they would all have to be staffed by representation, either equal, and/or, on certain committees, one additional member appointed.

Ms. Mitzie Hunter: Thank you.

Thank you, Chair.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you. We'll go back to the opposition side now for their second round. Opposition? MPP Shaw?

Ms. Sandy Shaw: Thank you, Chair.

I'm going to direct some of my questions to the Ontario College of Teachers. Perhaps you can just help me to understand, or refresh my memory. It seems to me that—we share in your mandate to protect Ontario students. That is something that we understand and we share in your goal, absolutely. It seems to me that under Bill 48, there were changes made to your structure that would allow you to do that, but these have not been proclaimed. These provisions have not been proclaimed. Is that correct? If you can help me refresh my memory that we have these, but the government has yet to act on them. Is that correct?

Ms. Nicole van Woudenberg: Yes. Before I turn it to Chantal, that is my understanding as well. Thank you for the question. Bill 48, which has passed, still has sections that need to be proclaimed that vary from the bill that's presented here before you. But I'll turn it to Chantal for any additional information.

Ms. Chantal Bélisle: Yes, there was additional detail that was required, especially with the ability to create regulations to be able to move forward with the governance structure proposal or propositions that were under Bill 48.

Ms. Sandy Shaw: Okay. Thank you. I guess if I can switch a little bit—it wasn't in your presentation, but if I could switch, if you feel that you could talk about the precautions that are taking place to keep teachers and students safe during COVID-19. Do you have any commentary on some of the things that we've been asking for, which is the 15-class-size cap to keep students and teachers safe? I'm wondering if you have any commentary on your teachers, now, your education workers and what they've been going through for the last eight or nine months and what they have been doing very directly to keep students safe.

1540

Ms. Chantal Bélisle: We'll start with Nicole, and I can comment after.

Ms. Nicole van Woudenberg: Yes, and thank you for that. We recognize that for Ontario-certified teachers, whether they're at the front line in the classroom or they are in the position of an administrator, such as a principal or a director of education, or they're working in an alternative setting, these are very challenging times.

We've provided guidelines, especially since the move to online learning and the requirement for Ontario-certified teachers to be very nimble and pivot to that type of environment. We issued guidelines in the springtime with regard to understanding some professional advice that we have.

We're staying well within our mandate, as we know that our four pillars have to do with accrediting the education programs, the licensing, receiving complaints and then expunging of any disciplinary action that has to

take place. We recognize that there are other organizations, such as the associations that advocate directly for our shared membership: Ontario-certified teachers who work in the public schools.

We've been providing guidelines for Ontario-certified teachers in whatever employment situation they find themselves in, because we do have quite a percentage of individuals that don't work in the public school system—providing those ongoing professional advisories for them as well.

Chantal, I don't know if you have anything to add.

Ms. Chantal Bélisle: I would simply clarify our mandate is the members of the profession and not employer school boards. That does not fall within our jurisdiction.

Ms. Sandy Shaw: Thank you. I understand you stay in your lane, but given the extraordinary environment in which teachers are working these days, I had to ask the question.

I would just like to comment and say on behalf of many parents and grandparents, on behalf of my five grandchildren in the system, you should be proud of your certified teachers and all of the education workers. They've done a phenomenal, exemplary job.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Three minutes.

Ms. Sandy Shaw: In the two minutes that I have left, I'm going to turn my last question over to Michael Gallardo from Merit OpenShop. I would like to know what you and your members are doing around keeping them safe around COVID and what they're doing when they are working in people's homes around COVID-19 protections.

Maybe you might want to comment on this: We were very concerned that one of the first things this government did was take away two paid sick days for workers in the province. The concern for that is that employees will go to work when they're not feeling well, or that they're safe, and that will contribute to the spread of COVID-19—so the idea that two paid sick days not only keeps the employees, the workers themselves safe, and their families, but their communities. I'm wondering if that's something that you could comment on, and some of the other provisions that you put in for keeping workers and their customers safe.

Mr. Mike Gallardo: Okay. Thank you, MPP Shaw, for the question. I want to say, the government has been quite supportive of the industry in general. There are various types of construction. You mentioned residential and you mentioned—construction is considered an essential service. Right now, in addition to—we talked about teachers just recently, commending them for staying and being on the front line. Construction workers have had to do that as well.

I think there are a lot of protocols that have given a lot of employees comfort. You've got government support; you have inspectors going out into the field. They're doing their blitzes. I think employees do feel safe going to work.

A lot of companies—when we were going through the initial steps back in the early spring, companies had to adapt. There were a lot of guidelines that were given—

Interruption.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): I apologize to cut you off. There are division bells, so there's a vote in the House.

As there is a division being called in the House, pursuant to standing order 128, I must suspend the committee meeting at this time to enable members to make their way up to the chamber to vote. I ask members to please return promptly, as the committee meeting will resume shortly after the vote in the House. We'll recess for 30 minutes and we'll come back at 4:15. The committee is now in recess until 4:15 p.m. Thank you.

The committee recessed from 1545 to 1615.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Good afternoon and welcome back. We'll start from where we left off. Since the independent members—

Interjection.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Okay, we'll go to the government side for the next round. MPP Barrett? Unmute, please.

Mr. Toby Barrett: Yes, thank you, Chair. Am I coming through okay?

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Yes.

Mr. Toby Barrett: I want to thank the people at—I guess we're not at a witness table—the Zoom witness table. We've got three very interesting issues here.

Maybe I would like to start with the Grand River Environmental Network. Greg, you mentioned the Cambridge flood. I watched that one; I think it was in 1974, in what we called Galt at the time. Certainly, one of the core mandates for conservation authorities is flood mitigation and attempts at control. We certainly saw an awful lot of work being done by Grand River after floods like the one in Cambridge.

I'm south of you, farther down the Grand, and I relate to three conservation authorities in my riding. However, even with the tremendous flooding incidents just in the last couple of years, we find that there are 36 conservation authorities and 25 of them spend less than 20% of their budget on flood mitigation. Of those 25, there are 10 conservation authorities that spend less than 10% of their budget on flood mitigation. I just wondered if you had any comments on that, given your interest in that area.

Mr. Greg Michalenko: I think there are probably naturally going to be great differences between flood threats and problems in the different authorities. Some are highly urbanized; others aren't. Then you get precipitation and river courses varying greatly, so they need different approaches. That means also having to channel the water appropriately from the burgeoning cities, off the roofs, driveways and hard surfaces all at once in a storm, if there is nowhere for it to go.

But you'll see in planning subdivisions now that they have storm water retention plans. You'll see it along the watercourses, too: There is erosion control and other measures like reforestation to keep the water soaking into the soil. It's a very complex matter. It has to be done with a great deal of ingenuity, and also with mobilizing the residents, as well, making them feel good that they know something they can teach you, and that they're willing to

go to work as either watchdogs or with shovels in hand to do matters that will gradually improve things.

Mr. Toby Barrett: You mentioned that proposal a number of years ago, maybe 20 years ago, on running a pipeline up to Kitchener. I know of a proposal to run a pipeline from Lake Erie, for example, straight north. In so many of the areas in my riding—Norfolk county and Six Nations, for example—issues of water quality and water availability are in the news quite regularly. Then it runs north to the city of Brantford, of course, and then to Kitchener, which draws so much water from the mighty Grand, although you've indicated there has been a tremendous decrease in consumption. But I think the fact remains there has been a tremendous increase in population—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Three minutes.

Mr. Toby Barrett:—especially in the Kitchener-Waterloo area. Do you not see any merit for considering a pipeline rather than relying on sucking water out of the Grand, especially since we've had three big droughts, going back 19 or 20 years ago? There's tremendous pressure on the river from that many people concentrated on the Grand River.

1620

Mr. Greg Michalenko: The greatest advances have come from cultural innovations, that people no longer feel they have to keep watering their lawn all the time. There have been subsidies and freebies for installing low-flow toilets and shower heads and so on. All of that has come together nicely. It's a program with many pieces. So that's cutting down on the demand side of it.

Also, 82% of drinking water in the Grand River basin in the urban areas comes from groundwater. Only 18% is a top-up. There is one plant on the Grand River in Kitchener that pulls the water out and then it distributes over gravel beds and it sinks down and becomes part of the groundwater. That's been done skilfully, and there has been good publicity, good accountability about it. People seem very satisfied with what has been done.

Mr. Toby Barrett: I was going to ask: Your organization, the Grand River Environmental Network, what's your relationship with the Grand River Conservation Authority?

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): One minute.

Mr. Toby Barrett: I assume advisory, if you are involved. Secondly, what is your reach? For example, the Grand runs through my riding just east of Brant county down through Caledonia, Cayuga, Dunnville, down to Port Maitland. Do you cover that area as well?

Mr. Greg Michalenko: Most of our membership would be to the north: Elora, Elmira, Waterloo, Kitchener, Cambridge, Paris, Brantford and those areas.

Mr. Toby Barrett: If I could, Chair, I'd like to switch over to—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you. We're out of time.

We'll have to go to the independent members now for their second round.

Ms. Mitzie Hunter: Thank you, Chair. I appreciate that. Actually, I have a question for the Grand River Environmental Network. I really appreciated your presentation today and the clarity with which you really outlined that the conservation authorities, while they are different because they are serving different parts of Ontario, they are very focused on their mandate and what they are supposed to be doing.

I'm wondering, from a governance point of view, the changes that have been proposed in this legislation: How do you believe that will affect the ongoing work of the conservation authorities? It seems to me that the legislation is saying to the authorities, "You're not to follow good governance." You're there for the sole purpose of the authority; you're supposed to be there to represent your individual municipalities. It just seems to be setting this up not in an efficient way.

Mr. Greg Michalenko: I guess there are two things in there. One is this harping on the core mandate. That's being taken care of. But being forced to go back 50 years and doing just that is really not a very intelligent proposal at all.

The other matter is the Grand River has branched out in so many ways and it has pieces of land that have hiking trails and reservoirs. People use it. There are educational programs embedded in the school system, and they come out and do things there too. So it's a centre of enormous activity. If you look in the literature and the studies of what makes authorities like that successful, it's there. We've invented it; we're doing it. We don't need to have control taken away from those who know what they're doing and those who like to, in a nuanced way, mobilize the population to participate and instead have somebody way up on top calling the shots. And then there is concern that there will be a way for developers to skirt the authority of the Grand River or to then go directly to cabinet, and that's politicizing it. The fear there is that are such strong connections between the oligarchs in the development industry and the Premier. There were massive donations to some right-wing websites during the election—\$100,000 each from two major developers. That's troubling.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): One minute.

Mr. Greg Michalenko: We live now in a political climate where we feel that the public that the government is supposed to be looking after is being ruled, not governed.

Ms. Mitzie Hunter: Thank you for your good work that you've been doing over the years to protect the natural environment, the watersheds and the whole community, really.

I really appreciate you saying there are all these hiking trails that students and young people can access. I know that's the case in my riding of Scarborough-Guildwood as well. We have some of the most beautiful natural environments. Highland Creek, of course, rushes through, and the conservation authority is there to really mitigate damage to the riverbanks and to keep it for generations to come. I agree with you: The focus should be on the work

locally to protect watersheds and natural environments. So I really want to say thank you to you and your members for the work you've been doing in the Grand River area.

Mr. Greg Michalenko: Thank you.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you so much. That concludes our time. Thank you to all three presenters for coming and for your presentations, and thank you for staying on the line while we recessed the committee for 30 minutes.

ENVIRONMENTAL DEFENCE
WORLD WILDLIFE FUND CANADA
ONTARIO MEDICAL ASSOCIATION

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): We'll move along to our next group of presenters. First, I would like to call upon Environmental Defence. If you could please state your name for the record, and you will have seven minutes for your presentation. Please go ahead.

Mr. Keith Brooks: Hi. Thank you. Good afternoon. My name is Keith Brooks. I'm the programs director with Environmental Defence Canada. I'm joined by my colleague Phil Pothen, our Ontario environment lead.

Thanks for the opportunity to address the committee today. We're going to raise some general concerns with Bill 229 and its introduction and also some substantive concerns we have with the bill, focusing on schedule 6.

It's our view that both schedules 6 and 8 should be removed from this bill. First, some general comments: We're aware that the government has been consulting on the role and mandate of conservation authorities for some time. Environmental Defence participated in some of those consultations. If the government wishes to make changes to the role of conservation authorities, that's clearly within its mandate. But to introduce those changes as part of an omnibus budget bill is highly problematic.

I'll note that just two weeks ago, the Auditor General criticized this government for routinely flouting the Environmental Bill of Rights. Now, by introducing changes to environment legislation as part of a budget bill, the government is once again avoiding its obligations under the Environmental Bill of Rights and curtailing public consultation and comment. Indeed, one could be forgiven for thinking that the decision to include schedules 6 and 8 in this bill is in fact driven by a desire to avoid the government's obligations under the EBR. This alone is reason enough to remove these schedules from this bill.

The timing of these changes, in particular schedule 6, is also problematic, given the debate under way about the increasing use of minister's zoning orders and how at least some of these zoning orders relate to conservation authorities' role in the planning and permitting process, which schedule 6 amends. My colleague will expand on that in a moment, but I mention it here as another concern related to how and when these amendments are being introduced.

Of special concern is the MZO issued in Ajax in the lower Duffins Creek wetland complex. As I'm sure the

members of the committee are aware, that MZO permits the construction of a warehouse in a provincially significant wetland; however, that project cannot proceed without a permit from the Toronto and Region Conservation Authority, a permit which the TRCA is reluctant to grant, holding the view that development should not occur in a provincially significant wetland. Schedule 6 then may have specific bearing on this development proposal, though I note that this isn't the only instance of an MZO permitting development in a wetland. Nonetheless, the introduction of schedule 6 at this time could be construed as a move to allow this particular development to proceed rather than part of a well-reasoned set of amendments to the Conservation Authorities Act on the whole.

My final point before I pass this to my colleague is that, despite the speed at which this bill has been rushed through the Legislature and despite the fact that Ontarians have not been consulted per the obligations under the Environmental Bill of Rights, Ontarians are overwhelmingly opposed to this move to undermine conservation authorities. Tens of thousands of Ontarians have sent letters to their elected representatives. Thousands have made phone calls as well. Municipalities, conservation authorities, the Greenbelt Council, Ontario's Big City Mayors, the OFA and many others stand united in requesting schedule 6 be removed from this bill. If this government is truly interested in what the people have to say, the people are speaking loudly and clearly on this matter and asking for the removal of schedule 6 from Bill 229.

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I'll now pass to my colleague Phil Pothen.

Mr. Phil Pothen: Environmental Defence requests the removal of schedule 6 and schedule 8 of Bill 229. Regarding schedule 8, we are adopting the testimony of the Wildlands League and Ontario Nature. Our own submissions are directed to schedule 6. As my colleague indicated, I'll be drilling into the technical basis of our objections.

First, let there be no misunderstanding: There is no good-faith case to be made that schedule 6 improves or maintains the protection we get from conservation authorities.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Three minutes.

Mr. Phil Pothen: Schedule 6 will diminish their scope, powers and impartiality to such a degree that they can no longer keep Ontarians safe. It does this in two main ways. First, schedule 6 would transform fact-based, arm's-length decisions about what is necessary to prevent flooding and landslides and protect resources into polarizing battles between political partisans or towns with conflicting short-term self-interest. Second, schedule 6 would cause conservation authorities to be paralyzed by the same fragmented ownership, jurisdictions and technical disciplines that they were designed to overcome.

Schedule 6 would sideline technical expertise and watershed-level public interests and replace them with politics in three main ways:

First, amendments to section 14.1 would end the existing implied duty of conservation authority members

to prioritize the watershed-wide objects of the authority. It would force them to favour the narrow interests of their appointing municipalities. Decisions would become a function of the balance of votes between the towns who would reap revenues from the development on one side and those who would bear the environmental risks on the other. This problem would be aggravated by section 14(1.1), which would require that all the conservation authority members be actual politicians from those municipalities.

Second, proposed subsection 28.1(8) would let unscrupulous rejected applicants, who know they can't convince actual experts their proposal is safe, circumvent any independent expert adjudicative body and request reconsideration by a partisan politician instead.

Third, subsection 28.1.1 would actually allow a minister to usurp the whole authority of a conservation authority with respect to development permits.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): One minute.

Mr. Phil Pothén: One massive problem this creates is that it would leave the minister to decide an application without conservation authorities even providing the technical analyses that are required to assess whether the criteria in the act have been met. These analyses can't be done by ministry staff because the comprehensive watershed knowledge resides with and is often created from scratch by conservation authorities.

I'm going to touch on three of the seven main ways that schedule 6 allows conservation authorities to be paralyzed by fragmented jurisdiction, ownership and technical disciplines.

First, by amending 21(1)(b) to let landowners refuse conservation authorities access to do basic testing, schedule 6 would prevent them from discovering when conditions on a site require protective measures elsewhere in the watershed. I want to draw attention to something very important. This change will be exploited cynically by landowners who know that their property has—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you. I apologize to cut you off. The time has come up.

We'll move to our next presenter, World Wildlife Fund Canada. If you can please state your name for the record, and you can get right into your presentation.

Ms. Elizabeth Hendriks: Hi, this is Elizabeth Hendriks with WWF Canada.

Good afternoon. My name is Elizabeth Hendriks and I am the vice-president of restoration and regeneration at WWF Canada. A science-based conservation organization, WWF Canada, in partnership with foundations, governments, business, communities, individuals and our supporters, has worked to conserve Canada's ecologically important regions for over 50 years.

I want to thank the committee for the opportunity to speak on Bill 229. On behalf of WWF Canada, we recommend schedule 6, the proposed changes to the Conservation Authorities Act and consequential amendments, be withdrawn in its entirety from Bill 229.

It is WWF Canada's analysis that the proposed changes to the Conservation Authority Act will threaten the future

of the province's natural environments by minimizing the scope and power of conservation authorities, and place businesses, communities and small municipalities at a disadvantage for growth—a growth that considers the environment and the economy.

The proposed overhaul comes as communities across the province continue to deal with the ongoing threats of climate change and biodiversity loss, as well as a global pandemic that's plunged the world into a recession. At a time when the province is facing unprecedented pressures, we need to strengthen the co-operative role between core institutions to ensure transparency, efficiency and best practices that ensure communities and nature will thrive.

Despite its name, Bill 229 undermines Ontario's ability to "protect, support and recover." In particular, schedule 6 erodes CAs' roles in planning and their ability to manage lands containing natural hazards and wetlands, build flood resilience in the face of climate change, and preserve critical natural features. We learned from the Walkerton crisis, Hurricane Hazel and the significant impact of the flooding seasons in the past few years that planning at a watershed scale is the right path forward to protect, support and recover our communities.

Since 1946, conservation authorities have protected our environment at the watershed level by keeping development in safe zones and away from sensitive and flood-prone areas. We need our CAs to continue to have ecosystem oversight and planning authority in development so they can protect the natural environment along with public health and safety, while maintaining clarity and consistency for economic development.

Our environment is crucial to rebuilding our financial and general well-being following a particularly difficult year. In Ontario, GDP is heavily dependent on nature: farming contributes \$47.7 billion; forestry, \$18 billion; tourism, \$34 billion; and even fishing, hunting and trapping contribute \$13 billion. Stressing or destroying vital ecosystems will not only have an enormous economic impact, but also huge environmental and social costs.

Some of the more prescriptive changes, such as new procedures and yet-to-be determined regulations, will have unintended consequences, potentially imposing red tape that would be counterproductive to the government's stated desire to help conservation authorities modernize and operate with greater focus, transparency and efficiency.

In this time of uncertainty, businesses need environmental protection and safeguards to be clear and concise and not continually left to the development of future regulations. Introducing this uncertainty will put Ontario businesses behind best practices.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Three minutes.

Ms. Elizabeth Hendriks: We have seen incredible successes, such as Lake Simcoe conservation authority's storm water management policies, which actually have the backing of BILD, the voice of the home building, land development and professional industry.

In the region of Waterloo, as cultures and expectations of developers have shifted, so too have developers'

sophistication around designs. Some companies have begun to view site restoration as a public responsibility and actually work collaboratively with the conservation authority, getting to better restoration outcomes, rather than viewing CAs as a hurdle.

The point is, a good company is able to rise to the spirit of safeguarding regulations for stewardship and quality control as a part of the matter of doing good business. If schedule 6 passes by allowing a back-door process to get special treatment from the minister's office, the general competence of the industry will be dragged down, alongside the gains in land use practice and the important unified culture we have created over the years.

The proposed changes also authorize the Minister of Natural Resources and Forestry to overturn a CA's decision to not use a development permit, politicizing the process and removing the opportunity for science-based decision-making. These changes would also allow developers to fast-track approvals and appeal decisions they do not agree with, without affording the same opportunity for citizens. The result could be development that is unsafe or damaging to the natural environment without holding space for community voices.

A global pandemic is not the time for the Ontario government to make ambiguous changes to core environmental oversight and structure. Rolling back globally recognized conservation authorities and land use management practices will not put us in a place of competitive advantage after the crisis of the pandemic has lifted.

If we are serious about building back better and ensuring our ability to recover from this pandemic, we cannot dismantle the planning and development institutions that allow us to deliver a strong economy—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): One minute.

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Ms. Elizabeth Hendriks:—and a strong environment, nor can we put our municipalities at further risk in the middle of a climate and biodiversity crisis.

Allowing conservation authorities oversight in the planning and development process helps us protect vital biodiversity and our ability to adapt to climate change. This is a much-needed long-term approach to two problems that aren't going away soon, even when the pandemic does. Thank you very much.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you. We'll move to our next presenter, the Ontario Medical Association. Please state your name for the record and you can get right into your presentation.

Dr. Samantha Hill: Thanks. I'm Dr. Hill. Good afternoon. I am a cardiac surgeon and president of the Ontario Medical Association. I come representing over 32,500 practising physicians. With me today are Mr. Allan O'Dette, our CEO, and Dr. James Wright, chief of OMA's economics, research and policy division. We thank you for the opportunity to appear.

We commend Minister Phillips for funding the provincial budget to combat COVID-19, particularly the support for additional hospital beds and to reduce the backlog of surgeries. It's a promising start. However, the

physicians who operate the thousands of community-based medical clinics and who are responsible for most of the day-to-day medical care are struggling and need support. Community infrastructure is just as critical as hospitals, and if it fails, hospitals will rapidly follow. This is why community health care is the focus of our comments today.

Throughout the pandemic, Ontario's doctors have continuously cared for their patients. We're on the front lines in hospitals, clinics and offices, providing care to patients by phone, video and in person, and it has been a very challenging time. We worry about bringing COVID-19 home to our families. We worry about keeping our clinics open, and how closing them will hurt our patients and the communities in which we live.

We worry about the effect of the pandemic backlog on our patients, which currently stands at 14.1 million services behind where we were last year. On average, that's one missed service for every Ontarian. Almost two thirds of these postponed services would have been provided in community medical facilities by family doctors, by specialists and by diagnostic clinics. This enormous backlog means that in addition to lost preventative care and diagnostic testing, patients with existing health conditions are waiting longer to see their doctor. When this happens, smaller issues become bigger health issues. While some patients are fine, some patients end up in the hospital, and yet others die.

Community-based doctors play a crucial role in delivering the best possible care to every patient in Ontario, and they are struggling to keep up with the normal demand—forget the increase they currently face. Please consider the challenges they are experiencing and provide the support they need.

Mr. O'Dette will now talk more specifically about some of these challenges.

Mr. Allan O'Dette: Thanks, Dr. Hill. I'm just going to build on your comments. I'd first like to thank all the members of the committee today, government and opposition alike. Thank you for all that you do. I recognize the challenges that you face each day.

Community-based clinics cannot fail, as we're still in this pandemic and it's not going to be over for some time. We need to recognize, as important as hospitals are, your physician's office in the community is health care infrastructure, and we need to support them.

As Dr. Hill just described, over the past six, eight months, many of those physicians were really struggling to deal with their overhead. So they take, off the top of their gross, somewhere between 30% and as high as 50% of their billings, to cover their overhead. We really need to recognize the importance of supporting that community infrastructure.

We have a long way to go, and we need to make sure that the communities have their physicians' offices remain open. I think it's really important that the government recognize that.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Three minutes.

Mr. Allan O'Dette: I'll pass it over to Dr. Wright.

Dr. James Wright: Likewise, I would very much like to thank the members of the committee for taking the time to talk to us today. I want to build on the comments about community care, and I also want to talk about virtual care.

We are very appreciative of the efforts of the government to deal with the surgical backlog by supporting surgeons and hospitals, but I want you to know that the majority of clinical care actually occurs in the community, and there's a backlog there. The last we looked, 14 million interactions hadn't occurred. The reason you don't know about the backlog in clinical care in the community is because we don't measure it.

These primary care physicians are struggling with the PPE, keeping their offices clean, and they're trying to deal with this backlog. So what we really need is to recognize that additional cost, just like you recognized surgeons. You're paying them for working extra hours and extra hard, and we need to do the same thing with our primary care physicians.

The second thing I want to talk about is virtual care. Again, I want to compliment you for instituting these short-term codes called K-codes, which allowed us to virtually transform, overnight, in-person to virtual care. Virtual care is going to transform health care by providing access for those who aren't able to get to their physicians. It's also going to increase productivity. If any of you have had an interchange through virtual care, you didn't have to go to a physician's office. You didn't have to take time off work. You didn't have to pay for parking.

So what do we need? We need three things. First of all, all modalities need to be covered. Currently, it's only telephone and video, and yet we all use secure messaging all the time, so it needs to cover all modalities.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): One minute.

Dr. James Wright: Second, we need to stop thinking of it as virtual care and think of it as care delivered virtually. What that means is that we have a schedule of benefits that recognizes all of the nuances of care delivery. We need to compensate according to that schedule of benefits.

Lastly, there is an impending threat, which is the corporate intrusion into virtual care walk-in clinics. This runs a great risk of interfering with continuity of care, quality of care and uncontrolled utilization because of convenience care.

The last thing I want to say is that we need to continue to stay the course with increased contact tracing, increased testing and increased isolation while we wait for the COVID-19 vaccine.

Thanks very much. That concludes our remarks, and we really look forward to your questions. Thank you.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you so much. We'll start this round of questions with the independent members. MPP Hunter.

Ms. Mitzie Hunter: I want to thank all of the presenters. You've spoken very passionately about why we should not be moving forward with schedules 6 and 8 and the damage that it could do to our environments. The Auditor General has put forward her recommendations.

Municipalities and local governments have expressed dismay at why this government is intervening, in fact, with a local authority that is actually working and is primarily funded by municipalities at this stage.

This week in the Legislature, the Minister of the Environment was really not at all in tune with the sentiments that are being shared here today. He actually felt that the work that they're doing with Ducks Unlimited Canada for wetlands was a priority.

For the consequences of what you've outlined today and the permanent damage that it could do, it's just really shocking. I'm wondering—maybe we could start with Environmental Defence to just really talk about what is at stake here if the government refuses to listen and keep schedules 6 and 8.

Mr. Phil Pothén: Just to start, there are some pretty stark circumstances that are likely to arise. For example, landowners will be able to hold conservation authorities and hold their property hostage so that they can kind of extract money when their land is needed to prevent dangerous flooding. That's because we've removed the expropriation power from conservation authorities. Decisions about land use planning in communities are going to start to be made without having the basic information that's required, because conservation authorities aren't going to be allowed to participate in the process. What we're going to see is more flooding, more landslides, more contaminated water.

If you look at jurisdictions that have always had the sort of model that this schedule 6 would move us towards, we see it's not uncommon in other parts of North America to see even new neighbourhoods damaged or destroyed or evacuated because of flooding. This is not an illusory problem. When you remove the insulation between these decisions and politics, it is inevitable that dangerous things will happen. It couldn't be more stark, and then you have to put things in the context of climate change. We know that extreme weather events are only becoming more common, which means that the power to enter into properties and check to make sure—

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The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): One minute.

Mr. Phil Pothén: —that there isn't a source of that contamination or flooding or a collapsing slope that's going to affect the neighbouring property. That's going to be all the more important going forward if that power is being removed here. We're not just talking about recreational properties, which are very important; we're talking about people's lives.

I have to be very clear: It encompasses things that don't fall strictly under the big-F category of flood control, because the whole premise of the conservation authorities system is that all of these natural systems are connected. For example, if a conservation authority is engaged in discouraging people from using certain invasive species in their properties, it may not come under flood prevention or it may not come under landslide—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you. I apologize to cut you off. The time has come up.

We'll move to the government side now. MPP Kusendova.

Ms. Natalia Kusendova: Good afternoon. Thank you very much, Chair, and thank you to all of our presenters. I'll be directing my questions to the Ontario Medical Association. Mr. O'Dette, it's great to see you. Dr. Hill and Dr. Wright, it's nice to meet you. Thank you for your deputation today.

I myself am a registered nurse, and I have worked during this pandemic, so on behalf of the government of Ontario, I want to express my sincere thanks to all of your members and all of our front-line physicians, who are the custodians of our health care system and who have been working very hard, day in and day out, since the onset of this pandemic.

We are now in the seventh month, and so we know that our front-line health care providers—doctors, nurses, PSWs and all of the allied health team—are facing serious challenges, but we still need stay the course. Some of the things that we can celebrate as a province—and it is thanks to the hard work of our front-line physicians—are that, in comparison to other provinces, we have one of the best caseloads per 100,000. We have also reached our goal of testing close to 50,000 people per day, which is phenomenal, going from 800 in the early days of the pandemic—back in January, we were only able to test 800—to now over 50,000 every day. These are some reasons to celebrate.

But we need to stay vigilant and we need to stay the course in order to ensure that we guide Ontarians during the second wave of this pandemic. That's why our government is committed to funding the necessary health resources. To date, we have spent \$15.2 billion to support our front-line workers, which includes support for 141 hospitals and 626 long-term-care homes. We're spending a lot more money this year than we have in any previous years, because we recognize that this is a time when we really need to invest in our front-line workers, including doctors, nurses etc.

Dr. Wright, I believe you talked about virtual care and the different modalities, which is a very interesting concept. I know that the Minister of Health, Christine Elliott, is working and has been working on a digital-first strategy, because we recognize that times are changing and we can certainly rely on technology a lot more. We know that our province is not homogeneous—it's quite heterogeneous—and patients, especially those who are living in remote and rural areas, can benefit from more digital access to health care. Can you talk a little bit more about those modalities that you mentioned, and can you comment on our Digital First for Health Strategy and how this will improve access for Ontarians across Ontario?

Dr. James Wright: Yes. Thank you so much for your question. To expand on the question: Thank you very much for your efforts to expand broadband, because some of these modalities, particularly video, are very dependent on high-speed Internet. We think that's a really important initiative. It's very clear that virtual care is particularly important to vulnerable populations and those in northern

communities. For those who, through geographic or socio-economic reasons, can't access regular care, virtual care is vital.

We very much appreciate the government's institution of what are called K-codes. These were emergency codes. They did exactly the right thing. It allowed Ontario to pivot from in-person to virtual care virtually overnight. What it did do, however, was only recognize virtual care through video and telephone. That was great, but I think everyone has recognized and, in fact, science would tell us many of these health care interchanges can be done through secure messaging, text or email. The digital plan, the Digital Health Strategy, is very much moving in that direction, and we want your support. We want all modalities to be funded. That seems appropriate. We see this as substitution: Instead of seeing your doctor in person, you're going to have a virtual interaction.

I want to emphasize, I want to forget the term "virtual care" and shift to "care delivered virtually." It's just a different modality. Sometimes it may be text, sometimes it may be telephone, sometimes it may be video and sometimes, obviously, it needs to be in person. We have a schedule of benefits, which represents the full spectrum of care, every nuance, and that's how we need to fund these services. As we go forward with that, we'll provide a full range of virtual options, in-person options for the patients of Ontario. So thank you for your question.

Ms. Natalia Kusendova: Thank you. This is certainly very, very helpful feedback as we move forward, especially during the second wave of the COVID-19 pandemic. This is very helpful for us to consider.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Two minutes.

Ms. Natalia Kusendova: My next question I would like to ask to Dr. Hill. With the COVID-19 pandemic, things are happening very quickly, and there are a lot of challenges still in front of us as we weather the second wave. Can you talk to us a little bit about some of the potential challenges you foresee for physicians, but also patients and families across Ontario? And can you discuss the importance of a contingency fund for the challenges ahead of us that we may not know as of yet today?

Dr. Samantha Hill: Thank you very much for that question. I'd be happy to address it. Thank you as well for your service to the public at large and to patients individually as a nurse. We couldn't do anything alone.

Your question focused around the challenges that we're seeing, and particularly, I think, those that we're seeing in the community really need to be addressed. Some of that revolved around PPE early on. We know that there's PPE now available, but it is a temporary measure and there's still a lot of anxiety about when it's going to be abruptly terminated and what happens then. The cost of PPE in the community for those who aren't using that temporary supply has gone up dramatically, as have all of the overheads associated with running an office, including the fact that they need to have more people around to do the cleaning—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): One minute.

Dr. Samantha Hill:—they have to pay for the cost of cleaning supplies etc., etc. They have also been juggling this new virtual world that my colleague here represented so well, and it's been a real adjustment that has been made in real time with all the other stressors that have been happening.

Furthermore, there are a lot of challenges about how we address virtual care or how we address care delivered virtually and what we may be missing or what we need to learn to look for differently when we lose those visual cues, when we lose that physical representation of the patient in your office. Some of that speaks to mental health issues, anxiety issues, your ability to screen for depression, suicidality; it's a lot harder to do through a phone call.

Other things involved, things such as rashes or abscesses or things that sometimes require a surgical procedure, if you can't see what the patient is talking about, it often becomes very hard to give them definitive advice. These are all challenges that we're growing and learning about together as we figure out what the new way forward is—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you. I apologize to cut you off. The time has come up.

We'll move to the opposition side now. MPP Shaw.

Ms. Sandy Shaw: Thank you very much, Chair. Dr. Hill, I'm going to just finish up with you. I'm going to split my time between you and the representatives from Environmental Defence.

One of our concerns with this budget that was put forward is that it really doesn't seem to address the sense of urgency that most people in the community are feeling. I mean, there's \$9.3 billion that is unspent sitting in this government's budget. They talk about prudence, and it is our opinion that prudence would be that you spend the money now to ensure that we don't end up in longer and deeper lockdowns.

Really, you used the word "concern" from people that we see a lot of one-time, time-limited measures, but there's a lot of concern and uncertainty about what will happen when these measures dry up, if you will. For example, the Ontario Hospital Association themselves say that, just from the pandemic alone, they have an \$850-million deficit. As best as you can, can you just describe how you feel about this government's prudence in not spending money and not putting money in the field now when we see the urgency is now?

1700

Dr. Samantha Hill: Thank you so much for that question. I'm happy to comment. First and foremost, like we said, the money that was put into things like addressing the backlog and the support that we've had around some of those concerns has been very appreciated and very needed.

We are calling for help when it comes to things that address the community backlog as well, though, and we haven't seen that yet. We know that there needs to be an allowance for in-person visits, and the reason for that is to defray the extra costs that I've just mentioned about infection prevention and control requirements and the

decreased efficiency that physicians are seeing. Frankly, physicians in the community have seen a real cut to what they've been able to build, the revenue they've been able to bring in, and that has put a real challenge on them to keep those community clinics open and to continue to provide care for their patients. That needs to be addressed or we will lose some of those clinics—

Ms. Sandy Shaw: I'm sorry to cut you off. The time is so limited, and I really do apologize for that, but I'm just going to thank you for all that you're doing to keep the community safe. Maybe in the second round my colleague will come around to that.

But I just wanted to give the Environmental Defence group a chance to explain, very simply, when you talk about schedule 6 and its ability—what it does is it short-circuits good planning around development and around protecting our wetlands and preventing flooding, erosion and so forth. But that, combined with MZOs—can you talk a little bit about, for example, the Duffins Creek MZO and how that makes no good sense when it comes to planning and land use planning?

Mr. Keith Brooks: Thank you for the question. I'm sure that members of the committee are aware of the increasing use of these minister's zoning orders for planning purposes. They're overriding the normal official planning process, overriding public consultation, and permitting, in some cases, development in areas that are actually prohibited by law. Members might not be aware but we, alongside with Ecojustice and Ontario Nature, actually launched a suit on Monday because we think that the government's use of these minister's zoning orders is actually illegal because it's in contravention with the provincial policy statement, which prohibits development on wetlands. I guess the case is specific to this one in Duffins Creek that you mention there, MPP Shaw.

But in Pickering, the minister has granted a zoning order to approve the construction of a warehouse on a provincially significant wetland. These provincially significant wetlands are protected by law—or they're supposed to be protected by law—and that's the basis of our suit. But, also, a development in an area like this would require a permit from the conservation authority. In this case, it's the Toronto and Region Conservation Authority—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Three minutes.

Mr. Keith Brooks:—and they don't want to grant the permit because they have a position that they don't support development in wetlands. So there's a connection here in that just as a minister's zoning order has been issued to approve a development in a provincially significant wetland, the government has brought forward a bill that removes the power of conservation authorities to say no. It's highly problematic in its timing.

Ms. Sandy Shaw: Thank you for that, Keith.

Dr. Hill, I want to apologize again for cutting you off. The time is so limited here and I do appreciate you being here.

With that, Chair, I'll cede it back to you.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you so much. Any further questions?

Seeing none, we'll go back to the government side now for their second round. MPP Bouma?

Mr. Will Bouma: Yes, thank you, Mr. Chair. Through you, it's very good to hear the witness testimony this afternoon, and a pleasure to have you here.

I wanted to start by asking a couple of questions to Keith and Phil from Environmental Defence. I guess my first question would be—waste water can cause a variety of harmful environmental and health issues when managed poorly. In response, our government has recently announced several investments in new and innovative waste water and storm water management programs, including \$15 million to improve the management of Lake Ontario waste water discharge and \$10 million to support waste water monitoring and public reporting. How would these investments contribute to improved health for Ontarians now and into the future? I'm just wondering if I could gauge your thoughts on that.

Mr. Phil Pothen: This is Phil Pothen responding. I just want to point out that with \$15 million and \$10 million, we're talking in the single digits of numbers of houses that would buy in some Ontario municipalities. Listen, any investment is good, but just think about the order of magnitude of the figures you're talking about. To perform substantial work, I would question whether that is actually making anything approaching a meaningful dent in the need, particularly given the impact that the changes to schedule 6 would have on the demands on those sorts of systems.

Mr. Will Bouma: Good stuff. I appreciate that. I understand your organization has a special focus on safeguarding our fresh water and creating livable communities. The budget includes another \$12 million in funding over two years to establish a pilot for detecting COVID-19 in raw waste water, which could provide an early warning of COVID-19 outbreaks. Can you tell us how this might help the health care sector take early action to safeguard communities?

Mr. Phil Pothen: It's unclear to me whether this is directed towards Environmental Defence or the OMA. I think if you're asking about the health care sector, that might be more of an OMA question.

Mr. Will Bouma: Okay, very good.

And then, if I could, Mr. Chair, I'd like to turn to the World Wildlife Fund—just a question for you: The government has recently announced several investments that aim to preserve Ontario's natural spaces and protect our environment, including—it's the same question, actually—investments in new and innovative waste water and storm water management programs, such as the \$15 million over two years to improve the management of Lake Ontario waste water, \$10 million to improve and support waste water monitoring and public reporting to improve transparency, and \$7.5 million to contribute to the health of the Great Lakes and watersheds. I was wondering if you could explain how you feel these investments could contribute to protecting the wildlife in our lakes.

Ms. Elizabeth Hendriks: Thank you. I'm so glad. I was like, "Oh, I want to answer that question." Actually, as it pertains to schedule 6, those investments made wonderful hard infrastructure investments for municipalities—desperately needed. But municipalities manage waste water separately from conservation authorities, and I think we need to recognize again that that becomes increasingly fragmented if you just focus on individual municipalities, versus the conservation authorities that provide us this holistic ecosystem approach, which allows us to prevent Walkerton drinking-water tragedies that we've already experienced. I think there are two distinctions. I think investment in infrastructure is really important. I think we also have to recognize mistakes happen upstream, and those can impact downstream, and everyone in Ontario deserves an equal chance at healthy fresh water consistently.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Two minutes.

Mr. Will Bouma: Thank you. One more question to you, then, Elizabeth: The budget includes support for Earth Rangers, a youth-focused conservation organization dedicated to educating children and their families about biodiversity, inspiring them to adopt sustainable behaviours and empowering them to become directly involved in protecting animals and their habitats. Can you discuss how investments like these efforts would educate children and youth in areas related to important environmental mandates, such as species at risk and protected areas, climate change and litter?

Ms. Elizabeth Hendriks: I don't work for Earth Rangers. I know education and investment in education systems are really important. I appreciate environmental education, of course. We have to start somewhere, but I can't speak to their programming specifically.

Mr. Will Bouma: I appreciate that.

Finally, if I could come back to Keith—somewhere in your or Phil's testimony, I heard an implication that municipal councillors cannot be trusted with managing conservation authorities because they're in the pockets of big developers. I've spent time on municipal council, and in fact, I think a lot of parliamentarians have. I was wondering if you could speak to that a little bit further, just for the record, stating that municipal councillors cannot be trusted to take care of conservation and source water protection in their areas.

Mr. Keith Brooks: I'll make a quick comment, and I'll pass it to Phil. We did not state that at all. We did not suggest that they could not be trusted. What we suggest is that it creates a situation of moral hazard.

Phil, if you want to elaborate on some of that—

Mr. Will Bouma: Yes, I'd love to hear that.

Mr. Phil Pothen: Just to be clear, our concern was this government's proposed schedule 6 forces municipal councillors to put the narrow interests of the body that appointed them ahead of the interests of the conservation authority as a whole. That's not because of a defect in municipal councillors; that's because of the defect in the legislation that we're complaining about here. This government is creating a situation not just of moral hazard,

but it's imposing an obligation to do the wrong thing on municipal councillors.

1710

Mr. Will Bouma: Interesting. I don't know how much time I have left, Mr. Chair—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thirty seconds.

Mr. Will Bouma: —but I guess I would disagree with that presumption. I feel very strongly that my friends who remain on municipal council—in fact, I have yet to meet a municipal councillor in my riding who would not put the interests of the environment before their own interests or those of the municipality, and so I would—

Mr. Keith Brooks: Your legislation obliges them to do so. That's the problem.

Mr. Will Bouma: I disagree, sir. Thank you.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you so much. That concludes our time for the government.

We'll go back to the opposition. MPP Shaw.

Ms. Sandy Shaw: No, Chair, MPP Arthur.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): MPP Arthur. Sorry.

Ms. Sandy Shaw: Thank you. Pardon me.

Mr. Ian Arthur: Thank you very much for coming in. It's great to see some familiar faces here in this round of questioning. I think I've had meetings with all of you.

I'm going to start with Environmental Defence, and we're going to talk just briefly. I want to talk about a pattern of behaviour, because I've brought this up a couple of times, that they promised to open the greenbelt during the election. They were forced to draw back from that. They then had schedule 10 of Bill 66 to open the greenbelt. Now we've seen the overuse of MZO's, and now we have schedule 6 of this budget bill. Does this represent a pattern of behaviour on the part of this government to open up very specific areas for development, in your opinion?

Mr. Keith Brooks: It does appear to be consistent with a number of these instances that you mentioned there before, around schedule 10 of Bill 66 and other changes to the greenbelt.

Another one that we're concerned about, of course, is Highway 413, which goes from Milton to Kleinburg. That actually crosses through the greenbelt as well. It crosses over a number of rivers and urban valleys that are not protected under the greenbelt, and it cuts through the greenbelt itself in Vaughan. I know that the government has said multiple times that they will not touch the greenbelt, and yet they actually approach the greenbelt and manage to undermine it relatively frequently.

Mr. Ian Arthur: I think that's a really important point: that each time they're met with an obstacle, they go back to the drawing board, and instead of saying, "Hey, the people of Ontario don't really want these sort of moves to be made," it's, "Let's figure out a new way and see if we can get it past the good citizens of Ontario without them actually managing to notice what we're doing." I'm thankful, and I think a lot of people are, to the folks at Environmental Defence and all the others who do draw attention to this, and have learned how to do so very

rapidly in response to how quickly the government tries to push these things through.

I'm going to move over to the OMA. When we've looked at where countries have been extremely successful in flattening the curves, the role that expert advice has played in that, the role that contact tracing has played in that and the testing systems that have been put in place, what are areas where the OMA feels that Ontario could have actually done better in response to this pandemic? This is to any of you, whichever one feels like answering.

Dr. James Wright: Do you want me to go first, Dr. Hill? It was a time of great uncertainty. We were meeting an agent that we'd never seen before. We had very little clear information on how it was transmitted, how to treat it. I believe that in times of crisis, people make a lot of decisions, and going back, you should always learn. But I'm not sure—

Mr. Ian Arthur: I'll rephrase the question, then. Now that we're in the midst of the second wave—and we had a long period of time to get ready for the second wave—are there any things that you would like to see in this budget that are not in this budget?

Dr. James Wright: I think the testing is reaching levels that would begin to drop the positivity rate, and we're looking at something less than 5% or 3%. I think contact tracing is where, perhaps, we could invest more time and resources to make sure that all of the cases are identified, allowing people to isolate.

Mr. Ian Arthur: Thank you. It's a really important point, and I have spoken a lot with my public medical officer of health in Kingston. The contact and trace program in Kingston, frankly, is one of the reasons that my community has been so successful in squashing the curve. Every single time that we get an outbreak, we manage to make it disappear very quickly. But remarkably, there—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Three minutes.

Mr. Ian Arthur: —is no provincially run contact and trace program at all in Ontario.

Sorry, was that two minutes or out of time, Chair?

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): No, you still have two and a half minutes.

Mr. Ian Arthur: Okay, thank you. Elizabeth, I'll move to you very quickly for a question there. Talking about the need to approach things in an ecosystem manner, it was brought up that conservation authorities are spending whatever percentage on flood management and not other things. Would you talk about some of the other roles that conservation authorities play, in particular for wildlife in Ontario, and the need to protect it on an ecosystem scale?

Ms. Elizabeth Hendriks: Absolutely. I think some of the other programming that both supports their core mandates, as well as protects species and wildlife, is around that flood mitigation, is around working with land developers around restoration and rehabilitation of land. The Lake Simcoe conservation authority example I provided around storm water management is about reducing impact on land and water to ensure healthy, functioning ecosystems, and we reduce our footprint on land. They all ladder up to ensuring healthy habitat, both

land and water. It's not just putting a fence around a little bit of area and saying, "That's the area that species are going to stay within." It's about how we can make, across a watershed landscape, across Ontario, interconnected habitats for wildlife and humans.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): One minute.

Mr. Ian Arthur: Thank you very much.

Phil, you had your hand up. Did you have something else that you wanted to add? Chair, can you unmute Phil?

Mr. Phil Pothen: All right. I just wanted an opportunity to respond to some of the lines of argument that the government has offered when citizens complain about bills, about schedule 6.

Mr. Ian Arthur: You have one minute, by the way.

Mr. Phil Pothen: In particular, they're told that these measures, or some of them, were requested in earlier consultations, regarding the Conservation Authorities Act. Now, Environmental Defence has no difficulty accepting that this is true of some participants, because there is no shortage of landowners who wish that they could profit from dumping, excavation and other development that endangers people and natural systems. But we do have trouble accepting, and what we hope is not true, is that the members of this committee and the members of the caucuses that you belong to fall into that same category—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you. I apologize to cut you off. The time has come up.

We'll go to the independent members now for their second round. MPP Hunter.

Ms. Mitzie Hunter: Chair, I want to just read into the record, because I want to be clear that section 6(14.1) prescribes duties of members of the conservation authority. Under the new legislation, the members should generally act on behalf of their respective municipalities, and that contravenes the duty of care. If we skip forward to schedule 7, section 109 actually outlines the duty of care for credit unions, that "Every director, officer and member of a committee shall exercise their powers and discharge their duties honestly, in good faith and in the best interests of the credit union."

In one single piece of legislation, the government is contradicting itself. Why it is setting up conservation authorities for failure is just—really, based on all the testimonies from all of our witnesses, it's the wrong direction.

Keith, you have 30 seconds, because I've got to ask the OMA a question. Go ahead, Keith.

Mr. Keith Brooks: I just wanted to add that a number of municipalities have, in fact, passed resolutions opposing schedule 6, and that's important to note—and so has AMO. So municipalities are also not in favour of these changes.

1720

Ms. Mitzie Hunter: Yes, I would agree with them as well.

I do want to ask the OMA just to talk a little bit about the concerns for local communities. My riding of Scarborough-Guildwood, for the nine months that we've been in this pandemic, has remained a hot spot, and it has

not changed. Just today, there were reports that 40% of people in ICU are there with COVID.

I know you've already talked about testing and contact tracing, but what I am noticing is that this government has not done specific interventions for COVID hot-spot communities. They are only now just starting to do surveillance testing to see if there is spread that's going into schools, going into communities. These are things that we have known. So from a hospital and medical health capacity perspective, can you talk to what we should have in this budget or maybe even accessing the billions of dollars that are still sitting in COVID contingency funds that have yet to be allocated that could be put to better use right now to save and protect lives in those hot-spot communities? This is for the OMA.

Dr. James Wright: We're waiting for a C-19 vaccine, and I think planning that is going to be absolutely critical. The sooner we can get this to our health care workers and vulnerable populations—it will be absolutely critical to getting the economy back on solid ground again.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): One minute.

Dr. James Wright: We believe that communication hasn't picked up quite as well as we would have hoped in terms of masking, physical distancing—those things which, really, are the basis of public health.

I've already talked and you brought up contact tracing and testing and isolation. I think what we might be looking to see is more testing in high-rate regions. You want to get a positivity rate of less than 5%, maybe even less than 3%. I compliment the government on the rapid acceleration from minimal levels to 50,000, but maybe we need to invest more in the high-rate areas. Clearly there are geographic hot spots, so those might be things we could do.

Ms. Mitzie Hunter: Okay, thank you.

How about the World Wildlife Fund? Would you like to say anything as we close out? Elizabeth?

Ms. Elizabeth Hendriks: Thank you for the opportunity. Elizabeth Hendriks with WWF Canada. I just want to reiterate Environmental Defence's comments about the number of people that have spoken—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you. I apologize to cut you off. The time has come up.

That concludes our time. Thank you to all three presenters for coming and for your presentation.

Before we move to our next group of presenters, as a reminder, pursuant to the order of the House dated November 23, 2020, this is a time allocation bill, so we will have to end at 6 p.m. today. It looks like the members will have only the opportunity to ask one round of questions instead of two rounds.

CUPE ONTARIO

WHISPERING SPRINGS INC.

MR. MICHAEL HAWKINS

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): We'll move to our next group of presenters. First, I would like to call upon

the Canadian Union of Public Employees, Ontario division. Please state your name for the record, and you will have seven minutes for your presentation.

Mr. Fred Hahn: Thank you. My name is Fred Hahn. I'm president of CUPE Ontario.

The vast majority of CUPE Ontario's 280,000 members are on the front lines of the COVID-19 pandemic working hard to keep Ontarians healthy and safe while ensuring our vital public services keep operating. This government calls them heroes, and they are that. Each and every one of them shows up each and every day, working under very difficult and dangerous circumstances to protect, support and help Ontario recover from the pandemic. They deserve backup.

For more than eight months, the government has made a good show of supposedly doing just that, but on the ground, on the front lines where CUPE Ontario's heroes are working, they aren't seeing that support. This government is simply not backing them up with real actions and real investments. It's why, in our pre-budget submission, we asked this government to change course, to make choices that really support the front lines. Instead, the budget continues to offer spin and nothing of real substance.

Except for some health care expenditures, this budget is, at best, flatlining funding to critical public services. In too many cases, it's actually cutting program spending over the next few years after you adjust for inflation and population growth. This means our rightly celebrated PSWs and staff in long-term-care homes aren't seeing additional funding in this budget to support four hours of hands-on direct care, nor will they see additional funding for compliance inspections that help to protect residents. It means that our hard-working CUPE education workers, who protect our schools, keeping them safe and clean while supporting students' learning, will see no new pandemic funding to reduce class sizes or improve ventilation.

It means no support for Ontario's universities, whose workers are critical to our economic recovery, even though they are dealing with both extra COVID-19 expenditures and decreased revenues due to the loss of international students.

This means that social service workers supporting Ontarians in child care centres, child protection agencies, developmental services and community agencies, which have been underfunded for years, will not see any permanent funding supports needed to help Ontarians recover.

Even in services like health care, where there are some funding increases that appear, we are concerned with the signs that show that that funding will actually be for the expansion of for-profit delivery. As an example, under the current existing model for building long-term care, much of the \$1.75 billion announced to build 30,000 new long-term-care beds could well go to for-profit operators, the same operators who put profit over people to disastrous effect.

And our municipalities, where we have public health workers, paramedics and shelter workers—municipal

workers of all kinds who are critical to protecting our communities from COVID-19. Does this budget increase funding to any of those services or to municipal social services in general needed to support Ontarians to recover from the devastating impacts of COVID-19? No, this budget actually incentivizes reducing municipal revenues through its new business property tax cut scheme. This government isn't only failing to invest; it's actively weakening the capacity of municipalities to do this important work.

This raises some important questions: Where are the dollars really going? Who is this budget really supporting and protecting? Some of these dollars are hiding in phantom expenditures. I mean, part of the \$9.3 billion from the March 2020 economic statement that the Financial Accountability Officer noted were unspent in the COVID fight have now been finally allocated, but this budget adds more unallocated dollars over the next few years. In fact, there is now more than \$11 billion in unallocated funding.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Three minutes.

Mr. Fred Hahn: Not only is that artificially inflating the deficit, it is money not being spent on the front lines to keep people healthy and safe.

There are also significant tax cuts directed primarily at [*inaudible*] industries in this budget. Are these time-limited relief programs targeted at small businesses who are most severely impacted by COVID-19? No, 94% of all Ontario businesses will see a permanent reduction in their business education taxes, even those like Walmart, who have increased their profits during this pandemic.

The government is also handing over money with increased electricity subsidies for large industrial and commercial businesses. This means that companies like Loblaws, who have reported record profits during the pandemic, are actually getting government money to pay their hydro bills. This continues a pattern of transferring collective resources to pay for the increased costs of hydro privatization that is the result of past Liberal and Conservative governments. Indeed, these subsidies have doubled under this current government and they now account for more than \$6 billion a year. When that's added to the more than \$3 billion in tax cuts that were handed out in 2019—and it comes after years of record low corporate taxes—combined, these tax breaks and subsidies to profitable corporations have robbed Ontarians of the revenue needed to actually support front-line public services, critical to protecting, supporting and recovering from the pandemic.

If this budget was serious about making this government's spin real, it would immediately increase the corporate tax rate to 16%. It would place an additional wealth tax on the top 1% who have prospered during the pandemic. It would take that revenue raised, and combine it with the dollars that are currently stashed in contingency slush funds, and it would actually spend them to support and protect Ontarians on the road to recovery.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): One minute.

Mr. Fred Hahn: In our pre-budget submission, CUPE Ontario also asked you to address the inequities that

resulted in higher COVID-19 transmission rates in communities that contain front-line workers, who are disproportionately low-waged, racialized and female. Those are our members. They've been working around the clock for more than eight months, doing everything they can to protect and support Ontario. They continue, even though this government took away their rights with legislation like Bill 195. They are exhausted. They are frustrated. They are angry. They are sick of spin and the lack of action and real investment. They are supporting Ontarians. They are protecting our province. They, and the services they provide, are key to our recovery. They deserve better than a government handing over billions of dollars to their corporate friends instead of investing in them and their services. They are heroes, and it is time this government treated them as such and really had their backs.

1730

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you. We'll move to our next presenter, Whispering Springs Inc. Please state your name for the record, and you can get right into your presentation.

Interjection.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Unmute, please. Unmute.

Interjection.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Sorry, we can't hear you. Can you unmute yourself please? There seems to be a—

Mr. John Corcoran: Is that better?

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Yes, we can hear you now. Go ahead, please.

Mr. John Corcoran: Sorry. Must be the headset.

I'm John Corcoran of Whispering Springs Inc. I'm from Alnwick/Haldimand township in Northumberland county. We have another retail company that we're starting called Glamping Getaways in 2021, which will be a retail online facility just to provide glamping hardware to the glamping industry. I previously used to be in the bottled water business as a private label co-packer and acquired several hundred acres in the Grafton area. Our family moved out here in 1981 to build a resort and spa that my brother, Jim Corcoran, operates today called Ste. Anne's.

In 2014, I was trying to figure out what would be the best way to carry the taxes and generate a family income for my wife and my two children as well as myself, and my daughter came up with the idea of glamping. That was after throwing out the idea of actually having a small park, of which we had five others in the township just for people to set trailers up, which didn't go over well. As a result, we looked at the alternative, which was something that was much lower impact: glamping. I didn't even know what it was at the time, but we embarked to go down that road and met with the town planner, who suggested that we put in a temporary zoning, until the business was established, for up to 15 units.

The first year, we set up four units. We opened in the late fall, just as a trial period to see how that business

model would operate. We had met with all of the approving agencies, including Lower Trent, at the time. They met with my daughter, looked at the property from an aerial point of view on her computer and said that they didn't really have any concerns, and all the agencies approved, so we started working on that business.

The business started in the late fall of 2017. We opened with the four units. The next year, we opened with 10, and by the third year, we were up to 15 units. One of our neighbouring families asked whether they could do a wedding on the property, and the wedding was a huge sensation. It covered a lot of ground on both Instagram and Facebook—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Three minutes.

Mr. John Corcoran: As a result of that, we found that we were in the wedding business more than we were in the glamping industry. The problem with that particular model when we were trying to provide both weddings and family vacations was that we had a lot of tents going up and down every weekend, and quite often they were happening on other vacation people's time.

I went to the bank, and I looked at getting a construction loan for a couple of hundred thousand dollars to put up an 80-by-30 outdoor wedding pavilion gazebo, and planned on building that in the fall of 2018. To my surprise, the building inspector said that he'd really like to help, but his hands were tied based on the greater Golden Horseshoe growth plan and that Lower Trent Conservation area would need to provide their approval before he was able to issue any more building permits. That also prevented us from legally building any more than the 10 units that we had already had.

I've dealt with my township for quite a while and have a great rapport with them. I've built three successful businesses here, since we moved to Grafton in 1981. The building inspector actually called the planner in and said, "Listen, I would just go ahead and do it based on your decision. But the worst that can happen is we'll fine you later and you'll pay a fee."

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): One minute.

Mr. John Corcoran: We said, "We'll take that risk," and that was fine. We basically put up that building. I immediately wanted to clear things with Lower Trent, so I initiated a hydrogeological study with my consultants at a cost of about \$6,000. The consultants suggested that this was really a moot exercise, partly based on the fact that this really isn't a definitive wetland. Both of these ponds were built, one in the 1950s and the other in the 1980s, so they're artificial ponds; they're artificial wetlands. Because of our soil porosity, one of the big factors is what they call a hydrological study, which basically talks about water penetration into the ground, and because we are all sand-based—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you. I apologize to cut you off. The time has come up.

We'll move to our next presenter, Michael Hawkins. If you can please state your name for the record, and you will have seven minutes for your presentation.

Press *6 to unmute, please.

Mr. Michael Hawkins: Hi. My name is Michael Hawkins. I reside in Grey county. Our family operates a mixed farm: beef cattle and wheat. I am also a qualified life insurance actuary and operate an independent consulting practice, serving clients across Canada, in the United States and internationally.

I'd like to discuss the amendment to the Insurance Act, in particular, the addition of section 201.2, which is given as section 5 of schedule 22. This amendment would affect life insurance contracts with a certain feature. The type of life insurance affected is known in the industry as "universal life."

Some background: I am a fellow of the Canadian Institute of Actuaries and a fellow of the Society of Actuaries. I have been employed by life insurance companies and as a consultant. I have 28 years of experience in the industry. In 2015, at the request of the Department of Justice, I was qualified as an expert in life insurance by the Tax Court of Canada.

Universal life is flexible by design. It has protection and investment components. The consumer chooses how much emphasis to give to the protection and investment components. Some products have minimum or maximum investment requirements, while others give the consumer complete flexibility on how much they choose to invest. As life changes, the consumer can change how they use their contract.

The consumer is offered various investment accounts within the contract: daily interest, GICs, domestic and international stock market indices and mutual funds. These are complicated contracts. The contract can be 50 or more pages in length. The insurance company offers the contract to the consumer on a take-it-or-leave-it basis. Consumers use these contracts for long-term safety nets, for retirement and estate planning, and for savings vehicles. These contracts have been sold throughout the province for decades, to thousands and thousands of your constituents.

The amendment aims to limit the amount that can be invested in a particular account within universal life contracts. The amendment would intrude into existing private contracts. It would forbid insurance companies from honouring their existing contracts. It would revoke existing rights of consumers, disallowing consumers from making full use of their existing life insurance contracts.

It is important to realize that life insurance is long-term business. I own a life insurance contract that I obtained 28 years ago. This summer, I assisted a gentleman, a resident of Toronto, with his life insurance contracts issued to him in the 1960s, the oldest contract being 58 years old. A consumer who has been paying premiums to a life insurance contract for 20 or 40 years suddenly, without consultation or compensation, has this amendment intrude into that contract, forcing the insurance company to dishonour the contract and revoke the rights and benefits bought and paid for by the consumer.

1740

Life insurance predates Confederation. Canada Life was the first Canadian life insurance company, founded in

1847. I am not aware of any other instance where the Ontario Legislature has inserted itself to revoke benefits or entitlements within life insurance contracts or to prohibit life insurance companies from honouring their contracts or restricting insurers from providing certain types or amounts of life insurance protection to consumers. I invite the members of the committee to review the Insurance Act to see that this type of intrusion is not the history of life insurance in Ontario.

In my practice, I work with lawyers, accountants, insurance advisers and other actuaries. We take life insurance contracts as written. We do not expect government to suddenly step in to forfeit benefits. If life insurance contracts in Ontario and the guarantees and promises therein are now subject to the whims of a budget document, you make them flimsy and flighty. You degrade all life insurance contracts. In fact, you degrade all contract law.

The budget document states, "The government is protecting families by proposing legislative amendments to ensure that this sector is not vulnerable to exploitative behaviour by individuals and companies using life insurance policies with side accounts for investment purposes," but a purpose of the affected insurance contracts is to let consumers invest money. The amendment will damage financial protections of Ontarians. It does not protect them. Further, the amendment as written is biased, arbitrary and ambiguous. It is to a bad end as well as badly drafted.

Even if life insurance companies were vulnerable for whatever reason, the government should not take away the benefits and rights of ordinary Ontarians under their life insurance contracts—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): One minute.

Mr. Michael Hawkins: —in order to protect shareholders of large multinational corporations. There already exists a legislative regime to manage distressed insurers. Having a budget document shave or skin this or that insurance benefit in order to boost the fortunes of an insurance company is completely outside the box.

As it is, there is no evidence that Ontarians are investing unusually large amounts in these contracts and there is no evidence that life insurance companies are vulnerable because of this activity or any other. Manulife reported third-quarter net earnings of \$2.1 billion and is paying out \$540 million as its quarterly dividend; it has a market capitalization of \$43 billion. Sun Life: \$750 million net earnings for the quarter, paying out \$320 million as a dividend—not exactly vulnerable.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you. I apologize to cut you off. The time has come up.

We'll start with the questions now. I'll go to the official opposition for the first round. MPP Arthur.

Mr. Ian Arthur: Thank you to all the presenters for coming in.

Mr. Hahn, I want to start with you. I want to talk about pandemic pay and what happened in the initial stages of the pandemic where, if a health care worker was actually sent home, they would receive pandemic pay while they

were at home, and the abrupt about-face that the government has done on this and the fact that now, if you have to self-isolate for 14 days and you're a health care worker, you actually don't receive pay for that. Given that this is the budget bill, what would you have liked to see in this budget bill for guaranteeing the wages of health care workers from across Ontario?

Mr. Fred Hahn: I think that the pandemic has taught us that we have chronic low wages in jobs that we rely on enormously for support, like PSWs in long-term-care facilities, but also throughout health care and community agencies and developmental services. These are jobs that have often been invisible and ignored. These are jobs that are done by women, mainly racialized women. These are jobs that are often not full-time jobs. These are jobs that are paid crap, considering how important they are.

We should have learned. We should have learned from the first phase of the pandemic that we actually needed to permanently increase their wages, never mind giving partial pay bumps for partial periods of time, never mind giving pay bumps to all kinds of job classifications—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): I'll once again remind the witnesses to please be mindful of the vocabulary you use in the committee.

Mr. Fred Hahn: Thank you for that reminder. I appreciate it. I often require it, because it is a little infuriating that we currently have folks who are going through a second wave who are experiencing actually more detrimental, more stressful, more challenging circumstances with less support in relation to being able to self-isolate and not being paid to do so.

What this budget should have done is not just permanently increase people's wages who do these important jobs; it should have provided paid sick time for every worker. It should have forced corporations like Loblaw's and Walmart to actually provide that paid sick time, because the government shouldn't have to pay for it, goddammit—sorry. Thanks for the reminder. They should have actually done what so many people in our communities have learned that we need to do. Instead, it goes in the other direction.

Mr. Ian Arthur: Thank you, Fred. I understand it's hard. I get exasperated, chronically, listening to some of the lines of questioning from the government in this committee, but you have to roll with it.

I believe my colleague MPP Shaw has some questions as well.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): MPP Shaw.

Ms. Sandy Shaw: It's good to see you again, Mr. Hahn. This is the budget bill, and there are so many things we've been talking about that are slipped in there, like revoking all the powers of the conservation authority. There's a lot of spin, though, in this budget, and I appreciate you acknowledging—we've been saying and the FAO said there are \$9.3 billion of unspent COVID-19 response funding, and these are unallocated dollars. Can you talk a little bit more about what you explained about the phantom expenditures? I mean, in many ways, this budget is a work of fiction, so saying we're going to spend it doesn't make

it so. So can you explain that and how you see that as a failure to respond to our COVID-19 crisis?

Mr. Fred Hahn: Certainly. One of the other pieces of the budget that is about phantom expenditures is the huge and growing amounts of contingency funding. We now think that it totals over \$11 billion in new contingencies on top of the money that was also put into contingencies in March, which, as you pointed out, the Financial Accountability Officer pointed out, wasn't being spent. It's shocking to learn. I think most Ontarians have no idea that when the finance minister stands in the Legislature and promises to spend this many billions on that and this many millions on that, that there's no requirement to actually spend it.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Three minutes.

Mr. Fred Hahn: I think that the government runs a real risk of having the anger and the ire of communities pointed directly at them, because they got a lot of credit for having the budget that has the largest series of expenditures outlined in it in the beginning part of November when they announced this budget. What people will experience in their communities is a lack of actually expending these resources, and what people will experience is more COVID-19 tragedy and death. What people will experience is more economic hardship as a result of the government not actually expending this. We will have another Financial Accountability Officer report that will demonstrate how they haven't actually delivered. I think that the government is in real danger of having the people of Ontario be rightfully furious with them for not doing what they said they would do.

Ms. Sandy Shaw: I agree. This is a government that has shown itself to not have a lot of credibility when it comes to the deficit numbers. Not putting money in the field right now has put us into a longer, deeper lockdown. But we think that rather than saving lives, they were trying to save a buck and that they're going to show some pretty nice numbers. They've given themselves the ability to put that contingency funding to the deficit and the debt, not to spend it on the things that keep people safe in the province. So I agree with you. I think what the government says and what they're experiencing or what the Premier gets up and says and what is happening in the field are two different things—very specifically, four hours of hands-on care. They said they would support it, but then there's no money in the budget for this.

Mr. Fred Hahn: Yes. It won't happen unless there's actually a dedicated plan. We all understand this, those of us who have focused on this issue for some time. Our union has been campaigning on four hours of hands-on care for more than a decade. We know that there are tens of thousands of personal support workers who must be recruited and trained in order to deliver on this promise.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): One minute.

Mr. Fred Hahn: We're glad that the government finally, after the opposition having brought in private members' bills year after year after year—we're glad that the government finally passed it at second reading, and we're glad that they announced that they were in favour of

it. But all of that is empty words when the budget document provides zero, zero, zero resources in the next entire year to not recruit, not train, not even try to begin to achieve this promise of four hours of care. So it is an empty promise.

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Again, I believe the people of Ontario, who have paid a great deal of attention to long-term care in a way that they haven't for some time, will be rightfully outraged when they understand that the Premier stood in front of the people of Ontario and promised one thing and delivered a budget that actually did the opposite.

Ms. Sandy Shaw: I would like to thank you and your members for the work that they do on the front line. They are truly, as you say, heroes. We recognize that. We understand that they should be paid accordingly. They should be supported. Hopefully, we have learned. Hopefully, as you said, when the people of Ontario understand that we say that—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you. I apologize to cut you off. The time has come up.

We'll go to independent members. MPP Hunter.

Ms. Mitzie Hunter: Thank you, Chair. I do want to recognize all of the front-line workers. I know, Mr. Hahn, that one of your members, I believe who was in the school setting, sadly passed away. I know how special those relationships are for students and the social workers who work with them. They are true heroes and they need to be recognized in wages, in PPE and also in vaccine support, as well, as those decisions become made.

I do want to ask you about paid sick days and how that would help to keep your members safe and also reduce the spread of COVID. As you know, I represent Scarborough–Guildwood, which has been a persistent hot spot: 40% of ICU patients have COVID in Scarborough's hospitals right now. So what would paid sick days do for your members?

Mr. Fred Hahn: Thank you for acknowledging that one of the most recent public deaths due to COVID-19 was a school board worker, a member of our union who worked for the Toronto District Catholic School Board.

It's important to understand—I hope I'm not telling tales out of school when I say that that school board, like many others and some other employers, have what's known as “attendance management programs,” and that even though we're in the midst of a global pandemic, there are employers who have not suspended those attendance management programs. They require workers to attend and to account for their time, and then deny them access to paid sick leave if they may have that in their collective agreements. Even though they are required to self-isolate, they also require increasingly complicated doctors' notes and medical documentation. Even though the Premier and others have said, “That's no longer required in a pandemic,” there are employers in the public sector who are requiring that of workers, and so workers end up going to work.

Many of our members—in long-term care, for example—aren't full-time. They don't have access to

benefits. They don't actually have paid sick leave. They don't have access to it at all, and yet they're working in some of the most dangerous settings. So having provided paid sick leave would be enormously important, not just because somebody could actually listen to the advice of the medical officer of health of their region when they say, “If you have symptoms, you should stay home. If your kids have symptoms, you should stay home.” Nobody can do that if they have to pay their rent, if they have to feed their children, if they have to go without pay. We have talked paid sick time in this province for many a year, but it has never been more urgent.

In relation to school boards, I'll just also point out that this budget provides \$200—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): One minute.

Mr. Fred Hahn: —to every family, for every student. That means students not only in the public system, but in the private system—so people going to Upper Canada College are getting \$200 a kid. But that money could have paid for 6,700 early childhood educators; it could have paid for 6,700 EAs to help kids. These folks are not doing virtual learning—our members, education workers. They are on the front lines in schools, with kids. We can see the outbreaks that are happening in our schools because of the negligence of the government in terms of its school reopening plan.

I just want to say that giving money, shovelling money, directly to families, 200 bucks, is not going to matter as much to individual families as taking those collective resources and actually putting them back into the system to make sure our kids and the people who work in those schools are actually safe.

Ms. Mitzie Hunter: Yes, absolutely.

Mr. Hawkins, can you tell this committee what this schedule will do to—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you. I apologize to cut you off, but the time has come up.

We'll move to the government side now. MPP Piccini.

Mr. David Piccini: Thank you very much, Chair, and thank you to all the presenters today for speaking. Good to see many of you again.

My question is going to be for you, John. I know we haven't had the chance to get in here in the questions. I'm just going to say it's refreshing to hear from an Ontarian, from an everyday person. I think we saw—Fred, I have got to say, I saw you listening intently to the speeches and then laughing during John's, which I was really disappointed to see. It is refreshing to hear someone pouring their story out to the finance committee, which I think is really important that we hear that for all Ontarians and all legislators here.

Ms. Sandy Shaw: Point of order, Chair.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): MPP Shaw, yes. Please go ahead.

Ms. Sandy Shaw: You know, the same rules that apply should apply when we're doing virtual meetings, and there is absolutely no way that MPP Piccini would have any sense as to what Fred Hahn was doing. It's disrespectful. It imputes motive, and I think that the whole commentary should be withdrawn out of respect for people who come

here late on a Tuesday afternoon to depute about important issues.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you, MPP Shaw. I'll just remind the members to be respectful of each other, and please focus your point of questions.

Mr. David Piccini: Yes, thank you, Chair.

I wanted to speak to you about a couple of the measures here. One, on schedule 6—you spoke about being in Alnwick/Haldimand township. I know one of the points of schedule 6 is to, generally speaking, have members of municipalities accountable to their municipality. It's funny, because I know Alnwick/Haldimand specifically wrote in support of schedule 6 to this bill.

One of the stories I heard from the mayor was that one of the councillors had to make a point after being, sort of, pressured at a board meeting to say, "No, no, no. I'm going to take this to my council because we need to put it to the duly elected members of our council."

So, in this bill, it specifies that, generally, the members from council who sit on the boards of the CAs should be accountable to their councils. John, how important is that? You did touch on your relationship with councils. How important is it that those duly elected members are there to support folks like you and others that they represent?

Mr. John Corcoran: It's extremely important. Within my township, I've always had that support. That's the reason that we've had the success in building the number of businesses that we have.

What worries me now is if there is not a strong communication link and direction from the municipality in the governance of Lower Trent, it just doesn't work.

Mr. David Piccini: The second question for you is on consent. Clause 21(1)(b) talks about consent of owners for entry into the property. I believe you told a story about not having that. I think it's important. I know our Lower Trent and others, we have a great rapport with them, but I know from time to time there has been a bit of the blurred lines between consent and knowing whether a CA official is

there for personal enjoyment or there on behalf of and officially representing the CA for their duty. Can you speak to me about the importance of that schedule, which talks about having the consent of the owner prior to entering the property?

Mr. John Corcoran: Well, it's one thing to ask for permission and consent; it's another thing just to outright trespass without even clarification or notification that they're coming onto your property. In my circumstance, not only was I violated on both fronts, but I was heavily pressured for Lower Trent to come in onto our property a second time. It wasn't until I actually got legal advice and found that they didn't have the legal authority to do that. Had I provided them onto my property—it's not that I'm trying to hide something; instead, I'm just trying to limit the work exposure and the cost, all of which is a cost that we didn't budget for when we initially developed the park. The greater Golden Horseshoe plan that they're acting on now—

Mr. David Piccini: Thanks very much, John. I know we're out of time here, but I appreciate the members opposite and others hearing from an Ontarian about their experience here, and why those schedules are in the bill.

And I hope you look forward to the 20%, and everybody takes advantage of the staycation tax credit to visit Whispering Springs.

Mr. John Corcoran: Thank you.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you so much. That is all the time we have for today. Thank you to all three presenters for presenting today before the committee.

As a reminder, the deadline for written submissions is 7 p.m. on Wednesday, December 2, 2020. The deadline to file amendments to the bill with the Clerk of the Committee is 12 noon on Thursday, December 3.

The committee is now adjourned until 9 a.m. tomorrow, when we'll continue with public hearings on Bill 229. Thank you.

The committee adjourned at 1800.

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