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Jeudi
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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
OF ONTARIO

Thursday 30 May 2024

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE
DE L'ONTARIO

Jeudi 30 mai 2024

The House met at 0900.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Good morning. Let us pray.

Prières / Prayers.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

GARRETT'S LEGACY ACT
(REQUIREMENTS FOR MOVABLE
SOCCER GOALS), 2024

LOI DE 2024 SUR LE LEGS DE GARRETT
(EXIGENCES RELATIVES AUX BUTS
DE SOCCER MOBILES)

Mr. Bresee moved third reading of the following bill:

Bill 99, An Act to provide for safety measures respecting movable soccer goals / *Projet de loi 99, Loi prévoyant des mesures de sécurité pour les buts de soccer mobiles.*

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I'm pleased to recognize the member for Hastings–Lennox and Addington.

Mr. Ric Bresee: I'm very proud today to see this bill, Bill 99, An Act to provide for safety measures respecting movable soccer goals, come before us today for third reading.

I do need to say thank you to my colleagues the MPP from Newmarket–Aurora and the MPP from Burlington, who will also be speaking today.

I want to express my appreciation to the Minister of Tourism, Culture and Sport, to all of my colleagues on both sides of this House and, of course, to my awesome staff team and the team here in the Legislature for their cooperative approach in getting this bill drafted, processed through first, second and committee hearings. And now, here we are at third reading.

Most importantly, I need to express my deepest gratitude and my greatest sympathies for the families of the victims that we're speaking of today, that they have participated in this process. I also have lost a child, but I can't imagine the strength that they endured—the horror, if you will—of having to come before this House, come before the committee and continue to talk about the tragedy that impacted their lives. I am deeply grateful for their participation in this process.

I hope and I believe that we all hope that if this bill passes into law, it will help to prevent tragedies like this from ever happening again.

Speaker, unfortunately, I need to remind the House of the tragic event that led us to where we are today, to this final debate.

On a sunny spring day in May 2017, a 15-year-old by the name of Garrett Mills, in the town of Greater Napanee, was playing in a local park with his girlfriend, Joanna, and his best friend, Josh. This was a young man who enjoyed making others laugh, apparently especially with silly puns. He made everyone around him feel better just by being around him. His parents, Dave and Gwen Mills, who are in the audience today, were very proud of this thoughtful, intelligent, responsible and quite charming young man. His girlfriend told them that day that it was actually one of the best days of his life.

Unfortunately, on that beautiful spring afternoon, as this young man was hanging around the park with his friends like any teenage boy would, the unthinkable occurred. This day, he was hanging off the crossbar of a movable soccer net, doing chin-ups, when tragedy struck in this small community. That 200-pound soccer goal tipped forward, falling on top of him and fracturing his skull. Later that afternoon, Garrett, that healthy, joyful, energetic young man, passed away from his injuries. He was the victim of an entirely preventable accident.

Speaker, I didn't personally have the pleasure of knowing Garrett, but because of the marvels of technology, I've been able to see pictures of that spring and even that day. When I was learning about this young man, I heard stories from his mother and father—stories about how they admired their son's outlook on life. His motto was to get out there and make a change in the world, make the world better. It's a motto that we should all aspire to.

As we look at the final consideration for Bill 99, we are carrying on the legacy of Garrett, making a change in the world and working together to make sure that a tragedy like this does not happen in any other community in Ontario or to any other Ontario family.

Bill 99 addresses a growing number of incidents of soccer-net-tipping fatalities and injuries. Across North America, there have been over 40 fatalities, mostly young children, where tipping soccer nets were to blame.

Speaker, I think we all can remember growing up and being out at a local park. As kids, we may have felt invincible. But as parents, we all need to trust that every safety measure possible is in place to ensure that our children are safe.

In this bill, we're not mandating a particular type of soccer net to be used in a park. Many field operators, often municipalities or school boards, use these temporary nets to allow for many sports to be played on their fields. It

essentially doubles or even triples the value of that field as an asset to their facilities. What we are doing with this bill is enhancing an organization's ability to provide outdoor recreation in a safe environment that our children can have access to.

If passed, this bill will allow the minister to create regulations on how the installations of mobile soccer nets are managed and how they are secured. These regulations will include properly securing the net to the ground, proper storage, and provide for signage, stickers and other educational resources to inform everyone of the risks involved.

The regulations that are suggested in this bill are not unique. Many jurisdictions across North America have already passed laws requiring that nets be secured, and almost all soccer associations in Canada have guidelines on how to do this. After a similar incident in 2003, when six-year-old Zachary Tran died in Chicago, the state of Illinois implemented Zach's Law in 2011.

Speaker, I know that the minister is a strong advocate for sports and recreation. I know that he wants to ensure that the people of Ontario can enjoy a game of soccer and not need to worry that the soccer net could injure a player. Again, we don't want to restrict the use—but instead ensure the devices are used safely. So I am encouraged to see members of all parties co-operatively working together to bring this bill into law.

In committee, Jacqueline Palm, the mother of Jaime Palm, who died in 2014 when a soccer net fell on her, told our committee, "Losing Jaime as a result of a preventable, avoidable tragic accident is heartbreaking." Her father is in the House today. "Our lives will never be the same."

I also want to quote from Dave Mills's testimony in committee. He shared a segment from an op-ed piece written by Russell Wangersky:

"It's hard enough for parents to deal with the unpreventables, the bad luck and the being in the wrong place at the wrong time situations...."

"Like I said, it's hard enough dealing with the unpreventables.

"But the preventables?"

"If we can't stop those from happening, what the heck is wrong with us?"

"There should not be a single set of soccer goalposts anywhere in this nation that are not properly and permanently fastened down by now. Not indoor nets, not practice nets, not movable nets.

"There is a point where things just aren't accidents anymore. If you've been warned and warned, it eventually crosses the line into sheer negligence.

"And we've been past that point for years."

Tragedies like both Garrett and Jaime's are preventable. This bill provides legislation to prevent tragedies from temporary and movable soccer nets from happening to any more Ontarians.

In an August 2014 CBC news article, Dr. Charles Tator, founder of Think First Canada and a neurosurgeon, said, "It's been recognized for a long period of time that goalposts that are improperly anchored can cause injury, and in fact there are several recorded fatalities...."

Incidents like this date back to 2001, when, in Montreal, nine-year-old Patrick Rivest was severely injured. At the time of the incident, the Montreal Gazette stated that that was the sixth incident that year of injuries from toppling goalposts in Montreal.

0910

Speaker, I need to take a moment to recognize the Minister of Energy and the Minister of Long-Term Care, who both, in previous governments, worked extensively to bring this bill forward. I'm honoured to be the one to carry the baton to carry this past the finish line.

In fact, back in 2018, our Premier came to the Quinte region and met with Dave Mills. After hearing about the tragedy of Garrett's death, he made a promise: "Don't worry, buddy. We're going to get this done for you, and we're going to get this done for Garrett."

Today, I'm honoured to be the one to carry the torch across the finish line and get this done for Garrett.

Today, I ask that all members put partisan politics aside. Let's unite together and prevent the preventable from happening.

I want to conclude my remarks by repeating Garrett's motto one more time: Let's get out there, make a change in the world and make the world better. This will be Garrett's legacy.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Further debate?

Happy belated birthday.

I recognize the member from St. Catharines.

Mrs. Jennifer (Jennie) Stevens: Thank you. This will be the second time that I rise and speak to support Bill 99, Garrett's Legacy Act. This legislation is aimed at ensuring the safety of our children as they play on or play around soccer fields across this fine province of Ontario. More than any of that, however, it is legislation that is built on the foundations and principles of learning from a tragedy.

Enduring the pain and loss of the kind that was endured by the Mills family is heartbreaking, and while this bill will never make whole their loss, it does make sure that we endeavour to do what is right—ensuring that we do everything in our power to make sure it will not happen again.

My condolences again go out to the Mills family, out to their community—and a reminder that making amateur sport safe, and the fields and arenas that they play on, must be a primary concern for this province.

This bill is named in honour of Garrett Mills, a young man whose life was tragically cut short due to the lack of safety measures for movable soccer goals. His story is a poignant remainder of the responsibilities we bear as legislators to protect the youth of our communities. During the second reading of this bill, I highlighted the profound impact of Garrett's story on the community and the necessities for robust safety measures. Many members of this House shared their heartfelt support for the bill and recognized the importance of preventing future tragedies. We also heard from representatives of all parties who stood together in support, sharing a commitment to enhancing safety in sports.

I've always been a firm believer that only together are we able to accomplish the public good. As myself and others have walked across the aisle to accomplish positives for our communities, I am glad to see we are doing something here for sports safety. Today, I recognize it is a small step. For some, it will feel large—the largest mountains.

While I risk sounding too proverbial or using a platitude that will not sound genuine, if passing this bill makes certain that we save even one life, then it's well worth all of our efforts in this House.

When I saw the news break originally about Garrett Mills, a young teenager from Napanee, what stood out to me was his energy. In 2017, that life of promise was heartbreakingly cut short when an unsecured soccer goalpost fell on him. He was doing chin-ups on the soccer goalpost—the type of activity that my own children have done countless times at our own soccer fields throughout the city of St. Catharines.

My thoughts and prayers go out to any family who experiences this tragedy—and in this case, especially his father, Dave Mills, known to many as Buzz Collins—are beyond words.

This bill, Garrett's Legacy Act, is born out of a father's loss of a son, but also the commitment to prevent any other family from facing such a loss. Garrett's Legacy Act is more than just a bill; it is a father fulfilling his son's request to leave a legacy, and it is about a family ensuring that the loss of their loved one was not in vain.

Speaker, as we engage in this debate, let us not lose sight of the family and their motivation behind this legislation. It is a tribute. It is a tribute to a young boy who should have been playing, laughing and continuing to grow up. Let Garrett's memory inspire us to pass this bill, ensuring that his legacy is one of protection, care and enduring love for all of our children.

The journey to pass this bill has not been without setbacks. I know this is not the first time it has been tabled, and its timeline is longer than I think has been intended, but, together, collectively, we can move it through the process to having it be fully passed today within this House.

Garrett's Legacy Act has specific requirements for organizations and entities that provide movable soccer goals for public use. These include ensuring that goals are located on level surfaces, securing goals in accordance with prescribed regulations, and meeting any additional prescribed safety requirements. The bill also empowers the Minister of Tourism, Culture and Sport to appoint inspectors to ensure compliance and to establish a mechanism for the public to report non-compliance.

The bill's main provision, which is to establish safety standards for movable soccer goals, is a reasonable step towards the goal of child safety. This is not an overly restrictive measure, nor does it impose burdensome regulations on sporting organizations. Rather, it asks us to take responsible and reasonable precautions to prevent avoidable accidents in the province of Ontario.

There are those who may argue that the measures proposed in this bill could present challenges to small sporting organizations. It is a fair concern, but cost does not always have to lead to a stalled process—that is well needed. While responsibility and accountability are the cornerstones of good governance, this bill encourages responsibility, not just at the governmental level, but also within our community organizations. It asks everyone to play their part in safeguarding our children.

Speaker, the cost of action of keeping sport safe is an important one. What we are proposing here cannot be simply symbolic, nor can it be a responsibility shifted onto local recreation groups without any resources to follow through. The former measure does not do this bill justice, and the latter one is just passing the buck. That is why this is vital. It is vital—I cannot overstate this piece—to make sure that the government will be required to do their proper due diligence with amateur and sport non-profits across the province that maintain these facilities, to ensure there's no undue cost.

While I recognize that the member opposite who's proposing this legislation cannot include funding to this type of legislation, I will publicly muse that it might be reasonable for the ministry to commit to community consultation and consider a type of reserve or additional measures or funding to offset any costs so that organizations can meet any new protocols.

0920

While there is no space for amendments at this point, I will continue to work with and advocate to the ministry in my role as critic for sports in Ontario, to ensure that there are solutions for safe sport. In this case, it could mean an additional pot of money granted to all municipalities across Ontario, ensuring that soccer fields and goalposts across Ontario will be modernized in the way we are talking about right here. Without steps like these, then we are providing obligations without the seriousness of ensuring the goals of this legislation can be completed.

This cannot be political. It must be practical. In this case, not only does the province hold the decision-making on regulations, but we also hold the purse strings to ensure it's done right the first time. So it is my hope that it is done right.

Rules are only as strong as they are used and enforced. If this chamber and, ultimately, the House moves forward to codify this bill into law, then we should be mindful of ensuring that, down the road, the ministry evaluates resources to ensure compliance. The ministry must check in with our sports stakeholders across the province, the actors who are doing the work—and they're often volunteers—of youth sports.

The experience of children and youth sport in Ontario is a core part of being Canadian. The benefits of sport are well-documented, from providing a baseline for a habit for a lifelong healthy lifestyle, to promoting physical development, to teaching life skills such as teamwork, discipline and resilience. Sports serve as a platform for our children and youth to learn about co-operation, leadership and the importance of setting and achieving goals.

I myself have been a youth coach. I have coached softball, soccer and hockey in the Merritton Athletic Association. I know that beyond the personal growth opportunities, youth sports play a critical role in our community-building. They create bonds among children, families and community members, fostering a sense of unity and belonging. Youth sport is where my family grew our friendships—some of our best friends, actually; ones that last to this day. They provide a safe, constructive environment for children to engage with their peers, thereby promoting social inclusion and diversity.

Speaker, as I mentioned earlier, I was a former coach of youth sports. This brings me to St. Catharines, a community that is passionate about its youth sports, and home to countless soccer fields, where thousands of children play, grow and foster a love for the beautiful game, the beautiful sport of soccer. Sports are to be enjoyed.

We have great sporting leagues in my riding: the St. Catharines Jets soccer club; the Garden City United soccer club; the St. Catharines Minor Baseball Association; the Kiwanis aquatic club; St. Catharines rowing, where we're going to be hosting the world championships; St. Catharines Falcons hockey—and I basically need to stop there, or I'll take up all the remaining time. These are great local organizations in my backyard of St. Catharines.

All of us here in the Legislature represent great communities with similar leagues. We owe it to them to make sure we do all we can do to keep the children safe and make sure that their playing fields are as safe as we need them to be.

It is my hope that the ministry will follow up with consultation with the community and the volunteer and amateur sporting organizations to ensure that any measures enacted today will be met with the equally weighted support of Ontario, to ensure costs are offset and goals can be reached.

I will be supporting this bill, my colleagues will be supporting this bill, with the understanding that it's not just about movable soccer goalposts, but about the legacy we leave behind for our children, about the safe and vibrant sporting culture we want for them.

I would like to again say my condolences to the Garrett family.

I think that we need to leave behind, for our children, safe playing fields and the vibrant sporting culture we want for them.

Also, let us remember Garrett; let us remember any other child who has been injured and given their life on an unsafe playing field. Let us honour his family's advocacy today, and let his legacy be one of safety, care and love for the sport that all of Ontario should be able to play.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Further debate?

Ms. Aislinn Clancy: I'm pleased to be here today to speak in support of this bill.

As a mom, I can only imagine what it must be like to lose a child. It's an awful tragedy that no parent or caregiver should ever have to experience.

As a social worker, I've walked with many families who have lost their children, and it's nothing that people easily recover from. The grief journey is unlike anything else.

My sincere condolences go to Garrett's parents. I appreciate their advocacy. To make meaning of such a tragedy is really hard. I know lots of families find it in themselves to be advocates, to ensure that no other child is lost in this way. I admire very much how Garrett's parents have worked with our member across the aisle to make sure that no other parents have to experience this kind of loss.

I have to admit that I didn't know a lot about the type of risk involved in this sporting equipment, so I thank you for that, as well. I've learned a lot about how it's a growing concern across North America, with 40 individuals losing their children. That's 40 families who go home without their child every day and live the rest of their lives grieving and trying to make meaning of that loss.

Today we have an opportunity to bring real therapy and relief, to find value in an awful tragedy, to try to make sure that no other child is lost in such a way.

I am a hockey mom. There are many kinds of hockey moms, I'll say. My kids play hockey, so I appreciate all the efforts that have gone into our sporting organizations over the years. Whether it's baseball, hockey, lacrosse, cricket, dance etc., we have so many wonderful ways in which kids can be active in our province. We have to find ways to make sure that when we send our kids out into our play spaces, out into these sporting environments, they come back whole, without concussions, without injuries, and without losing their life. I've participated in webinars, I've signed all the forms, but I also acknowledge that we are putting the onus on caregivers and families and young people to stay safe, and that's not okay. We need to start ensuring that the systems and the organizations and the landscapes where we send our kids to play sports are safe implicitly, that we send them out knowing that that safety is woven into the landscape, woven into the environment. We can do that by preventing harm and not putting the onus on a hodgepodge of individuals and play spaces and organizations to do this work, but putting the onus on the institutions to get this work done and ensure that there's safety there. We always say "safety first," and we've seen our society evolve over the years to embed safety. Whether it's through stop signs on the back of jerseys, or helmets, or seat belts, we've done so much to try to keep our kids safe and make sure that lives aren't lost. So I appreciate very much the spirit of this bill and its efforts to prevent life—and make meaning from tragedy that has, unfortunately, happened.

I do want to see us properly fund not-for-profit sports. Sometimes when we create more red tape, which I know we are all against—and this isn't red tape; it's meaningful, important legislation, but if we don't properly fund it, it can equate to a cut. I go home to my riding, as we all do, and we experience the feedback from these not-for-profit organizations that are not only struggling to get donations back but are struggling with volunteerism. We don't need

to impose cuts on these organizations if we can help it, so we need to back up any new legislation with proper funding to make sure that these organizations can continue to thrive.

0930

Just last night, I was at the Athlete of the Year awards. It was a beautiful moment in my region, and I think it's because we've created opportunities for all young people to get involved in athletics and shine and find bright spots in their lives and achieve great heights to make us all proud.

As a city councillor, I have been in lots of conversations about playgrounds and play spaces.

We haven't just underfunded our not-for-profit sector, but we've also underfunded cities and regions to create more opportunities for green space.

Kitchener Centre is densifying. I come from a region where we are putting up high-rises like never before, especially in the downtown core, where I live. We haven't done a commensurate investment in the green spaces, so we're looking at overpopulated, intense green spaces in our city.

So not only do I hope the government can fund the not-for-profit sector, who are looking to make sport accessible, but I hope that we can make that same investment in our green spaces and our public spaces like schools.

I know a lot of the soccer nets that we are putting up that are accessible to the public are on school playgrounds and school soccer fields. But what we hear from schools is that they are struggling to pay the bills. They are struggling to fund these things. So if we need this safety measure in place, we need to fund it, and that equates to funding schools, as well.

I appreciate this very much. I appreciate the effort to make our kids safe when they go out of our homes, when they go to play sports.

I also urge the government to invest in athletics to make sure that we can pay the bills and keep this opportunity available.

Finally, I'd like to talk a little bit about the use of these soccer pitches and how Garrett's life ended. I know it was through doing a chin-up. He was using a soccer net to do chin-ups, and it wasn't anchored down.

I hope we can enforce this bill. I hope we can find that these public spaces—not only during when sports are happening, whether that's a soccer practice, that it's anchored down; but we have the ability to make sure they're anchored down and secured and safe 24 hours a day, because I know that these soccer pitches, whether they're at a school, whether they're at a city park, are used by our public on a regular basis. We have many layers of people who make access of these public spaces. So let's make sure that the efforts we're making today include all of these voices, whether it's city sports, the education sector, minor sport organizations. Include them in the conversation to be sure that we can all be vigilant and we can all ensure that this effort is enforced overall.

I appreciate the bill, as a sport lover myself. I see it as a mental health tool. Sport is not just physical activity and

fun. We see young people facing severe mental health challenges at this moment in time. I truly believe that we can ensure every child in Ontario, whether they're low-income, racialized or from various cultural backgrounds, has access to affordable and safe athletics in the province of Ontario.

Thank you to the member opposite and to our many MPPs in this House. I appreciate this bill. I will support it.

I urge the government to keep working towards safe, accessible and equitable access to athletics in the province of Ontario.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Further debate?

M^{me} Dawn Gallagher Murphy: I rise this morning to express my strong support of my colleague's private member's Bill 99, Garrett's Legacy Act, 2024. I thank the member from Hastings–Lennox and Addington for putting forth this bill, as it addresses the safety and well-being of children in Ontario—specifically, to enhance the safety measures of movable soccer goals used by the public. The act sets out specific requirements for the safe usage of these goals. It mandates inspections and establishes a mechanism for reporting non-compliance.

Sadly, young Garrett was not the only child who lost his life too early due to an avoidable, tragic accident.

In my riding of Newmarket–Aurora, young Jaime Palm, a 15-year-old girl, an athlete, a blossoming soccer and field hockey player and volleyball team player, died when a soccer net fell over and she was caught under the crossbar in 2014.

I want to recognize Robert Palm, Jaime's father, who is here in the chamber today, and Jaime's mom, Jacqui Palm, who could not be here today. But with all her strength, Jacqui provided a deputation in front of the Standing Committee on Social Policy last July 2023, when this bill was under review.

Speaker, children are supposed to enjoy the outdoors, play and make use of public amenities like parks, fields and soccer pitches. When these amenities which are meant to bring joy instead bring grief, we know that there is a problem that needs to be addressed. Today, we can take a step towards ensuring that such tragedy never happens again.

First and foremost, the act mandates that all movable soccer goals be placed on level surfaces and securely anchored in accordance with prescribed regulations. This provision ensures that the goals remain stable and significantly reduces the risk of them tipping over and causing injury. Moreover, the act empowers the Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Sport to appoint inspectors to enforce these safety standards.

Another essential aspect of Bill 99 is the establishment of a compliance mechanism. This allows members of the public to report any non-compliance that they observe, ensuring that these safety concerns can be promptly addressed. It fosters a culture of accountability and vigilance, reinforcing our collective commitment to public safety.

The penalties outlined in the act for non-compliance serve as a deterrent, underscoring the seriousness of these

requirements. By imposing fines for violations, we emphasize that the safety of our children and communities is non-negotiable.

I would like to quote Jaime's mother, Jacqueline Palm, from her deputation to the Standing Committee on Social Policy:

"The soccer net that was above Jaime's head fell on top of her and crushed and killed her. Had this net been properly secured after the lawn was cut, my daughter would still be with us today. This was a movable soccer net. Tragically, it had not been securely anchored....

"Losing Jaime as a result of a preventable, avoidable tragic accident is heartbreaking. Our lives will never be the same....

"It is our hope that this Bill 99 will help to prevent any other parents like Rob and myself from having to suffer the loss of a child in a completely senseless, avoidable way."

Jacqui went on to say, "Please remember, over 40 children in North America since 1979 is the latest statistic; that's 40 children's lives too many. This bill needs to be passed."

The passage of Bill 99 is not just about compliance with regulations; it is about honouring the memory of a young boy, Garrett, and a young girl, Jaime. It is about preventing future tragedies of this nature. It is about taking proactive measures to protect our children and ensuring that recreational activities remain safe and enjoyable.

0940

I met Jacqui Palm close to nine years after her tragic loss of Jaime. As a mom, I felt the pain that Jacqui so evidently was carrying in her heart. As her member of provincial Parliament, I am honoured to stand in my place today and speak to this bill in its third reading.

I encourage every one of my colleagues in this chamber today to support this bill. Together, we can protect the innocence of our youth and prevent any unnecessary family grieving, community grieving and provincial grieving.

Let's honour Garrett and Jaime's legacy and make our province a safer place for everyone.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Further debate?

Mr. Ted Hsu: One of the most rewarding and fruitful parts of the job of MPP is to connect the issues that you encounter or work on in your constituency office with legislative work at Queen's Park.

I want to thank the member for Hastings–Lennox and Addington for bringing forward Bill 99, and I'm pleased to speak in support of it. This legislation comes out of the events in Napanee, only a 30-minute drive west of my home in Kingston.

Garrett's Legacy Act is named after Garrett Mills, a young boy who tragically lost his life in 2021 after being pinned and hit by a movable soccer goal. Garrett was doing a chin-up, something so many kids do on the crossbars of soccer nets. I've done that myself. But what happened next is something that doesn't normally happen: The net fell, hitting Garrett on the head. This could have happened to anyone playing soccer. This tragedy has

highlighted a safety concern—the potential dangers associated with unsecured or unstable soccer goals. Bill 99 is a direct response to this tragedy. The core objective of Bill 99 is to prevent similar accidents from ever happening again. It establishes clear safety standards for organizations and entities that make movable soccer goals available for public use.

Imagine a soccer player, brimming with enthusiasm, practising on the field. We want them to focus on the game, on developing their skills and, most importantly, on having fun. Bill 99 creates a safer environment for these experiences. Having features like weighted bases, anchoring systems and double post construction for movable goals will reduce the risk of an accident or injury. It should be a given that our kids are playing recreational sports with equipment that is safe.

The act doesn't just set standards; it also establishes a framework for accountability. The Minister of Tourism, Culture and Sport has the authority to conduct inspections and ensure compliance. Additionally, there are mechanisms for reporting instances of non-compliance. This creates a system that prioritizes safety and holds organizations responsible for upholding the standards. Working together, we can ensure everyone understands the importance of safety and implements best practices.

Bill 99 is a tribute to Garrett's memory and a future where our children can just enjoy soccer. Let's work together to create a safer environment on the soccer field. Our kids have enough challenges as it is. Choosing to protect and invest in our kids is always a good choice.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Further debate?

Ms. Natalie Pierre: Today, I have the honour to speak to Bill 99, Garrett's Legacy Act, An Act to provide for safety measures respecting movable soccer goals.

Legacies are powerful. They are passed on and have a long-lasting impact, imparting wisdom and action.

Today, we call for action. We call for the sort of action that would prevent injury for children and for people of all ages.

It's common in the warmer months for people to spend time outdoors in local parks. Sometimes it's just to relax and enjoy the weather; other times it's to work out, spend time with friends or play a sport like football, baseball or soccer.

One thing we don't really think about is the safety of the soccer goals found in a lot of our local parks, schools and sports fields. Many people don't realize that not all soccer goals are anchored to the ground, and they don't recognize the danger when they hang off the crossbar to do a pull-up, a chin-up, or even just a stretch. Improperly secured soccer goals present a serious threat to athletes, to children and to anyone using them or around them.

Sadly, we've all heard of incidents across the country of goalposts collapsing and falling on unsuspecting children, youths, adults, that have resulted in fatal injuries. These accidents are preventable and wouldn't have happened if the goalposts were secured down. One life lost to a preventable accident is one too many, but the fact is,

there have been over 50 lives lost since the 1950s to these kinds of incidents. That number is far too high for us to ignore.

There are solutions we can action. Similar to the Movable Soccer Goal Safety Act implemented in the Yukon, we too can ensure that goalposts are anchored down, and have inspections to make sure the equipment is safely secured.

In the Yukon, owners of movable nets for public use are now required to inspect their goals twice annually: once at the beginning of each soccer season and at another time during the year. They're also required to keep records of the goals' condition.

The Yukon and many states in the USA recognized that there needed to be laws surrounding the use of movable goalposts.

For example, in the state of Illinois, Zach's Law requires all movable soccer goals manufactured and sold in the state of Illinois to be tip-resistant. It also requires organizations that own and control a movable soccer goal to create a safety plan and an education policy that outlines how the organization will specifically address the safety issues associated with movable soccer goals.

These changes in how equipment is installed will prevent injuries and fatalities, and enhance safety.

Garrett's Legacy Act aims to protect the lives of people around movable soccer goals. The bill states that organizations or entities that make a movable soccer goal available for use by a member of the public shall ensure that the goal is located on a level surface, securely anchored in accordance with the regulations, and meet any educational training or other requirements that may be prescribed. The bill aims to allow for regulations and mandates for safe usage of movable goalposts and allows the minister to establish an avenue to report non-compliance with the act. Non-compliance would also result in fines for first-time and repeat offenders.

This bill is a step in the right direction in safeguarding children and the public while playing soccer, sports, or even spending time in the vicinity of goalposts.

Sport is an excellent way for children and youth to learn to play together and to work as a team to achieve a common goal.

Soccer is one of the most popular sports in the world, and the unfortunate incidences that have caused tragedies in communities are preventable and can be avoided.

Garrett's Legacy Act, if passed, will require organizations to ensure that any movable goalposts are secured safely so that tragic accidents like Garrett's never happen again. Tragedies like this are preventable, and we hope to implement solutions that will save lives.

Speaker, the safety of children and everyone in Ontario is a priority for our government.

Thank you to my colleague the MPP for Hastings–Lennox and Addington for bringing Garrett's Legacy Act forward and for the opportunity to speak to the bill. And thank you to Garrett's parents and family for your continued advocacy. Together, we can prevent these types of tragedies from happening.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Further debate? Further debate?

MPP Bresee has moved third reading of Bill 99, An Act to provide for safety measures respecting movable soccer goals.

Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

Be it resolved that the bill do now pass and be entitled as in the motion.

Third reading agreed to.

Applause.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Thank you to Garrett's family for being here today, and congratulations on the legacy.

Orders of the day? I recognize the House leader.

Hon. Paul Calandra: No further business.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): There being no further business, the House stands recessed until 10:15 a.m.

The House recessed from 0951 to 1015.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

PEARSON LIFT

Mr. Deepak Anand: Speaker, Toronto Pearson airport holds a special place in my heart. It was the place where I first set foot on Canadian soil, marking the beginning of my dream life on January 15, 2000.

Situated in Mississauga–Malton, Pearson airport is the front door to Canada for millions of visitors and newcomers to Ontario every year.

Premier Ford always says, "Ontario is an economic powerhouse," and Pearson airport stands as a testament to this by contributing over \$42 billion annually to Ontario's GDP and employing over 50,000 workers.

With the increasing demand for air travel, the Pearson LIFT project is preparing to elevate Pearson as one of the most advanced, sustainable and passenger-friendly airports in the world. This initiative will modernize facilities while creating world-class amenities and commercial spaces.

Thanks to the excellent leadership of CEO Deborah Flint, Pearson LIFT will strengthen vital infrastructure and reaffirm Pearson's commitment to supporting a sustainable and prosperous future for Ontario.

Pearson remains a transportation cornerstone and an integral part of Ontario's supply chain for the critical goods residents and businesses rely on every day.

My best wishes for Toronto Pearson's evolution as it reflects our national values and aspirations. I look forward to seeing the shovels in the ground for a stronger and prosperous Ontario.

CLIMATE CHANGE

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Speaker, as everyone knows, insurance rates are going up. People are getting sick at

work from heatstroke. People are being forced from their homes by out-of-control forest fires. These damages from climate change are already here. It is not a distant issue but one people are being hit with today.

We need to help people make their homes better able to withstand extreme weather. We need to ensure that the measures to protect people from climate-driven floods are not abandoned, as is being done with attacks on conservation authorities; in fact, we need to put in more flood protections. Making homes and communities safer from fire saves lives and avoids huge personal and financial costs. Failure to act and, in fact, action that makes things worse mean that people will lose their homes and that all of us will pay higher insurance premiums.

The government's refusal to carry out a credible climate plan or to put in place measures to protect us from existing climate damage is hurting people in Ontario.

The government must act now on climate.

GOVERNMENT INVESTMENTS

Ms. Christine Hogarth: It is my privilege to share that on May 10, I joined the Minister of Education, Stephen Lecce, to announce an investment of \$33.4 million for a new school in Etobicoke–Lakeshore. This new public school investment will create another 823 student spaces and 88 licensed child care spaces for families in south Etobicoke.

I'm happy to note that the new Etobicoke City Centre Elementary School is the fifth major school investment for Etobicoke–Lakeshore during my tenure as MPP. That's over \$135 million invested in schools and linked child care spaces in our community. I'm proud to advocate for and deliver these much-needed investments for our fast-growing community, to support working families and young learners. Two out of these five schools, St. Leo and Holy Angels, are expected to open in September 2024. The new Holy Angels school will accommodate 600 students and have 88 child care spaces. There will be room for 500 students at St. Leo, along with 49 child care spaces. The new and improved Bishop Allen Academy and St. Elizabeth school are anticipated to open in September 2027, with 1,300 and 600 pupil places, respectively.

I also want to share that for the upcoming 2024-25 school year, the Toronto Catholic District School Board will get nearly \$1.2 billion in education funding, which is an increase of over \$15.6 million from the current school year; the Toronto District School Board will get \$3.3 billion, an increase of \$68 million from the current school year.

1020

HOMELESSNESS

Miss Monique Taylor: Hamilton is facing the worst homelessness and housing crisis yet. Speaker, 1,900 are homeless, with 258 visibly homeless, sheltering in encampments. Close to 8,000 Hamiltonians are on a wait-list for housing eight to 10 years long. And 16,000

affordable units have been lost in the last 10 years—lost units with rents of \$750 or less. For every one unit of affordable housing created, Hamilton loses four to the private rental market. Life expectancy is half when you are homeless. None of this is okay.

On Saturday, I joined the march to end homelessness in Hamilton. I met Dorothy, a 72-year-old sheltering in a nearby encampment since November. She was evicted from her home by a renovation. Dorothy was there with so many others calling for change. I met Angela, affectionately known as “Jordan’s mom,” a pillar in the community who continues to stand up and speak out. Angela spoke passionately and challenged all of us in attendance to come together to support, to help, to make a difference. It was an emotional gathering that wrapped up with a communal meal, distribution of clothing and blankets, and the collective sense that now is not the time to give up.

Political will got us here, and only political will will get us out. Together, we must end this crisis.

In the words of those marching on Saturday, “We are unstoppable! Another world is possible!”

THE SASHBEAR FOUNDATION

Ms. Patrice Barnes: I'm always happy to stand and rep Ajax.

Over the weekend, I had the privilege of joining the Sashbear Foundation at their annual walk in Toronto, which saw the incredible support of over 700 participants.

I would like to extend my heartfelt thanks to Lynn and her husband, Mike, the founders of the Sashbear Foundation, who are here today along with Marlene, Melanie and, I think, Paul. Their initiative stems from the tragic loss of their daughter Sasha to suicide, and they have since dedicated themselves to promoting mental health education, awareness and suicide prevention strategies.

In a world where mental health stigma still persists, organizations like Sashbear serve as a place of hope and understanding. Their commitment to breaking down barriers surrounding mental health conversations is not only admirable but also vital for our community's well-being. They focus on educating parents and caregivers on how to effectively support children facing mental health challenges.

Sashbear's remarkable efforts include empowering families and communities through life-transforming skills workshops and evidence-based programs. All of these services are provided for free. Their work has touched countless lives.

I want to express my gratitude to Lynn, Mike and their incredible team for the dedication and impact that they have had.

MEMBER'S WEDDING ANNIVERSARY

Mr. John Vanthof: I was wondering this morning what I was going to do my member's statement on, and then I got a text that made my decision. My wife texted me and wished me happy anniversary. I tried to save myself; I

called her back and—you know, “Happy anniversary.” Someone asked me how long we’ve been married, and I had her on the phone, so I had to ask her that too. We’ve been married 38 years.

We met—she came to our farm with my cousin from Holland for a day, and then she came back on a year for an exchange program, and then she went back to Holland and, amazingly enough, she actually came back again.

She keeps me grounded. Just a little story: When I first got the job as whip, I came back and explained to her what a whip does, like that we’re supposed to organize things. All she did—she just laughed. When I came back one time and said I’m the finance critic, she said, “But you don’t even do the books.”

Anyway, I love her dearly. She is my rock.

Happy anniversary.

Applause.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly): Nicely done. And I’m sure the flowers will be delivered later today.

Further members’ statements?

D-DAY

Mr. Stephen Crawford: Happy anniversary.

Speaker, in seven days, Canada will mark the 80th anniversary of D-Day, the largest combined military operation in history.

On June 6, 1944, D-Day, 14,000 brave Canadians stormed Juno Beach in Normandy. They launched a campaign that helped turn the tide of World War II. This day is etched in history as a testament to courage, sacrifice and the unyielding spirit of soldiers. We must remember the bravery demonstrated by our Canadian heroes who landed in Normandy on that day, defending freedom, our rights and democracy.

To honour those who fell 80 years ago, I will be attending the annual D-Day parade in Oakville, hosted by the Royal Canadian Legion, Chris Vokes Branch 486. Veterans, Legion members, dignitaries and cadets will assemble at the Legion hall and march to the cenotaph. The cenotaph, located in the centre of Bronte Village in a park by the lake, honours those who served in World War I, World War II and Korea. The park is dedicated to Major-General Christopher Vokes, an Oakville resident and a distinguished veteran. It stands as a reminder of the bravery and sacrifices made by our fellow Canadians.

As the 80th anniversary approaches, we are also mindful of the conflict happening today, including the wars in the Middle East as well as Ukraine. We are reminded that our freedom should never be taken for granted.

Speaker, I encourage all of us here in the House, and all Ontarians, to take some time to remember over the next seven days those who fell on D-Day.

GOPHER DUNES

Ms. Bobbi Ann Brady: Today, I stand to boast about an exciting business on the western edge of Norfolk

county called Gopher Dunes. Many locals driving by on Highway 59 might view this as a dirt track where dirt bike enthusiasts just go to rip it up once in a while. Truth be told, Gopher Dunes is a premier race track that broke ground in 1986 with Frank and Barb Schuster, the masterminds behind bringing world-class racing talent and entertainment to their property. I’ve known the Schuster family since I was very young—quiet, behind-the-scenes folk who have always given back to their community. Today, Barb and Frank’s son Derek has his hand on the throttle as owner and president.

The main feature of Gopher Dunes is the world-famous two-kilometre sand track. The course features man-made obstacles with a 40-rider starting gate. Racers who have travelled the globe maintain that Gopher Dunes is one of the most difficult sand tracks in the entire world. After a long day of riding, most riders quip, “Just happy to have survived.”

Over the years, the property has grown to include a beginner, novice and peewee track.

Tired of watching action on the track? No problem. There’s fishing, swimming, trail riding and camping right on-site.

As someone who has grown up frequenting Gopher Dunes, I assure you, the family atmosphere is one to behold.

A few weeks ago, I took part in the kickoff of the Honda Canada/GDR/Fox racing season. A stellar team racing out of Courtland includes one of Canada’s top racers, Dylan Wright, seasoned veteran Tyler Medaglia, and from down under Australia, the youngest member of the team, Tiger Wood, who joins as an amateur.

Good luck.

POLISH HERITAGE MONTH

Ms. Natalia Kusendova-Bashta: As May is coming to an end, I want to take a moment to acknowledge and celebrate Polish Heritage Month in Ontario.

The month of May commemorates the 1791 constitution, symbolizing Poland’s enduring aspirations for freedom, democracy and independence. It also highlights the significant impact Polish Canadians have had on Ontario’s history, culture and democratic values. Polish Heritage Month provides a valuable opportunity to educate all Ontarians about the challenges Polish Canadians have had to overcome, escaping oppression, the Iron Curtain and eventually settling here in Canada.

This past Tuesday, I had the pleasure of co-hosting a Polish Heritage Month celebration alongside my wonderful colleagues Minister Surma and MPP Christine Hogarth.

I’m also proud to sit in the chamber next to a fifth-generation Polish Canadian, MPP Yakabuski.

Speaker, I’m proud to be part of a government that champions the many diverse cultures within our province.

Our government’s commitment to the strength and diversity of Ontario was particularly evident on Tuesday evening. The celebration showcased the traditions, talents and contributions that make our community vibrant and inclusive.

We will continue to support and promote cultural diversity, ensuring that all voices are heard and appreciated in our collective journey toward a stronger, more unified Ontario.

1030

Remarks in Polish.

DOWNTOWN MILTON SUMMERFEST

MPP Zee Hamid: I'm delighted to invite the House and everyone listening to Downtown Milton SummerFest this Saturday.

Just to give you an idea, the small stretch of main street that hosts this festival was built for a town of 3,000 to 5,000 people, and yet, every year, we welcome 35,000 attendees at this festival. In addition to food, drinks, vendors and everything else, we also have eight different concerts—not at the same time.

I would love to see my colleagues and everyone listening out there come out to Milton and enjoy some of the hospitality my community has to offer.

WEARING OF HOCKEY JERSEY AND SHOES

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly): On a point of order, I recognize the member for Peterborough–Kawartha.

Mr. Dave Smith: As members will see, on their desk is a notice that today is Peterborough Day at Queen's Park. We'll have a reception in rooms 228 and 230.

I am seeking unanimous consent to wear my Peterborough Petes jersey for Peterborough Day as well as my Trent University Converse running shoes for Peterborough Day.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly): The member from Peterborough–Kawartha is seeking unanimous consent to wear Peterborough garb. Agreed? Agreed.

KAREN GLASS

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly): I recognize the Minister of Children, Community and Social Services.

Hon. Michael Parsa: Speaker, after 34 remarkable years of public service, assistant deputy minister Karen Glass at the Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services will be retiring tomorrow.

Karen, on behalf of the people, I want to thank you for your service. Thank you for everything that you've done for the province of Ontario. Enjoy your retirement.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Ms. Chandra Pasma: I'm very pleased to be able to welcome my husband, Matt Helleman, and my daughter Mira Pasma-Helleman to the House today.

Thanks so much for coming to spend time with me, guys.

Mr. Sam Oosterhoff: I have two wonderful guests from the riding of Niagara West who are here today. The mayor of Wainfleet, Brian Grant, and Joe Gonzalez are here at Queen's Park witnessing democracy in action.

Welcome to Queen's Park.

Mrs. Jennifer (Jennie) Stevens: It gives me great honour to be able to introduce Carol Dueck, the executive director of the Mack school of nursing alumni association; also Willy Noiles, who's a good friend of mine. He is on my riding association, and he is a great advocate for injured workers.

Welcome to your House.

Ms. Patrice Barnes: Once again, I'd like to welcome Lynn Courey, Melanie Jani and Marlene Yip to the House from the Sashbear organization.

MPP Lise Vaugeois: I would also like to welcome the renowned disability and injured workers activist Willy Noiles. Thank you for being here. It's always a pleasure to see you.

Mr. Dave Smith: I have a number of people to introduce:

—from my constituency office, my assistants Sally Carson and Jini Ganesalingam;

—from the city of Peterborough, Councillor Lesley Parnell and government relations adviser Sarah McDougall Perrin;

—from the Peterborough Petes, general manager Mike Oke and Roger the mascot;

—from the Peterborough County-City Paramedics, Chief Randy Mellow, Chief Patricia Bromfield, Michelle Walsh and Alison Gratton;

—from Peterborough county, Deputy Warden Sherry Senis, Councillor Ron Black, Tracie Bertrand, Karen Jopling and Emmanuel Pinto;

—from Miranda Water Treatment Systems, Michael Skinner and Ryan Moore;

—from Peterborough and the Kawarthas Chamber of Commerce, Sarah Budd;

—from Trent University, Ryan Sisson, Alison Scholl, Jessica Gordon and Sabrina Kuipers; and

—from the Eastern Ontario Wardens' Caucus, Meredith Staveley-Watson and Lauren Wilkinson.

Mr. Stephen Crawford: I have the great honour of introducing to the chamber today, in the Speaker's gallery, my wife, Najia Crawford, and my mother-in-law, Zahida Mahmood, who are here to see page captain Farah Crawford today.

Mr. Ric Bresee: Speaker, if you will indulge me, I have a few.

First, I would like to introduce Dave and Gwen Mills from my riding. They're the parents of Garrett Mills—in the Garrett's Legacy Act that was passed this morning.

Welcome to the House.

Ms. Natalia Kusendova-Bashta: I'd like to welcome the parents of one of our staff members from the Ministry of Long-Term Care: Speranzo Guida and Francesca Guida. Welcome to the House.

Ms. Bobbi Ann Brady: I'd like to introduce my friend Diane Elms and welcome her to the House. Diane is a

trusted voice, a respected homeopath with many years of experience as a natural health care researcher and practitioner focusing on drugless cancer care.

Welcome to the House, Diane.

M^{me} Dawn Gallagher Murphy: I'd like to welcome a constituent, Robert Palm, who is here. He saw the unanimous passing, third reading, of Garrett's Legacy Act, which is also a tribute to his daughter, Jaime Palm.

Mr. Amarjot Sandhu: It gives me great pleasure to welcome a group of seniors from North American Seniors club who are visiting Queen's Park today. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Mr. Ric Bresee: I'd also today like to introduce a good friend of ours, Steven Halloran, who is in the audience; my fabulous constituency team, Anita Ramski, Jamie McGarvey, Lixy Rolston, Tiffany Lloyd, and my executive assistant, Chris Dopking; and, of course, my best teammate, my partner, my beautiful wife, Heidi Galloway Bourgoin.

M^{me} France Gélinas: I would like to welcome Natalie Mehra and the 6,000 people from the Ontario Health Coalition who will be on the front lawn of Queen's Park right after question period. Please come and join them. They come from all over the province.

HOUSE SITTINGS

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly): Before we get to questions, I beg to inform the House that, pursuant to standing order 9(h), the Clerk has received written notice from the government House leader indicating that a temporary change in the weekly meeting schedule of the House is required, and therefore, the House shall commence at 9 a.m. on Monday, June 3, 2024, for the proceeding orders of the day.

QUESTION PERIOD

HEALTH CARE

Ms. Marit Stiles: This question is for the Premier.

This afternoon, thousands of people from all across Ontario are coming to Queen's Park to stand up for public health care. They're standing up for seniors who are being charged thousands of dollars for cataract surgery, for patients who are being charged an annual fee just to get primary care. The minister knows that these practices are illegal under the Canada Health Act, but she refuses to investigate or take action. Instead, she's blaming patients, saying that extra billing is their own "misunderstanding."

So how many misunderstandings need to happen before this Premier finally stands up for patients?

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly): I recognize the parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Health.

Mr. Nolan Quinn: Each year, our government invests nearly \$50 million to connect hundreds of thousands of Ontarians to primary care through 25 nurse practitioner-led clinics across the province. Ontario is the first jurisdiction to use the nurse practitioner-led-clinic model

of care, and we will continue to use this innovative way of delivering publicly funded primary care to connect hundreds of thousands of people across the province to the care they need.

Speaker, this year, we invested a record \$110 million to create 78 new and expanded interprofessional primary care teams; and then in this year's budget, which the opposition voted against, we've expanded that to \$546 million over the next three years, to another 600,000 Ontarians to receive primary care.

While the opposition continues to stand in the way of our innovative ways of delivering publicly funded health care, we will continue to do what's needed to get the job done for the people of Ontario.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly): Supplementary.

Ms. Marit Stiles: Speaker, "innovative"? That's code for privatizing our health care system; that's what it is.

There are busloads of people who are coming here to get answers from this Premier and this minister. At the same time, there are going to be rallies all across the province, in Ottawa, Cornwall, Sault Ste. Marie, North Bay, Dryden and Thunder Bay. I hope the government has some answers, because patients and families and our overworked and overburdened health care workers have had enough. Hospital departments—closed. Emergency rooms—closed. Urgent care clinics—closed. While this government enriches their shareholder friends, Ontarians are literally paying for it.

1040

What is this government going to do to protect public health care—or are we going to see more pay-for-it health care?

Mr. Nolan Quinn: Speaker, if someone is wrongfully charged for health care services, we will investigate it. That has always been the case.

We're investing a record \$85 billion into our publicly fund health care system this year, which is a 30% increase from when we took office in 2018. We've invested into our primary care expansion of \$546 million over the next three years—to expand our primary care to another 600,000 Ontarians. We're also investing in hospital infrastructure, with over 50 projects under way, with \$50 billion associated with that.

Ontario has the most internationally educated nurses in Canada, with internationally trained nurses now making up 41% of the new applications to the College of Nurses.

Speaker, in Ontario, we have a plan and it's working. And the opposition will continue to vote against our plan.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly): I recognize the leader of the official opposition.

Ms. Marit Stiles: Well, Madam Speaker, the member is right about that. We'll keep voting against the privatization of health care every single time. You can be sure and you can count on that.

The government keeps repeating the same line over and over again—that people are paying with their health card and not their credit card—but it's simply not the case. You will, as Ontarians, have to pay for this, and you're already

doing it—countless publicly reported examples of patients who are having to pay for upgrades before they're eligible for OHIP-covered services in private clinics. Over and over again, it's happening right now. It's costing patients, it's costing their families, and it's happening at a time when the cost of living has become absolutely unbearable for most people.

So I'm going to ask the Premier again: Why is this Premier expanding pay-for-it health care?

Mr. Nolan Quinn: I don't think I need to remind this House that the Leader of the Opposition was a Bob Rae staffer—who actually eliminated 10% of medical residency seats in the province of Ontario; that's thousands of less positions that would be practising in Ontario today.

Last year, we registered 2,400 new physicians, with 1,000 of them being internationally trained, which the opposition voted against.

Speaker, Ontario is the first province to have a publicly funded nurse practitioner-led clinic.

In addition, the new Practice Ready Ontario program will add 50 physicians this year. The new and expanded teams are the results of a province-wide call for proposals that took place in 2023.

Ontario leads the country in how many people benefit from the long-term, stable relationship with a family doctor or primary care provider. Since 2018, the province has added over 80,000 new nurses and 12,500 new physicians, which is actually outpacing the growth of the province.

SCHOOL FACILITIES

Ms. Marit Stiles: Yesterday, when the MPP from Parkdale–High Park asked the minister to fix a school in her riding where kids are wading in deep puddles, the Minister of Education pointed fingers. He blamed the school board. He said it wasn't his responsibility.

I was in a school, last week, where I asked grade 4 and grade 5 kids what their dreams are for their school. I asked them, if they could have anything at all in this school, what would they want? Do you know what they said? They said, "Can you bring back the soap in the soap dispensers?" That's what their dreams are right now.

That is the state of education in the province of Ontario right now—no soap; leaky roofs.

This government is failing the future of our province.

Can the Premier explain why his Minister of Education thinks the learning conditions of Ontario's students are not his problem?

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly): Response? I recognize the Minister of Education.

Hon. Stephen Lecce: Speaker, what Ontario parents want is that their kids are financially literate and graduate with life skills in this province—which is why we brought forth a comprehensive plan today to do just that.

The Leader of the Opposition has a history of voting against every single investment in our school-building fund.

It was Premier Doug Ford who doubled the funding to build more schools, who cut the timeline in half, who actually achieved the Auditor General's recommended investment of maintenance funding.

But the member opposite lacks the courage to stand up to the TDSB, which many of her compatriots sit on, and insist to the NDP trustees of the board to actually do their job and invest the money in that very roof.

It is comical that you think it's acceptable they're sitting on \$300 million when they ought to be investing it in our school system. They are the only board to have done so. We passed a law to prohibit it in the future. It's unacceptable. We're standing up for students.

"Invest in our schools" is our message to the TDSB.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly): Further questions?

Ms. Marit Stiles: Speaker, this government is running their own massive deficit, but they expect school boards to balance their budgets, when they can't even do it themselves. That's the truth. That's the irony.

Meanwhile, Ontario is facing a whopping \$16.8-billion school repair backlog. We know both Liberal and Conservative governments have left our schools crumbling. Students are left to learn under caved-in ceilings or in classrooms with garbage bins that are collecting the rain. We've all seen it on this side—boy, have we.

The minister can blame the school boards all he wants, but they at least are legally bound to balance their budgets. And it's basic math—when the minister underfunds them by millions of dollars, they are forced to make cuts, and they are not going to be able to make repairs.

So I want to ask the minister again—and the Premier: When is this Premier going to make his minister take some responsibility—

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly): Response? I recognize the Minister of Education.

Hon. Stephen Lecce: The NDP math makes the case that you actually really should be the first student for our financial literacy requirement in this province. We're going to offer it to the Leader of the Opposition. The member for Davenport is getting a sneak peek on our graduation requirement.

My goodness, 22% increase in funding—we doubled the funding, 136% increase in capital. We added \$1.3 billion of investment. We cut the timeline in half—maintenance funding, as encouraged or recommended by the AG, at 2.5%, which we have done.

This school board, specifically, is literally sitting on \$300 million of cash—so much so that they conceded yesterday that they don't even have the capacity to spend it all because there aren't enough skilled trade workers to do it. It's not a lack of money. It's a lack of will.

Stand up to the school board and demand better for your kids.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly): Further questions?

Ms. Marit Stiles: Speaker, the minister needs to take his own financial literacy assessment test.

The TDSB alone is facing a deficit of \$26.5 million.

In Thames Valley, classroom supplies are scarce amidst an \$18.5-million deficit, the largest they've ever seen.

Ottawa-Carleton is facing \$70 million in deficits.

The minister says there's historic education funding, but a budget that ignores inflation is a budget that ignores reality. The only thing historic is the fact that our kids are now lobbying us to fix the roofs of their classrooms, to bring back soap in the bathroom, and to keep the lights on in classrooms.

I want to ask the Premier, do we need to hire a lobbyist or reach out to you on Gmail to get some answers?

Hon. Stephen Lecce: For the first time in 25 years, our province is updating the Ontario secondary school diploma, giving it meaning and purpose in alignment with the economy that's changing around us.

We announced today a plan to introduce Ontario's first financial literacy graduation requirement, that actually will ensure young people graduate with real life skills and practical knowledge on how to balance a budget, live a life of purpose, save and retire.

We announced a plan today to hold new educators to account, something the Leader of the Opposition would never do—they'll never stand up to the teacher unions—while we expect better from our new educators by imposing the math proficiency test, elevating standards; something that is radically different from the NDP, who want to water us down and talk us down in this province.

We announced a plan to introduce home economics—a modernized version.

This is how we restore life skills, job skills and give young people knowledge they can apply to their lives.

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HOSPITAL SERVICES

Mr. Chris Glover: On May 10—this is to the Premier—last year, this government's Minister of Health stood in this House and said, "The Minden hospital is not closing." Yet, two weeks later, on June 1, they took down the hospital sign and they rolled the beds out in a minivan, and that hospital has been closed ever since.

The community warned this government that closing that emergency room was going to take lives.

Last summer, a father had a heart attack in Minden. He was rushed in an ambulance to the next nearest hospital, in Haliburton. He died of a cardiac arrest five minutes from the destination.

A girl with a fish hook in her eye in Minden had to be transported 30 minutes to Haliburton.

Two weeks ago, the Haliburton hospital—the one remaining emergency room in the community—was without a doctor for at least four hours.

Will this government acknowledge its mistake and reopen the Minden emergency room?

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly): I recognize the parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Health.

Mr. Nolan Quinn: For a decade under the Liberals, supported by the NDP, they underfunded the health care system, closing hospitals and hospital beds, firing nurses

and cutting medical school residency spots. Our government inherited a health care system under severe pressure due to the actions of the previous Liberal government.

Under the leadership of Premier Ford, our government has made record investments in health care. We've grown our health care budget by over 30% since we took office in 2018, with a record investment of \$85 billion into our publicly funded health care system.

Continuing their legacy of not supporting health care across the province, both the Liberals and the NDP constantly vote against our innovative investments and the bold action our government is taking to rebuild our health care system after years of neglect.

We'll continue to make the investments that are required to ensure that we have the best publicly funded health care system across Canada.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly): Next question. I recognize the member from Nickel Belt.

M^{me} France Gélinas: Durham hospital in West Grey is this government's next Minden. On Monday, their emergency room will close 14 hours per day, and all in-patient beds will be closed. West Grey town council had to declare a state of emergency. South Muskoka Memorial Hospital is going down the same path, looking at closure. And the hospitals in Chesley, Clinton, Almonte, Arnprior, Campbellford, Hawkesbury, Listowel, Mount Forest, Palmerston, Seaforth, South Huron, Walkerton, Wingham—their list goes on—are not far behind.

How many rural hospitals does this minister intend to close?

Mr. Nolan Quinn: Ontario has some of the shortest wait times across the country, but we know there's more to be done. As I mentioned in my previous answer, we have 50 hospital projects right now across the province, totalling \$50 billion. Again, we're making up for lost time under the Liberal government propped up by the NDP.

Last year alone, we had a record number of new nurses: 17,500 new nurses registered in Ontario, with another 30,000 nurses enrolled and studying at a college or university. But we're not stopping there. We're investing over \$740 million to address the immediate staffing needs, supporting the expansion of over 3,000 new nursing seats at Ontario colleges and universities.

We have also expanded the Learn and Stay grant, which the opposition voted against, which pays for tuition, books and supplies for nurses and other health care workers.

We're also funding the largest expansion of medical school spots in over 15 years, with 1,212 undergraduate and 1,637 post-graduate seats.

TAXATION

Ms. Christine Hogarth: My question today is for the Minister of Energy.

Do you know what? It has been two months since the federal government increased the carbon tax by a whopping 23%, and everything seems to be getting more expensive. Speaker, while the Liberals like to blame everyone else for

the damage they've caused, Ontarians know that their costly tax has driven the cost of living to record highs.

The carbon tax queen, Bonnie Crombie, along with her Liberal caucus continue to prop up their federal buddies' costly measures, despite witnessing the financial hardship Ontarians are facing. I hear this every day when I'm knocking on doors.

On the contrary, our government has been opposing the carbon tax since day one. We want to keep costs down for Ontarians and deliver real affordability.

Speaker, can the minister please explain why the carbon tax must come to an end?

Hon. Todd Smith: Thanks to the member from Etobicoke–Lakeshore for the question this morning.

This is the number one issue that we're hearing about across the province—the increased cost of living in our province, but also across our country, and the impact that the federal carbon tax, supported by the queen of the carbon tax, Bonnie Crombie, is having on their household bills. Gas bills for their vehicles, home heating, grocery bills—they're all going up, and they're all a result of the increasing federal carbon tax year after year.

We've taken a different approach in Ontario. We're lowering the cost of living, the price of gas, taxes, fees. We have reduced taxes across the province. And our plan is working.

As a matter of fact, this morning, the Premier and the health minister and the Minister of Economic Development announced another major investment in health sciences, at Sanofi in north Toronto.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly): Question?

Ms. Christine Hogarth: As families across the province continue to see soaring prices for gas, groceries and energy, many of them have cancelled their summer vacation plans. Even a simple road trip has become unaffordable as parents struggle to pay for the basic necessities of life. This simply is not fair.

Life is harder under the Liberal government and its flawed policies. The federal government and the Liberal members sitting in this Legislature must come to their senses and give a break to Ontarians who just want a vacation this summer.

Speaker, can the minister please explain how the carbon tax continues to hurt every single person living in this province?

Hon. Todd Smith: Madam Speaker, it is that serious, and it is that dire for a lot of families across our province, particularly in rural parts of Ontario that don't have access to, say, a transit system or a TTC.

We've done as much as we can to lower the cost for those folks in the GTHA to get around with One Fare that the Associate Minister of Transportation has introduced, saving those who take transit up to \$1,600 a year.

We've cut the gas tax by 10.7 cents a litre here in Ontario, but at the same time, the federal carbon tax continues to drive up the price at the pumps, which makes it really difficult for people to get out and visit beautiful parts of our province like Prince Edward county and Kingston and Essex and Windsor counties and, in northern

Ontario, beautiful places like Kakabeka Falls that are wonderful this time of year.

It's the federal carbon tax that's making it more difficult for those people.

We should all, in this Legislature, be supportive of Premier Ford's motion to scrap that tax in Ottawa.

SEXUAL VIOLENCE AND HARASSMENT

Ms. Catherine Fife: My question is for the Premier.

On May 14, this government chose to silence the voices of survivors by sending Lydia's Law, Bill 189, straight to committee without debate, claiming it expedites the process.

Yesterday morning, I asked the Chair at justice committee if they had received instruction to review Lydia's Law at committee. The answer I got was no. They had received no instruction. There is no timeline for when this bill will be called.

There were 1,326 sexual assault cases thrown out of court in 2022. I hope that we can agree that rapists should not be walking free in the province of Ontario.

My question to the government: Why did you silence survivors on May 14, and when will you call the bill to committee?

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly): Response? I recognize the government House leader.

Hon. Paul Calandra: Honestly, it's an unfortunate question from the member opposite, because the member would know that members on all sides of the House would take this very seriously, and to assume anything less really is beneath the dignity of every member in this place.

The member, who is a long-time member of this House, would also know that the government does not direct committee business. The member would also know, being a long-time member, that there is a subcommittee that works on each committee, and that subcommittee is made up of a member of the NDP, and it is made up of a member of the government party. So what I would suggest the member opposite do is reach out to the subcommittee member from her party on that committee to call a subcommittee so that they could bring a study forward. I know that they have been working very closely together, in fact. The NDP member of the subcommittee and the member for Kitchener South–Hespeler have been working very closely to put together a very thorough study on this, and I trust that—

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly): I recognize the member for Waterloo.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Speaker, that is a pathetic response from the House leader.

This government is knowingly and deliberately starving the system, and sending a message to survivors and families across Ontario that they do not care about the lived injustices that women have experienced.

1100

If expediting was the goal of the government, why hasn't the committee been instructed to call the bill? If you had read Lydia's Law and if you had read Lydia's victim

impact statement, you would never have deferred this piece of legislation to committee, where it is languishing.

Lydia asked me, “Why would women report, knowing how broken the system is?” This is our opportunity to correct that system. We need to change the justice system because the status quo isn’t working, and change begins with transparency.

My question, again: When will the government call the bill at committee so that survivors can get the justice they deserve in this province?

Hon. Paul Calandra: Again, it is the subcommittee and it is the committee which will decide the fate of that study, and I trust that they will do their job very well.

I need no lessons from the member opposite on respecting the rights of victims of crime in this province—and to suggest anything else is beneath the dignity of that member. I have two daughters of my own. Do you not think I want them to be made safe, Speaker?

Interjections.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly): Order. Order.

Hon. Paul Calandra: Do you not think I’ll stand up for victims of crime? The member opposite should know that I’ll do that and—

Interjections.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly): Order. The member for Waterloo will come to order. The member for Oshawa will come to order.

Interjections.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly): Stop the clock.

The member for Hamilton Mountain will come to order. The government House leader will come to order. The member for Waterloo will come to order. The member from Hamilton West–Ancaster–Dundas will come to order.

Question?

TAXATION

Mr. Lorne Coe: My question is to the Minister of the Environment, Conservation and Parks.

The federal carbon tax continues to drive up the cost of the goods we buy and the interest we pay. At a time when prices are out of control and people are having trouble paying their bills, the federal Liberals hiked the tax again by 23%. It’s not fair. We know that it’s possible to improve on the impacts of climate change without forcing people to pay a costly, job-killing carbon tax. The Liberals must reverse this tax, so that Ontarians can put food on their table.

Can the minister please share how our government is protecting the environment for future generations to enjoy without introducing a punitive carbon tax?

Hon. Andrea Khanjin: I’ll tell you what we’re not doing: We’re not driving 300,000 manufacturing jobs out of this province, like the former government did and which a punitive carbon tax would continue to do.

Instead, we have hard-working members like the member for Whitby, who is building up his community and building up Ontario, building on transit—this member takes GO train transit every day—and that’s a vision our government wants for all Ontarians.

We’re getting more cars off the road and more people into transit. If it was up to the opposition, the cost of these transit projects would go up. But no fear, Speaker: Instead, this government will continue to build transit, and we’ll lower fees by introducing the One Fare program for all Ontarians, making it more economical to get more cars on the road and to transit.

In addition, just next door to the member’s riding, we’re building the first urban provincial park. If it was up to the opposition, the cost of building this park would also go up.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly): Question?

Mr. Lorne Coe: Thank you to the minister for that response.

Speaker, our government continues to invest in the future of Ontario and create a legacy of environmental health for generations to come.

The people of Milton and the people of Lambton–Kent–Middlesex sent a clear message on May 2—a very clear message. They rejected the queen of the carbon tax, Bonnie Crombie, and the carbon tax she supports. They, and everyone else in Ontario, want to see our government continue to stand up for them, to fight for affordability and oppose the Liberal carbon tax.

Can the minister please explain how our government is keeping costs down for hard-working families in Ontario without imposing a costly tax?

Hon. Andrea Khanjin: The member is correct; Carbon Crombie would drive up the cost of everything in this province—driving up the cost for Ontarians who want to go camping this summer in the great provincial parks which this government is building. Under this government, we’re expanding and building more campsites—something many Ontarians have said, loud and clear, they want to do this summer with their children. It’s an affordable activity, but if it was up to Carbon Crombie, it would be very expensive to put gas in these vehicles.

But don’t worry, Speaker. This government is lowering the cost of gas by 10 cents a litre. In addition to that, we’re building the EV infrastructure by putting EV charging stations in Ontario parks and making sure we’re using clean, green steel to build these electric vehicles—again, creating jobs and building up our economy.

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: My question is to the Premier.

Over a month ago, I brought forward Bill 173, the Intimate Partner Violence Epidemic Act. The government sent it to committee instead of making the declaration immediately. They have yet to call it at committee, pass it, enact it or declare IPV is an epidemic.

The 2022 Renfrew county coroner’s inquest report had 86 actionable recommendations, 75 of which were for this

Conservative government to implement. The very first one: Declare IPV an epidemic in Ontario.

More women continue to be killed in this province due to this government's inaction.

Survivors, victims, their families, communities, municipalities, advocates, experts are all wondering: Will the Premier declare today gender-based violence and IPV to be the epidemic that it clearly is?

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly): Response? I recognize the government House leader.

Hon. Paul Calandra: In fact, this Parliament agreed, and that is why this Parliament voted unanimously to pass that particular bill. At the same time, when Parliament as a whole unanimously voted to pass that bill, we also went a step further. We said that we had to find out how we can make the system better for victims of crime. We wanted to bring together not only ministries, but we want to bring in service providers who have told us that while there are a lot of services, often that is disjointed. We wanted to bring in the justice system. We wanted to bring in crown attorneys. We wanted to ensure that not only are we just making a declaration but that we're actually providing better services for people. We wanted to look across the country, across our partners worldwide, at what we can do better, in much the same way that we did with human trafficking.

If the NDP are that afraid to work over the summer, to try to do something effective here, to bring forward legislation that will make a difference in the lives of the people of the province of Ontario, like our human trafficking work has made a difference in the lives of people not only in Ontario but across the country, I feel sorry for them.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly): I recognize the member for Windsor West.

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: I just want to point out that Bill 28, which was a direct attack on women, passed in four days through this government with no committee—no committee. Bill 124, eight sitting days—another bill that directly attacked women in the province of Ontario.

If you really wanted to take action, you would declare intimate partner violence an epidemic today and implement the 75 recommendations from the Renfrew county coroner's inquest.

The Conservatives claim they won't declare intimate partner violence an epidemic until they have actionable measures, and yet for nearly two years they've had 75 recommendations from an inquest into the deaths of three women in Ontario. Nearly 100 municipalities have made the declaration. And I have a letter that was sent to the government House leader and other government members from the warden of Lanark county imploring the government to pass my bill and declare IPV an epidemic before the House rises in a few short days.

Last week, Shannan Hickey, a 26-year-old nurse from Belleville, was killed by her partner.

Will you make the declaration—

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly): Response?

Hon. Paul Calandra: Speaker, what we did is, we went a step further. Parliament passed that bill unanimously.

Unanimously, Parliament passed that declaration. At the same time, what Parliament said is that we have to make sure that it's not just a declaration; that there has to be work behind the declaration, and that is what Progressive Conservatives are willing to do. We are willing to do the work behind making sure that victims, that service providers have access to the absolute best system in the world. We're prepared to do that work.

Interjection.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly): The member for Windsor West will come to order.

Hon. Paul Calandra: If the member opposite just simply wants a declaration without meaning, well, then I feel sorry for the NDP—

Interjection.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly): The member for Windsor West is being warned.

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Hon. Paul Calandra: It highlights just why they are so irrelevant in the province of Ontario. This is an irrelevant party that has nothing to say—

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly): Question?

Interjection.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly): The member for Hamilton Mountain is being warned. The member for Hamilton Mountain has been warned.

To the member for Kanata—Carleton.

GOVERNMENT SPENDING

Mrs. Karen McCrimmon: Speaker, inexplicably this government doubled down, saying that the retention and—

Interjection.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly): The member for Niagara Falls has been—not warned; I'm going to call you to order, but be careful, because if I hear a response like that again, you will be.

Mr. Wayne Gates: I appreciate that. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly): I apologize to the member. Please ask your question.

Mrs. Karen McCrimmon: Thank you, Speaker.

Inexplicably, this government doubled down, saying that the retention and recruitment of doctors is not a major concern. Excuse me? Some 2.3 million Ontarians don't have a family doctor, yet nothing is happening because we are told the cupboards are bare.

It is true that this year's budget forecast a \$10-billion deficit, and it is also true that in the past six years this government has added \$86 billion to Ontario's debt. So the money is being spent somewhere; just not in health care.

Speaker, I want to ask the Premier how he could possibly think that spending \$1 billion to expedite beer and alcohol sales should be his priority instead of solving the family doctor crisis.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly): Response? I recognize the member from Oakville.

Mr. Stephen Crawford: To the member opposite, who I believe is on the record for supporting a carbon tax and

thinking that's great for the people of Ontario—well, that gives us a sense of where you're coming from.

But let's go back. We ran, in 2022, on a key promise to deliver convenience and competition to the people of Ontario. The people of Ontario spoke. They want competition. They want convenience. They're sick and tired of the Liberal deal that they put into place—a 10-year monopoly deal which gave higher prices and a monopoly to large, foreign-owned companies.

We, on the other hand, care about small businesses. We care about the people of Ontario.

Some 7,500 jobs are going to be created by our change here in Ontario that we're putting forward—good-paying jobs for the people of Ontario. Our GDP is going to grow by an estimated \$200 million. New investments in infrastructure, in cooling systems for various companies are going to expand. And most important, it's going to give—

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly): Question?

Mrs. Karen McCrimmon: I get it: This is strictly a distraction from the truth that this government has no solutions for the many challenges facing Ontarians—no solutions for an aging, ailing public health care system; no solutions on improving housing; no solutions on safeguarding and improving public education. This government has no solutions for overwhelmed Ontario families, children, seniors or patients; just giveaways to wealthy friends and insiders.

Speaker, I want to ask the Premier once again: How could he possibly think that the priority of this government should be renegotiating beer contracts instead of investing in the solutions that Ontarians urgently need?

Mr. Stephen Crawford: Let's be clear to the House here and the people watching on TV: We've made it a very big priority to hire doctors, create new medical schools in the province of Ontario, hire foreign registered nurses and bring them into the province. That's very much a priority.

But let's get back to what the member was asking about, with respect to the liberalization that we are bringing in.

The previous Liberal government signed a multitude of bad deals. I know the Minister of Energy could certainly point to the Green Energy Act, which was probably one of the worst bills ever signed in the people of Ontario's history—but also the Master Framework Agreement, a 10-year deal which gave high prices, high taxes and high profits to foreign corporations.

We are acting on the promise that we ran on in 2022, which is to give liberalization to this, stop the old agreement—a 97-year monopoly—bring convenience and competition to the people of Ontario, and bring back economic growth. This is what the people of Ontario want, and we're delivering.

TAXATION

Mrs. Daisy Wai: My question is for the Minister of Long-term Care.

The federal government's unfair, regressive carbon tax is forcing Ontarians to pay more for everything, from their groceries to home heating and gas.

Speaker, families in my riding of Richmond Hill are concerned about the impact the costly tax will have on their loved ones.

I have heard from long-term-care operators in our province who say that the Liberal carbon tax is driving up the cost of building. As our aging population continues to grow, it is vital that our long-term-care capacity grows alongside it.

Ontarians want an end to this tax, and the federal Liberals need to do the right thing and scrap it immediately.

Speaker, can the minister please tell the House what our government is doing to build more long-term-care homes in Ontario?

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly): I recognize the parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Long-Term Care.

Ms. Natalia Kusendova-Bashta: I thank the member for Richmond Hill for her question and also for being such a strong advocate for seniors not only in her riding but across the province of Ontario.

Madam Speaker, the member is absolutely correct; as the minister and I travel across the province, what we hear from operators is that the carbon tax is increasing the tax of absolutely everything, including construction of new homes. That is why, in our recent budget, in 2024, our government, under the leadership of Premier Ford, stepped up to the plate and invested \$155 million to the construction fund subsidy. We talked to the industry and heard them loud and clear. However, the Liberals—surprise, surprise—voted against this increase in funding to make sure seniors can receive the care they need. Instead of supporting our government's plan to build Ontario, they continue to support this cost-hiking carbon tax.

Speaker, I stand with the Premier, and I stand with the minister, who is making life easier for Ontarians, especially our seniors.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly): Question?

Mrs. Daisy Wai: Thank you to the parliamentary assistant for the response. She is also as compassionate to all the seniors in this province.

Unlike the NDP and Liberal members of this Legislature, our government understands the challenges Ontarians are facing. That's why we have been asking the federal government to scrap the carbon tax since day one. But the opposition continues to turn a blind eye. They would rather support a costly carbon tax that does nothing besides punishing families, businesses and workers. Despite their inaction, our government, under the leadership of Premier Ford, is getting it done for Ontarians.

Speaker, can the parliamentary assistant elaborate on the work our government has been doing to ensure that our seniors receive the care they need and enjoy the high quality of life that they deserve?

Ms. Natalia Kusendova-Bashta: After a decade and a half of the Ontario Liberals' hopes and prayers, complete

lack of vision, complete lack of investment into long-term care, we are finally getting the job done. And despite the work the federal government is doing to hold down construction with their tax on everything, we are still getting it done for the people of Ontario. In fact, we are not letting the carbon tax slow us down. Last year, we approved over 11,000 beds to start construction.

Contrast this with Carbon Crombie's record of failure as the mayor, where she failed to build almost any housing—Mississauga is one of the only jurisdictions in Ontario that actually lowered, under her leadership. She didn't build then, and she isn't building now. We just can't afford her.

Once more, I ask Carbon Crombie and her high-cost Liberal caucus to join us and call on their federal Liberal cousins to finally give people a much-needed break and scrap this tax.

HOSPITAL SERVICES

Mr. Jeff Burch: Speaker, through you to the Minister of Health: Today, thousands of concerned citizens are outside Queen's Park protesting this government's disastrous health care policies and privatization scheme. Among these citizens are residents of Port Colborne and Fort Erie, who have now gone 330 days without after-hours services at their local urgent care centres.

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Nearly 10,000 residents in Port Colborne alone are without a family doctor, and many are forced to rely on their local urgent care centre.

Through you, Speaker: When will this minister finally listen to the citizens of Niagara and step in to restore full urgent care services in south Niagara?

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly): Response? I recognize the parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Health.

Mr. Nolan Quinn: That's why we're investing in a new hospital in the Niagara region. We're also investing in connecting 600,000 more Ontarians to an interprofessional primary care team. The new and expanded teams will include family health teams, nurse practitioner-led clinics, community health centres and Indigenous primary care organizations.

Speaker, I'll remind the member opposite, they actually voted against our budget that included a \$546-million expansion over the next three years to expand the interprofessional primary care teams.

The Minto-Mapleton Family Health Team has already hired a new nurse practitioner. And we're going to see more in the months to come.

In Ontario, we have a plan, and it's working.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly): Further questions?

Mr. Jeff Burch: Speaker, again to the Minister of Health: As a result of this government's failed health care policies and mistreatment of health care workers, residents in Welland have now endured a staggering 457 days without after-hours emergency surgical services at the Welland hospital—a cut that Niagara Health said was

temporary due to staffing shortages. With Welland's population surging and housing targets being surpassed by 276% last year alone, we should be seeing a historic expansion of services in south Niagara.

Speaker, through you: When will this minister listen to the people of Niagara and step in to ensure after-hours emergency surgical services are restored at the Welland hospital?

Mr. Nolan Quinn: Speaker, let's talk about historic: Our government is investing \$3.1 billion in the new hospital in Niagara. Once completed, the new hospital will consolidate five separate campuses and expand acute-care services, replacing outdated infrastructure that the NDP allowed to crumble under the Liberal government. Additionally, we're meeting the growing demand in the region. The new hospital is planned to have 159 more beds than the combined total of beds at Niagara Health's Port Colborne, Fort Erie and Niagara Falls campuses. The minister recently met with Mayor Steele about the creative ideas they're exploring locally.

We will continue to work with all of our health care partners across the province to ensure that we have the best publicly funded health care system in the north, south, east and west.

BEVERAGE ALCOHOL SALES

Mr. Vincent Ke: My question is to the Minister of Finance.

For years, consumers and retailers have been urging the government to expand alcohol distribution policies to align with most other Canadian provinces and the US, to allow for an open market and greater convenience for consumers. Currently, consumers can only buy alcohol from a limited number of grocery stores. This often results in the need to make additional trips or makes it inconvenient to pick up a bottle of wine before visiting a friend.

Speaker, my question is: How will this expansion for retailers be implemented to create an open and convenient marketplace?

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly): Response? I recognize the member for Oakville.

Mr. Stephen Crawford: Thank you to the member for Don Valley North. I must say, that was a very good question.

In terms of the liberalization and the changes that we are making, it's going to have a tremendous impact, not only on families across Ontario and individuals who just want to buy a bottle of wine on a Friday night and not have to go to the LCBO or the Beer Store, but it's also going to help small businesses. Small businesses are the backbone of the province of Ontario. Speaker, 7,500 new jobs will be created in small businesses and convenience stores and other areas, so this is going to have a tremendously positive impact.

In fact, I can assure the member opposite that there has been great support from the convenience store industry. In fact, the president of the Ontario Convenience Stores

Association said, “This is great news for all convenience store owners and their staff in Ontario. We at the” Ontario Convenience Stores Association “have been petitioning the Ontario government for beer and wine” in corner stores “for the last 30 years.” We’re delivering.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly): Question?

Mr. Vincent Ke: Thank you to the parliamentary assistant for his response.

Speaker, in Ontario, a survey showed that 75% of youth in grade 12 had reported lifetime alcohol use.

Based on research from Alberta, awareness and education campaigns can help shed light on alcohol-related harms.

Alcohol consumption has surged post-pandemic, especially amongst the youth in Ontario. Can the minister please tell this House, what is the strategy to combat this rise, and what is this government doing to promote responsible drinking?

Mr. Stephen Crawford: It’s a very good question. It’s important to understand that the Ontario government takes this very, very seriously. With the modernization, the Ontario government is investing an additional \$10 million in funding to support social responsibility initiatives and organizations that maintain the rigorous standards of social responsibility. That will include warning signs, mandatory staff training and high standards for licensing and enforcement.

TAXATION

Mr. Sheref Sabawy: My question is for the Associate Minister of Small Business.

Speaker, the cost pressures driven by the federal carbon tax have placed a significant burden on Ontario’s small businesses and aspiring entrepreneurs. Young people in our province with innovative ideas are finding their dreams stifled by the increasing affordability challenges stemming from this tax. The carbon tax is not only driving up operational costs for existing small businesses, but it’s also hindering the ability of these budding entrepreneurs to get their ideas off the ground in the first place.

Our government must continue to demonstrate leadership in helping Ontario’s young entrepreneurs succeed during their start-up phase.

Speaker, can the associate minister tell us how our government is supporting aspiring entrepreneurs in our province who are negatively impacted by this disastrous tax?

Hon. Nina Tangri: Thank you to the great colleague of mine from Mississauga—Erin Mills for the question.

Speaker, I’ve heard from so many young entrepreneurs who are finding their dreams of starting their businesses harder due to the mounting affordability challenges caused by the carbon tax. Many tell me their parents are willing to help, but with the costs of groceries, gas and everyday essentials growing, there’s just nothing left over to help them secure the necessary capital or invest in the supplies needed to start or sustain their businesses through the crucial start-up phase.

Our government recognizes the crucial role young entrepreneurs play in driving our economic growth. That’s why we’ve invested \$1.5 million more into our Summer Company program, for a total of \$4.7 million a year, so an additional 250 young people can be their own boss this summer.

Speaker, while we’re making it easier for our entrepreneurs to get started, the carbon tax is making it harder. That’s why—

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly): Further questions?

Mr. Sheref Sabawy: Thank you to the associate minister for this response.

The Summer Company program has an important role in supporting young entrepreneurs across our province, and I know many aspiring business owners in my riding were happy to take advantage of this valuable initiative.

However, the challenges posed by the federal carbon tax go beyond just affecting students and recent graduates looking to start their first businesses. Entrepreneurs aged 18 and older are also struggling with the cost pressures this tax is creating, and it has become increasingly difficult for them to secure the necessary investments and resources to start or grow their enterprises.

Speaker, can the associate minister tell the House what additional measures our government is using to support this vital demographic of business owners?

Hon. Nina Tangri: Thank you, again, to the member for the question.

Speaker, I’ve been hearing similar concerns from more seasoned business owners who are grappling with the significant cost pressures this tax is creating as they seek to launch and grow their own business.

1130

Our government is taking proactive steps to bolster our support for all prospective small business owners.

Just last week, we announced a \$4.8-million investment over the next two years to expand the Starter Company Plus program, which provides training, mentoring and grants of up to \$5,000 to help entrepreneurs age 18 and older start or grow their business. This will give an additional 500 entrepreneurs the opportunity to succeed, building on the over 5,500 companies it has already supported and the more than 6,300 jobs we’ve created across Ontario.

Speaker, this Premier, this government is focused on reducing the barriers to starting a business, and the biggest one that still stands in their way is the job-killing carbon tax.

ACCESS TO HEALTH CARE

Mrs. Jennifer (Jennie) Stevens: In St. Catharines, Shannon Horner’s mother fell ill in Jamaica and couldn’t come home due to claims of no available beds in Ontario. Communication failures between the ministry and the insurance companies caused this. We know that there were actual beds available at the time. I wrote a letter and was

assured that it was being handled. However, I have yet to see any action.

The health care system is in crisis right now.

How are you going to explain to the people stuck in other countries why they cannot get home for care? And will you work with me and update on the steps your ministry has taken to make sure it will never, ever happen again?

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly): I recognize the parliamentary assistant to health.

Mr. Nolan Quinn: CritiCall Ontario is the organization that is prepared to be able to handle people who get injured while abroad. There was a miscommunication there, and that member did come home.

Speaker, under a decade under the Liberals, supported by the NDP, they underfunded the health care system, which put us in this situation. They closed hospitals, closed hospital beds. They fired nurses. And most importantly, they cut medical school residency spots, which leaves us with hundreds and hundreds of less doctors performing services in the province of Ontario.

Speaker, our government inherited a health care system under severe pressure due to the actions of the previous Liberal government, supported by the NDP.

Under the leadership of Premier Ford, our government has made record investments in health care, including a \$3.1-billion investment into a new hospital in Niagara, which that member voted against.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly): Further questions?

Mrs. Jennifer (Jennie) Stevens: I'd like that member across the way to explain to Shannon Horner why her mother fell ill in Jamaica. And, yes, she did make it home, but she unfortunately has passed now—my condolences to Shannon.

This happened twice in one week in Ontario, and dozens of times over the years.

It is heartbreaking that St. Catharines lost an amazing community member and family pillar.

It is time for action from this government. The minister called the family, but there has been no follow-up to the family. The president of Travel Health Insurance Association of Canada asked for changes. However, again, there has been no follow-up.

Please, follow up.

My community of seniors, travellers and snowbirds need assurance that their health care system will be there for them when they need it the most.

Speaker, when will we see real, compassionate action—and prioritize action with the experts to fix these issues?

Mr. Nolan Quinn: The status quo was no longer working for the people of Ontario when we formed government in 2018. That's why we're taking bold and innovative action to rebuild Ontario's health care system to deliver more connected and convenient care.

The Liberals, in 2015, removed those 50 medical residency seats. That is now hundreds of less doctors in our system today.

Speaker, since 2018, over 80,000 new nurses have registered to practise in Ontario—including 12,500 new doctors who have registered in Ontario. Over 2,400 new doctors were ready to practise last year alone, including 1,000 internationally trained doctors—

Interjections.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly): The member for St. Catharines will come to order.

Mr. Nolan Quinn: The opposition voted against our motion to ensure that we can have internationally trained nurses and doctors practising in our province.

We're investing over \$740 million to address the immediate staffing needs, supporting the expansion of over 3,000 new nursing seats in Ontario colleges and universities.

TAXATION

Ms. Laura Smith: My question is for the Minister of Public and Business Service Delivery.

The Liberal carbon tax is making life unnecessarily more difficult for people throughout the province. Due to the increased costs of goods and services, more Ontarians are struggling to afford basic essentials and make ends meet. Behind this record inflation and rising carbon tax, people are facing real harsh realities.

It's time for the federal government to finally listen to Ontarians and stop piling on even more financial burdens. They must scrap the tax now.

Speaker, can the minister please explain how the Liberal carbon tax is impacting consumer confidence in Ontario?

Hon. Todd J. McCarthy: I thank the member for Thornhill for her excellent advocacy for her community and that very thoughtful question.

Yes, the Liberal carbon tax is a major burden on families and households and our elderly and our young people, and on small businesses, the engine of the economy.

We must do all that we can, and we are doing, as a provincial government, all that we can to decrease the cost of living. My ministry has introduced the Better for Consumers, Better for Businesses Act, which ensures that price gouging will be recognized for what it is and declared unconscionable conduct. We have cut the gas tax. We have eliminated tolls on the 412 and 418 in Durham. We have banned licence renewal fees. So we're doing all we can.

We ask the federal Liberal government—and if the NDP supported us on consumer protection, call your federal cousins, tell them to defeat the Liberal government in Ottawa—

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly): Further questions?

Ms. Laura Smith: Thank you to the minister for his response and for the solid work that he does for the people of Ontario every day.

I'm glad to see that, unlike the Liberals and the NDP, our government is actually listening to the concerns of the people who elected us.

Speaker, Ontario has had enough of the Liberal carbon tax. After last month's carbon tax hike, commuters are being forced to pay more at the gas pumps. That's unfair to the residents in northern, rural and remote communities—and Thornhill—who rely heavily on vehicles for their work and to run their daily errands. The federal Liberals and their provincial buddies need to start respecting Ontarians and get rid of this unnecessary tax.

Can the minister please elaborate on how the Liberal carbon tax overlooks the varied needs and challenges experienced in communities across Ontario?

Hon. Todd J. McCarthy: Speaker, I thank you for the follow-up question from the great member for Thornhill.

When we talk about communities and how communities experience it, I can talk about my riding of Durham, which, as I have said many times, is a microcosm of the great province of Ontario. We have rural communities and farms in the northern part of Durham. We have suburban communities in Bowmanville, north Oshawa and Courtice and Newcastle. All of my fellow residents and citizens communicate with me regularly about, for example, the increased transportation, energy and operational expenses for our farmers, and the burden upon those who own homes or rent homes in terms of the energy cost impact.

As I said, we're doing all that we can for our fellow citizens and residents to reduce the cost of living, but it's time for the tone-deaf Liberals and NDP in Ottawa to pay attention to our citizens and scrap this ruinous, regressive carbon tax.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly): That's all the time we have for questions.

VISITOR

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly): I'd like to, first of all, mention that we have a former member of the Legislature joining us today. Jeff Leal, the member for Peterborough, is here. He was a member in the 38th, 39th, 40th and 41st Parliaments.

Welcome back.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly): I recognize the government House leader on a point of order.

Hon. Paul Calandra: I rise in accordance with standing order 59 to outline the order of business for next week.

On Monday, June 3, in the morning and in the afternoon sessions, we will be dealing with Bill 185, Cutting Red Tape to Build More Homes Act.

On Tuesday, June 4, in the morning, we will be on third reading of Bill 159; in the afternoon, we'll be on private member's Bill 45 and third reading of Bill 185. At 6 p.m., we will be dealing with private member's Bill 192, for the member of Nickel Belt.

On Wednesday, June 5, we'll be on to third reading of Bill 159 in the morning and in the afternoon. Private

members' business that day will be business for the member for Oshawa.

On Thursday, June 6, in the morning, third reading of Bill 159; in the afternoon, third reading of Bill 194; and private members' business will be Bill 133, for the member for Sudbury.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly): Seeing there is no further business, this House stands in recess until 1 p.m.

The House recessed from 1140 to 1300.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Mr. Joel Harden: I just want to join my colleagues earlier who welcomed the guests who are on the front lawn: 6,000 advocates for public health care.

REPORTS BY COMMITTEES

STANDING COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT AGENCIES

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Deepak Anand): I beg to inform the House that today the Clerk received the report on intended appointments dated May 30, 2024, of the Standing Committee on Government Agencies. Pursuant to standing order 110(f)(9), the report is deemed to be adopted by the House.

Report deemed adopted.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

HOMELESSNESS TASK FORCE ACT, 2024

LOI DE 2024 SUR LE GROUPE DE TRAVAIL DE LUTTE CONTRE L'ITINÉRANCE

Ms. Karpoche moved first reading of the following bill: Bill 204, An Act to establish the Homelessness Task Force / Projet de loi 204, Loi visant à créer un groupe de travail de lutte contre l'itinérance.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Deepak Anand): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

First reading agreed to.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Deepak Anand): Would the member like to make a brief statement?

Ms. Bhutla Karpoche: As the affordable housing crisis worsens, more and more Ontarians are falling into homelessness. The approach so far has failed. We need a coordinated, resourced provincial strategy to tackle the homelessness crisis.

My bill requires the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing to establish a homelessness task force to support the government of Ontario in creating and maintaining a

provincial homelessness strategy. In a province as rich as ours, no one should be unhoused.

PETITIONS

HOSPITAL SERVICES

Mr. Jeff Burch: With thousands of people on the front lawn of the Legislature asking for an end to cuts in health care, I'm pleased to present this petition with hundreds of signatures from the good people of Port Colborne, asking that the after-hours services at their urgent care in Port Colborne be restored so that folks who don't have a family doctor in Port Colborne can have a place to go when they are ill.

I affix my signature and send it to the Clerk.

SOCIAL ASSISTANCE

Ms. Bhutla Karpoche: This petition is titled, "Raise Social Assistance Rates." Right now, recipients of Ontario Works receive only \$733 per month and a recipient on the Ontario Disability Support Program receives \$1,227. Both of these rates are far below the poverty line. This petition is calling on the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to immediately double social assistance rates.

HOSPITAL SERVICES

Mr. Jeff Burch: Again, with thousands of people on the front lawn of the Legislature asking for a stop to health care cuts, I'm pleased to present this petition with hundreds of signatures from the good people of Welland, asking that their after-hours surgical services be restored at the hospital and that in the future, when a new hospital is built, it be a full-service hospital for the people of South Niagara.

I affix my signature.

CHILDREN'S MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: The petition I have to read into the record today is entitled "Improve Ontario's Child and Youth Mental Health Services"—and with everyone gathered on the front lawn, I think they would also agree that mental health is health.

This petition calls upon the government to invest more in mental health services. We know the wait-lists are incredibly long, sometimes up to two years, as pointed out in the petition.

So, this petition calls upon the government to urgently invest rather than cut and make sure that children have mental health services when and where they need them.

I fully support this petition, will affix my signature and deliver it with page Farhan to the Clerks.

PRESCRIPTION CONTRACEPTIVES

Mr. Joel Harden: I want to thank the Canadian Federation of Medical Students for the following petition, which is about universal access to contraception.

I know my friend here from St. Catharines has been an advocate for it, as have many people in this House, but in the community, what I'm being told is that the direct cost of unplanned pregnancy between people aged 15 to 29 is \$381 million and that what we need to do as a province and as a country is give people more control over their reproductive health and that universal access to contraception is a key way to do it.

I note that the federal government has made some inroads thanks to the federal NDP and the hard work of Jagmeet Singh and that team to move in this direction, but I encourage the House to listen to the people who have signed this petition, particularly the Canadian Federation of Medical Students, who are doctors in training, asking us to move on universal contraception for everyone in the province of Ontario right away.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

SUPPORTING CHILDREN'S FUTURES ACT, 2024

LOI DE 2024 VISANT À SOUTENIR L'AVENIR DES ENFANTS

Resuming the debate adjourned on May 29, 2024, on the motion for third reading of the following bill:

Bill 188, An Act to amend the Child, Youth and Family Services Act, 2017 and various other Acts / Projet de loi 188, Loi modifiant la Loi de 2017 sur les services à l'enfance, à la jeunesse et à la famille et diverses autres lois.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Deepak Anand): Further debate?

Mr. Sol Mamakwa: Meegwetch, Speaker. It's always an honour to be able to speak on behalf of the people of Kiiwetinoong.

As you know, Kiiwetinoong is a very unique riding—294,000 square kilometres. We are so rich when we talk about land and resources.

I rise today to speak on Bill 188, Supporting Children's Futures, again, on behalf of the people of Kiiwetinoong.

Last time I spoke about this bill, I spoke about the colonial history, and the care system reminds us of what it is like, in Kiiwetinoong.

I'll talk about in my remarks—we still see examples of these practices that are implemented and imposed upon our children in the care system. And I talk about that because—particularly when they are forced to relocate from the north, far northern Ontario, to southern Ontario for care.

When I look at this bill, Bill 188, even with its supportable steps moving in a better direction, I know we can do so much more. We can always do more. Why take half-measures on this bill? As the province and as the

government, it's your responsibility to fix problems left unaddressed.

1310

I want to be able to highlight some of those issues. I want to be able to highlight some of those problems that come with the bill and the many, many recommendations, most of which are not new, to help resolve these issues.

A few years ago—it was the summer of 2019—there was a cabinet shuffle that happened, and Minister Todd Smith looked at that file. One of the things that he had done was to show up in Thunder Bay, at the door, and introduce himself as the Minister of Children, Community and Social Services. He bumped into one of the directors of social services who looks after that children's file, and they sat down for about half an hour or 45 minutes. That director of social services at Nishnawbe Aski Nation was able to tell Minister Smith at that time what he could do. There was a jurisdiction issue between two First Nation agencies, where they were fighting over the resources, fighting over the children, because when you have children in care, it means money.

And I know that, I think about two weeks after, Minister Smith, at that time, in the summer of 2019, made a letter to ensure that children in northwestern Ontario, in the Tikinagan area—that the Tikinagan children's services have jurisdiction over their children. I share that story because I remember listening to a chief saying, "There are five kids who are under the age of five. I don't know where they are. They're somewhere in the system. I don't know where they are. They could be all over Ontario somewhere." She had no idea where they were. That's the welfare system that exists for us today.

Going back, there was a letter that was provided by, at that time, Minister Smith under MCCSS. He made a decision to make sure that the people of northwestern Ontario, in that specific area, had the jurisdiction over their children and there was no more fighting over the children. Of course, the other agency was not happy, because of where they were located. That's how you make change, and I encourage the current Minister of Children, Community and Social Services to meet with Nishnawbe Aski Nation to ensure he learns what the issues are that they are facing in the north.

Speaker, I know that in the north, First Nations are experiencing tragic death after tragic death. I say that because I'm thinking of Amy Owen, who died by suicide while she was in government care. She was 13 years old. And she was from Poplar Hill First Nation, which is part of my riding.

I am thinking of Kanina Sue Turtle, also from Poplar Hill First Nation, who filmed herself as she ended her life, getting care in Sioux Lookout, where I live. She was grieving the death of her friend, Alayna Moose, who had taken her life two weeks earlier.

I am thinking of so many others, so many other children from our communities, from our First Nations, who died in state care—but not all died by suicide.

What I'm talking about here tells us so much, Speaker, but to start taking away our children and pulling them into

these places is hurting our kids. It's hurting our families. It's hurting our communities. They are not getting the care that they need.

I want everyone in this House to be aware of the overrepresentation of Indigenous children in the care system, which should also be top of mind when we discuss issues related to care. In their inquiry in 2016, out of the 27 agencies looked at by the Ontario Human Rights Commission, Indigenous children were overrepresented in 25—for example, in 93% of the agencies. They are also admitted into care at a rate 2.6 times higher than their proportion of the child population. But these numbers are very low estimates, because the Ontario Human Rights Commission's sample was comprised of only mainstream or non-Indigenous children's aid societies.

Speaker, we need to put an end to these policies that take our children away from our communities and put them into settings where these assimilationist practices are imposed on them. First Nations' right to self-determination and jurisdiction over how our children are raised needs to be respected and supported by this government.

Just about a year ago, Ombudsman Paul Dubé published a report titled *Missing in Inaction: Misty's Story*, which was an investigation into the adequacy of measures related to ensuring the safety of an anonymous child referred to as "Misty," an Indigenous child living with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder and fetal alcohol spectrum disorder, who by 15 years of age had interacted with the child welfare system a number of times and had already experienced tremendous amounts of trauma.

1320

Speaker, she was sent to southern Ontario by the children's aid societies in northern Ontario because of their difficulty finding the appropriate resources closer to home. She was only in care in southern Ontario for 47 days, but these 47 were the focus of the Ombudsman's investigation, because "over the course of the 47 days Misty spent in the care of Johnson Children's Services in southwestern Ontario, she went missing seven times, including one period of 19 days. There is evidence that during these absences, she was physically and sexually assaulted, suffered injuries requiring medical treatment, used methamphetamines, fentanyl, cannabis, cocaine and Xanax—and overdosed."

The investigation into this inadequacy of the three organizations' fulfillment of their responsibilities towards Misty was very revealing. It showed us that the system failed Misty in many ways, in more ways than one, and left her vulnerable to harms, including human trafficking.

It also highlighted the need for agencies in southern Ontario to be educated in the learnings provided by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, which should inform how they understand and make decisions regarding the risks surrounding Indigenous children in care: "It is particularly pressing that agencies in southern Ontario such as Johnson Children's Services Inc. educate themselves and their staff on the

learnings from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls. They should also consider the risk factors unique to Indigenous children and their decision-making around their care.”

Speaker, I could go on, but due to the limitations of time, I just want to emphasize how important it is that all legislation and policy change takes into account the recommendations in the Ombudsman’s report but also the calls to action, and the justice, from the TRC, the very first of which is “to commit to reducing the number of Aboriginal children in care.”

In the MMIWG inquiry, it emphasizes the need for Indigenous communities to have their inherent jurisdiction and self-determination respected when it comes to child welfare and service design/delivery.

Among their critical recommendations are to prohibit the apprehension of children on the basis of poverty and cultural bias; fully investigate deaths of Indigenous youth in care; and establish a child and youth advocate in each jurisdiction with a specialized unit with the mandate of Indigenous children and youth within a period of one year of this report.

So you might ask, where is the children and youth advocate in Ontario today? I remember back in 2019, this government closed down the Child and Youth Advocate office, and the Ombudsman has not been given power equivalent to those that the Child and Youth Advocate once had.

The story of what happened to Mindy, as well, is from 2020, but the grim details of how First Nations children are treated in the care system keep emerging. This is only four years ago, but since 2022, we have seen investigations from APTN and Global News that shared about the terrible abuses First Nations children have faced in for-profit, privately run care homes.

For some of these group homes, First Nations kids from northern Ontario are seen as necessary for the profit model where they have been called cash cows and the bread and butter, and First Nations in the north paid so much more to place children in these homes—cash cows.

I don’t have enough time, but I want to conclude my remarks by talking about the life and the tragic death of Devon Freeman, whose story should remind us all of the impact that the implementation of our legislation has. We know that Devon Freeman should be an adult today, a man somewhere around the age of 22 or 23. He should still be here, a member of the Chippewas of Georgina Island First Nation. He should still be able to ride his bike. But that concludes my time for now. Meegwetch.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Further debate?

Mr. Logan Kanapathi: Thank you to my colleague opposite from Kiiwetinoong. Member, thank you for your presentation. I have a lot of respect for you. Thank you for bringing your own story and for sharing with us. Thank you for your perspective to this House.

Madam Speaker, we understand the harsh reality that many young people face within the foster care and child

welfare system. Our bill, Bill 188, will bring more accountability in the foster care system through the hiring of more inspectors, allowing for random inspections—it’s never happened before—giving the ministry more weight to enforce the laws that protect the rights of children in out-of-home care.

My question to the member opposite: Does he agree that there should be a stronger role in place to punish bad actors in the foster care system? That’s including in the Indigenous foster care system. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Mr. Sol Mamakwa: Meegwetch. I think one of the things—back in March or May of last year, which was 2023, I was able to travel up to KI for the signing of bringing power and authority to the First Nations in the care of their children. I think that was the first week of the current Minister of Children, Community and Social Services, Minister Parsa—that was his first trip up north. It’s always important to learn of who you serve and learn of our ways of life and who we are in the north. I think I would encourage the Minister of Children, Community and Social Services that they meet with Nishnawbe Aski Nation to see how the shared priorities are working. Meegwetch.

1330

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Further questions?

Mr. Joel Harden: I want thank my friend from Kiiwetinoong for his remarks. For those tuning in who don’t know what we’re debating, we’re debating Bill 188, the government’s latest effort around child protection law.

The member spoke about Amy Owen. This is a story from our community that broke hearts wide open when we learned of it, because it’s exactly as the member is describing: It is a child discarded to the for-profit foster care system, which disregarded her life. For the record, I want to read in something that Amy wrote on Facebook 11 months before she took her own life. She wrote, “I am just a kid and my life is a nightmare.”

I guess I would ask us, would we allow any child anywhere in the province of Ontario to be housed in a place that did them harm? And are we going to correct that harm—I’m asking the member: Are we going to correct that harm by continuing to fund for-profit operators who, as you say, often refer to the children in their system as “cash cows,” or do we need to move to a non-profit public system, with appropriate staff, that is well run?

Mr. Sol Mamakwa: That’s a good question from the member. I think the children who come into care pay the full price when the system is not working. They pay the full price of their life when the system is not working. We cannot continue to have organizations that are for-profit, continue to use our children as cash cows. I think it’s important that the child welfare system that’s there—we need to make it better.

I know, again, that’s the way colonialism works. That’s the way oppression works. What you describe in that story is exactly how it harms people. We need to do better. There’s always room for improvement. Meegwetch.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Further questions? The member from—wait—Simcoe—Grey.

Mr. Brian Saunderson: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Since taking office, my hair is getting grayer, and I continue to live in Simcoe.

I want to thank the member opposite for his comments today. The Indigenous communities are separate and apart in some ways with respect to the children's aid societies. I know the member opposite knows that Indigenous children's aid societies make their own placement decisions without the province interfering. That's the law; it's not an option.

I'm wondering if the member opposite could comment on his opinion of the children's aid societies in his communities and their effectiveness in making sure that children are placed in culturally appropriate settings.

Mr. Sol Mamakwa: I want to talk about the 59th recommendation, which called for: "That the Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services and all institutional parties to this inquest"—I'm talking about the Freeman inquest—"work together in a collaborative manner towards ensuring that First Nations children have the right to return to their home communities when receiving services under" this ministry. "This should be adopted as 'Devon's Principle.'"

There are far too many children whom the government has failed, too many children who have had to have principles named after them. It is our duty in this House to end this cycle and pattern of institutionalized mistreatment against Indigenous children and youth.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Further questions?

MPP Lise Vaugeois: Thank you to the member from Kiiwetinoong. I live in Thunder Bay, so I have seen and heard about many, many deaths of young people, of an adult who had a trailer hitch thrown at her and children who died in the river in Thunder Bay. There has been no justice for those people, as there was no justice for Barbara Kentner.

But what I want to focus on is Ian. He was one year old. He was in care. He was the child of somebody I knew through family. He died in care, and he had a major bruise on his head at the time. The family never got any resolution as to what actually happened to him. They always thought that something wasn't right.

So my question to you is, do you feel confident that when things happen when children are in care, that it will be taken seriously, that their families will achieve some kind of justice? We want to prevent it before it happens, but if it does, will there be justice?

Mr. Sol Mamakwa: Sometimes, time after time, if you're First Nations, the systems of care—this government continues to fail our kids. When you talk specifically about Thunder Bay, the Seven Fallen Feathers, all they were doing is getting an education. Even though it was in the child welfare system, it was an education system where we do not have high schools where we come from. They have to leave at 13 years old to get an education. When they did that, when those seven young youth went to

school, they came back in caskets. That's not right, but it continues to happen when we talk about the child welfare system. We need to better that system. Certainly, again, this legislation, Bill 188, can move further than that to be able to invest to make sure that we have the proper resources to protect our children.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Quick question, quick response?

Hon. Charmaine A. Williams: I listened to the members really speaking very clearly about how we can make better strides to increase autonomy of our Indigenous communities. Wabaseemoong, Pikwakanagan, KI: It was our government that was working with these communities to make sure that we are giving them the opportunity to have more care and the right to have more care over their children, which is so important—because you know it's a system that has been rooted in colonization and has impacted so many Indigenous families. That's a lot of pain and hurt to fix.

So I'm asking the member, based on the direction you see our government going, can you see the good faith that our government is putting into making changes that will be impactful? This is the beginning in a series of changes that we want to make.

Mr. Sol Mamakwa: First Nations, our families have always had jurisdiction and power over children. You don't give them the authority or the jurisdiction as a government; we've always had those.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Further debate?

Ms. Aislinn Clancy: I'm happy to share a few words about the bill. I was part of the committee that debated amendments, and it was a good process to hear from people with lived experience about how they felt about the bill and different partners in the community.

I do have to commend the government; we did get a lot of really good feedback, especially from young people who have lived experience. They were grateful that their information will be sealed off when they leave care, that they don't have to worry about people going back into the system, accessing their information. They were grateful to hear about holding bad actors accountable. And they were grateful that we'll be making a better effort to ensure that young people know how to reach out and have a voice and share when things are not going well.

I also want to commend the government because I know they have made investments in the Ready, Set, Go Program and have made investments in mental health services and homelessness services.

I'm here to share a bit more about the concerns I have about the sector and what I think we could do to improve the bill.

1340

When I went back to the CAS in my community, they shared really dire concerns about their level of funding. They say they're at a 10-year low in funding, and we know the sector has shared the number \$63 million that they need just to stabilize. When we say stabilize, it means not living in overdraft. I think everybody here knows what it

feels like to live in overdraft—or maybe you don't, and that's a privilege. If you've lived in overdraft, you know how that feels. It's sickening, it's stressful and I can't imagine being an executive director of a children's aid society looking at the reality they face, of living in overdraft.

We know now that our systemic gaps that we face in mental health, in housing and other issues—autism funding, developmental services etc. are impacting children's aid societies. Families are not able to provide shelter for their families. They are not able to feed their families at a growing rate. So 20% of people referred to children's aid society were done so because of inadequate housing. We know there's 20% to 30% that need complex mental health care that's being cut.

I've had three expert mental health professionals that I know personally—one agency was shut down, another program was shut down and another service that provides attachment trauma in a culturally relevant way was shut down. We are providing more access to those who need eight to 15 sessions, but these kids aren't that, and we can prevent them going into care by properly funding complex mental health care and developmental services.

We need to reflect on the privatization of the child welfare system. I know that the societies that I talked to said that the rates that they're being charged have gone up, but the funding they receive to pay those for-profit agencies has not gone up. We know that kin care, for example, only gets one tenth—one tenth—the amount of money. So we will pay someone in the private sector 10 times the amount we will pay their family member, who could be living in poverty, to care for an additional child. They're doing it because they care, but they face real financial strains as a result. We need to stop that. We need to start looking at the funding model and looking at a funding model that looks at prevention, because the government should not be parenting children at the rate that it's parenting children.

We know, just in my riding, oneROOF—I spoke to them last week; they had a meeting on Monday. They are questioning closing because of budget shortfalls. This is a youth shelter that is an essential service in my riding, serving young people ages 16 to 24, and we know that 60% of the kids in care are teenagers. So we need to look better at the services that we offer teenagers and the services we offer those on the autism wait-list, for example.

We also need to do better for racialized communities. In Toronto, for example, there's an 8.5% Black-identifying population, but 40% of the kids in care identify as Black—that's a huge gap—for Indigenous children: 3.4% of the population, but 25.5% of kids in care; Latinx and Asian individuals and families are much more likely to be referred for investigations. We need to look at systemic racism that increases the likelihood of people going into care.

We have to worry about these unintended consequences because if we add this red tape without commensurate funding, it equals a funding cut. And that's what the CAS in my riding said. They said, "If you give us more

administrative work and not the funding to do it, it equals less time with families, not more."

And as a social worker, I know what it's like to have growing caseloads. Growing caseloads is a serious reality that children's aid societies are facing. If you have a growing caseload and a growing number of times you have to see those people, it becomes a tick box—you're doing it to be sure that you did it—but the depth and the quality of that service is severely lacking—

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Thank you to the member—very passionate.

Moving on, questions?

Mr. Joel Harden: I guess I just offer the member an opportunity to finish her thought. She was in the middle of a thought.

Ms. Aislinn Clancy: I want to acknowledge that, in 2018, this government fired the Child and Youth Advocate. One of the people who came to committee with lived experience said she would not be where she was today if it was not for the Child and Youth Advocate, that he became a special member of her support system. And as a social worker, I did experience heartbreak and felt crushed at a government firing the lawyer for kids who have no legal guardian.

We know that the numbers speak to that. We know that, right now, the Ombudsman office only provides investigations for 1,491 cases, whereas with the Child and Youth Advocate, it was 2,790 cases. There were also half as many children dying in care when the Child and Youth Advocate was in office.

That is the request I have: that we reinstate that office. It was vital.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Further questions?

Mr. Brian Saunderson: I want to thank the member opposite for her comments and for her lived experience. I know she spoke of the child advocate office. From 2008 to 2019, the office of the child advocate wrote 79 different reports, totalling over 4,600 pages, and that's just one source.

My question to the member opposite: Would you agree that for 15 years—and you cited this statistic, actually; the number of children that died while in care—that this is long overdue, that these changes are much needed and that this bill, as you indicated in your comments, is moving the needle forward in a very important way?

Ms. Aislinn Clancy: Thank you for bringing that up. I agree that this is a step forward. I think, as someone in the opposition, what I find troubling is that I'm bringing forward in committee reasonable expectations, like people getting service in their first language, the ministry itself having the same privacy restrictions as the CASs—let's apply that. That's from the Information and Privacy Commissioner. I'm sharing information from the Ombudsman, that we should make accessibility possible in schools and libraries, using text and digital means. If we leave it on a website, young people are not going to have better access.

So, I agree; this is a step in the right direction. What I hope the government opposite will see is that we bring

forward amendments of good intention from the Ombudsman, Information and Privacy Commissioner, and Indigenous leaders, and we ask for those amendments to be considered so we don't have to have another conversation in five years. We can get it right.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Further questions?

Mr. Jeff Burch: Thank you to the member from Kitchener Centre for her words based on her experience. I was interested in what you had to say about red tape and the administrative burden that's placed on social service workers. I wonder if you'd like to expand on that, given your experience in social services.

Ms. Aislinn Clancy: Sometimes, when there's legislation that comes forward, I want to talk to the experts. I look at those in the child welfare sector as the experts in this, and I want to hear their input about what this bill means to them. They say they are one of the most regulated professions in the province.

Yes, we need this accountability, we need these measures, but they have ideas on how we can cut red tape to ensure that that administrative time is really used efficiently, effectively. There's a lot of red tape we can cut to just shift the amount of time that they're using on administrative tasks to what we're asking for today, instead of adding to some levels of administration that we need to address.

I hope when the government comes forward again, they will consult with the CASs and talk about cutting the red tape that they want to cut and optimizing their time so they can be with families.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): A very quick question.

Mr. Mike Schreiner: I appreciate the member from Kitchener Centre's speech and her service for her community. You talked about the underfunding of CAS and the programs that support kids to prevent them from being in care. Can you talk about some of the real-life examples of what that underfunding means?

Ms. Aislinn Clancy: I know people with their master's—they're psychotherapists; they are experts at trauma care. They were working in the not-for-profit sector. They have been shoved out.

One agency in Ontario that treats people who sexually offend—these are young people. We know early intervention for those who sexually offend is essential. The place is closed. Shame. Offered their jobs down the street in a non-unionized environment for \$10,000 less—now she will work in the for-profit sector. She will work for two days, get the same amount of pay that she was getting for five days. And why did she leave? Because we closed that organization.

I can't believe it.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Further debate?

Mr. Brian Saunderson: It's a pleasure to rise today on behalf of my constituents in Simcoe–Grey to address this important legislation. I want to start by thanking Minister Parsa and his staff and PA for their hard work on this bill, as well as Associate Minister Williams for her hard work.

I will be sharing my time this afternoon with the hard-working MPP from Brampton East.

Madam Speaker, we're here today on an extremely important topic. I'm a father of three children—well, they're not children anymore. They're 30, 28 and 26, which might explain the grey—although I think it was grey when they were five, three and two, as well.

1350

Parenting is a difficult task, Madam Speaker, and ensuring that children that aren't in the care of their families are in the care of a safe, secure and nurturing environment is essential to making sure that all children have an equal opportunity. We, on this side of the House, support the goals of Katelynn's Principle, that every child needs to be seen, to be heard and to be respected. Children and youth need to be at the centre of the child welfare system while taking into account their voices around decisions that affect the services they will receive. And that's enshrined in the preamble of the Child, Youth and Family Services Act and that is why this government is continuing to improve the legislation.

That is why, since 2020, our government has been redesigning Ontario's child welfare system to enhance early intervention, improve outcomes for children and address barriers to supports. Our government has introduced the Supporting Children's Futures Act, a bill that proposes changes, including new and enhanced enforcement tools, as well as accountability tools. These changes will support better compliance, with requirements designed to protect the safety and security of children and youth in out-of-home care, and these changes aim to better protect the privacy of children and youth with a history in the child welfare system that would further restrict access by others to their child welfare records while allowing them to disclose and discuss their experiences to enhance the system.

Madam Speaker, the measures proposed in the bill would also enable individuals who grew up in care to speak freely about their lived experience. The changes are one way that we are working to better protect and support children, youth and their families across Ontario to set them up for success.

Why are this legislation and these changes so necessary? From 2008 to 2019, the office of the child advocate wrote 79 reports that total over 4,600 pages, and that is just one source, Madam Speaker. That should have been a spur for the Liberal government of the day to act and it should have been a spur for the NDP to demand action from them. However, it wasn't. Neither the Liberals nor the NDP pushed this issue forward nor redesigned the system as we are doing now, and so it falls upon this government to take action now to further the legislation that we passed back in 2020. I don't think anyone on this side of the House, Madam Speaker, needs to take lessons from the opposition on care of our youth and vulnerable.

That is why we are strengthening oversight for out-of-care youth in our communities. All children and youth deserve care, to live safely and securely, and high-quality services that are culturally appropriate and meet their

unique needs. That is why, as part of Ontario's Child Welfare Redesign Strategy, this government is proposing changes to the Child, Youth and Family Services Act, 2017, that would allow for a modernized enforcement model. These changes would better support compliance with requirements to protect the safety and security of children and youth in licensed out-of-care homes.

We are proposing amendments to the regulations under the act to further support the safety and oversight of children and youth, including creating 20 new inspector positions. We have boosted the number of unannounced inspections. To increase transparency, we started publicly posting licensing information. We're improving the quality of the child welfare data to establish a common standard for every children's aid society across the province. And we've introduced this bill to continue that work with proposals that will enhance and improve accountability and oversight in out-of-home care. Through these measures, Ontario will modernize, standardize and improve important safeguards throughout the child welfare system. This will support service providers in delivering high-quality care to children and youth and support their health and safety and ability to reach their full potential.

Our government has worked to support customary and kinship care, which has allowed Ontario to have one of the lowest rates of children in care in Canada. The aim is, wherever possible, to keep children with people they know in communities that they know. We are supporting that through the child welfare redesign, which will improve experiences for children, youth and their families by, among other things, making a new investment of more than \$2.9 million to help support kinship service and customary caregivers, adopted parents and caregivers.

We are enhancing child, youth and family well-being through better integration and coordination of services, with diverse cross-sector community-based service providers in all communities; improving the overall quality of out-of-home care, focusing on family-based options like kinship and foster care where possible; and helping to ensure children, youth and families have a strong voice in the decisions about their care, including access to resources and better supports to transition successfully to adulthood.

This work, which has been occurring for years since we've taken office, is yet another measure in tandem with this bill of how we are working to improve the well-being of Ontario's youth and children in care.

We heard earlier from the member opposite about the situation in Indigenous communities. As I indicated in my question to that member, Indigenous children's aid societies make their own placement decisions without the province interfering or intervening. The law requires children's aid societies to place children in safe and culturally appropriate settings. If the child is First Nations, Inuit or Métis, the society must place the child with their extended family or community wherever possible. These are not options, Madam Speaker. These are the law.

This bill includes high-impact enforcement tools to ensure operators meet their obligations, including those to

provide culturally appropriate care. So I urge the members opposite to support this legislation.

Strengthening the protection of personal information of former children and youth in care is a critical piece of the puzzle here. Prior to this legislation, not only were the records sealed, but the individuals who grew up in child care were unable to speak about their lived experience and talk about their lives through the system. So, while through this legislation we continue to protect the privacy of children and youth once they leave care, this bill will not restrict their ability to speak about their own experiences. The changes aim to better protect the privacy of the individuals who were formerly children or youth involved in care and to better protect the privacy of children and youth with a history in the child welfare system that would further restrict access by others to accessing their records. However, it will allow them to talk about their own lived experience and work towards improving the system. These changes are aimed to better protect the privacy of adults who are former children and youth in care by restricting access by others but allowing them to speak about their lives.

Madam Speaker, our government will always be there to protect the children. That's what's driving this legislation and our comprehensive redesign of the child welfare system. Through the redesign, we're making new initiatives to improve out-of-home care, like improved oversight and accountability. And we've launched the Ready, Set, Go Program so that youth leaving care will be set up for success. We've backed that work up with investments. In this year's budget alone, there's an increase of \$76.3 million for child protection services.

Madam Speaker, we know through discussions we've had in this House that this is an all-of-government situation. So these changes to the child welfare system, operating in tandem with changes and increases we're making through the education system to access to mental health, to access to counselling, to restrictions on cellphone use, are all designed to place the interests of our children, whatever their backgrounds and beginnings, on an even playing field so that they get the best foot forward in their futures and that we equip them in the best way possible for their futures.

Parenting is a very difficult task, as I indicated at the outset. As a father of three, I know the challenges, and they are day to day, and they are not consistent, and they are always evolving. This government, on a whole-of-government approach, is doing everything we can to make sure children, regardless of their beginnings, are set up for the best opportunities, the best protections, the best access to care that they need to move themselves forward and be the workers of the future to shape this province and carry us forward.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): I recognize the member from Brampton East.

Mr. Hardeep Singh Grewal: It's my pleasure to rise today to speak about and discuss a matter of great importance, the Supporting Children's Futures Act, 2024. This act is crucial to the commitment that demonstrates

our unwavering dedication to the well-being and future of the children across this province. The act stands for a fundamental belief that every child deserves a fair chance at life, no matter their background. We must come together to provide them with the support and protection they need to thrive. Every child deserves the opportunity to reach their full potential, and it's up to us to ensure that they do. Let's work together to create a brighter future for our children and ourselves.

1400

The Supporting Children's Futures Act, 2024, holds the power to shape the lives of countless children and young people in our province, and the legislation is a sincere commitment to protecting the well-being and future of some of our most vulnerable citizens: our children and our youth. In a world where the innocence of childhood is often overshadowed by the harsh realities of life, it's our duty to ensure that every child, regardless of their circumstance, has access to care, protection and the opportunities they deserve. This bill, if passed, will be a beacon of hope, bringing improved safety and quality to our children and youth services.

Our government has worked diligently to create this bill, consulting far and wide across the child welfare sector. Ministry staff held over 30 virtual engagements with various stakeholder groups, including youth with lived experience. These extensive consultations have ensured that this bill addresses the real and pressing needs of children and youth in Ontario's care.

At its core, the Supporting Children's Futures Act is about protecting children and youth in Ontario's care today, through new measures for safety, service, oversight, accountability and privacy. It's also about providing better opportunities for these children and youth to thrive as adults tomorrow.

If passed, this bill will protect children and youth in care and provide them with a better future by strengthening oversight and enforcement tools for out-of-home care, protecting the privacy of youth formerly in care and updating the Child, Youth and Family Services Act with lessons learned since it became law. The changes proposed in this bill will improve safety and independence for children and youth in care and moving on from care. In the short term, this will mean safer and more consistent services for those who need to live away from home. In the long term, it will prepare these children and youth for adulthood and set them up for success. They deserve a chance to grow up safe and happy.

Speaker, to ensure applicants are fit to provide quality care, this bill proposes a more thorough application process and new powers to refuse a licence on several grounds, most importantly the public interest. To ensure all children and youth in care receive safe, high-quality services, this bill proposes to increase accountability for operators. This includes requiring inspectors to take certain actions when they find non-compliance and a better range of penalties, including compliance orders, administrative monetary penalties and enhanced charges with larger fines.

All members of this House know of shocking instances where some providers have failed to provide the high-quality care that we expect them to deliver, and our government has been clear: There is no room in our province for providers who don't operate in compliance with the law.

This bill proposes new high-impact enforcement tools to root out non-compliance, such as:

—an order for funding to be returned where a licensee has failed to use funds in accordance with the terms-of-service agreement for a child;

—an order for new management for an out-of-home care setting;

—restraining orders to restrain individuals who pose an imminent threat to the health, safety or welfare of any child or young person; and

—compliance orders to instruct the licensee to achieve compliance; for example, arranging staff training within a specific time frame if reoccurring non-compliances are identified.

These are critical changes that will reshape the way the rules and regulations are implemented and monitored throughout the program. We're creating new provincial offences for violations of a youth's rights against corporal punishment, physical and mechanical restraints, and detention—all positive changes, making it better and easier for youth to thrive.

We're enhancing the penalties for provincial offences under the act: up to \$250,000, imprisonment for up to one year, or both; and for corporations, fines of up to \$250,000 and new administrative monetary penalties of up to \$100,000. This is how seriously we're taking this.

Bill 188 also proposes new processes for inspectors, requiring documentation of findings and, in the inspection report, the ability to conduct investigations with a warrant when an offence is suspected. Changes to the appeal process for licensing decisions, conditions, suspensions and revocations are also proposed, ensuring the appeals do not automatically result in a stay.

The appeal process to require more information from the applicant or licensee, improving the rules for evidence before the tribunal, and clarifying the tribunal's orders following an appeal: These crucial new tools will hold service providers to the standard of care that youth deserve and our government expects. These new enhanced penalties will give ministry inspectors a more responsive and useful range of tools to use when they find a service provider that isn't consistently complying with requirements.

We understand that the safety and well-being of our most vulnerable youth are our top priorities. The Supporting Children's Futures Act is a comprehensive and necessary step forward in protecting and empowering the children and youth in Ontario's care. Let's work together to provide better care and a better future for all Ontario kids, because when we take care of them, we're taking care of the heart of our community, Speaker.

You can see in the great work done by the ministry and done by the great minister that put forward this bill the

amazing effort that they put in to capture all of those details that were given to them in consultation throughout their various ministry consultations and throughout the consultations that took place in committee as well. It shows the government's dedication and understanding of what needs to be changed. I'm so proud that it's this government that has taken action, after years and years and years, that's finally delivering for these children and youth to ensure that they're in a safe environment, they're encouraged to grow, they're encouraged to succeed. That's the Ontario that we all grew up in and we all want to see, where that Ontario dream, where that Canadian dream is instilled in every single youth and child, where they're able to dream to become anybody they want to be.

Speaker, we hear these amazing stories across the province of people who grew up in very, very harsh poverty situations, and today have some of the biggest corporations or run some of the biggest non-profit organizations. Those are the types of inspiring stories that we look up to as children, as we continue on in our daily lives. I remember even when I was a kid visiting, with a grade 8 or grade 7 class, Queen's Park way back when. And I got to sit in the public gallery up there and watch members debate. It really generates a form of vision and encouragement for children that this too can one day be achieved by anybody who puts their heart on their sleeve and works hard for the people. Not only does that apply for parliamentarians, but that applies for anybody working in the private sector. Inspiration for youth is so important, because when we follow our dreams and work hard at it, we're able to achieve them.

This bill helps support children and helps ensure that they are able to succeed in Ontario and grow in Ontario. As we continue to approve services—I know the minister has been working very hard to continue to improve services and ensure that children and youth are being supported across the province—we're looking at new examples and new conversation pieces of where children felt that they were left behind and they needed more support. That's what our government is doing: bringing in those changes to help support them, help grow their futures and ensure that we live in a society where each and every child in this province can grow up to live their absolute full potential.

I'm so proud to be a part of a government that takes this so seriously and is moving forward on these swift changes, and not only when it comes to the Ministry of Children, Social and Community Services. I believe all my colleagues that are ministers, parliamentary assistants and MPPs are doing amazing jobs in their portfolios to ensure that we have a better future for Ontario, a future where we all thrive and that Ontario dream continues to live on where we can all have a home, where we can all afford to raise a family and have a good life.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Questions?

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: I would like to thank the members from Simcoe–Grey and Brampton East for their presentation today. My question will be for the member

from Simcoe–Grey. According to statistics, roughly a thousand teens age out of care every year; 400 of those will drop out of high school and 400 will qualify for post-secondary education. But only 20%—that's 80 of those kids—who age out of care will pursue post-secondary education. If you follow it along, only eight graduate from post-secondary education.

I want to know if the member can speak about the importance of fully subsidized post-secondary education for kids who age out of care.

Mr. Brian Saunderson: Well, I want to thank the member opposite for the question. As he indicated, while we're here today debating Bill 188, we're also talking about a whole-of-government approach to making sure that all our children, regardless of their backgrounds, have equal opportunity moving forward.

Just on an interesting and related point, I was at the Ontario Association of Counselling and Attendance Services recently. They were holding their AGM in Collingwood. We were working with that sector and counsellors to make sure that children in school have the best opportunity moving forward, through access to counselling and attendance officers, to address the kids at risk, to come up with a plan to keep them in school. To the extent that children in care fall under those headings, I would hope they would have the opportunity to have those same services.

1410

This is a government that's invested record amounts since we've come into office, a 555% increase in mental health supports in our school system. This is a government that is working across the board to make sure that all children, including the children in our child care and welfare system, have the best opportunity moving forward to get the training skills they need moving forward.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Further questions?

Mr. Billy Pang: This question is for the member for Brampton. Thank you for his presentation. We've heard that this bill won't be the last step in improving the lives of children and youth in care. I understand that at the time this bill was introduced, the Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services filed several additional regulations.

To the member: Can you expand on what these regulations do and how they complement Bill 188's goals?

Mr. Hardeep Singh Grewal: Thank you to my colleague the member from Markham–Unionville for that question. Our government has been clear that this bill is one step of many, neither the beginning nor the end of the child welfare redesign. That's why in tandem with introducing this bill, we filed two regulations containing a number of new measures, including mandating information-sharing between children's aid societies and the ministry about specific health and safety risks to children in licensed and out-of-home care settings. We're requiring information-sharing between different children's aid societies as needed and we're going to

continue to do the great work to ensure children are protected and children are safe.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Further questions?

Mrs. Jennifer (Jennie) Stevens: While Bill 188 introduces crucial compliance measures, can the government guarantee that it will be accompanied by increased resources for the children's aid society and other child welfare agencies?

The reason I ask this is the service providers in Niagara and the children's aid society do so much and have to do a lot of heavy lifting, but they are only as effective as we are able to provide them with the resources to do that hard work. Without proper funding from this government, how can we ensure these measures will be effectively implemented to protect our most vulnerable children?

Mr. Brian Saunderson: I thank the member opposite for her question. Yes, children's aid societies play a pivotal role in making sure that our children at risk have access to the supports they need. That's why this government has increased investments into child welfare and protection. In this year's budget, it contained a \$76.3-million increase for child protection services. On top of that, the estimates tabled recently show an investment of almost \$1.9 billion in child welfare and protection, an increase over last year.

We recognize the importance of stabilizing the child welfare sector as the redesign work continues. My colleague spoke about the ongoing efforts in the review process. The child welfare sector saw a huge increase last year. We continue to look at ways that we can reduce any deficits for the children's aid societies, and we will continue to work with them to ensure that those children being serviced by them get the best service.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Further questions?

Mrs. Daisy Wai: I want to say thank you to the member from Brampton East for sharing with us how his grade 8 experience has stimulated him. It is with this vision that he's now our MPP, doing all the work together with us. This is the importance of us doing the best for our children. Of course, the health, safety and well-being of children is paramount to us.

I would like to know what oversight mechanisms are currently in place for the ministry to hold licensed out-of-home care providers accountable. How does this bill enhance those mechanisms?

Mr. Hardeep Singh Grewal: Thank you very much to the member for that question. This bill looked at introducing various new levels of enforcement mechanisms to ensure that students are protected and that when enforcement is needed, enforcement is happening, which are new regulatory requirements that if something is not working right, the government has measures in place to ensure that that organization is reprimanded for those mistakes and those repeated mistakes, Speaker. That's why we see now fines up to \$250,000 for corporations and additional fines of \$100,000 and combined fines as well.

As we continue to move forward, we want to make sure that children are protected, that they're in a safe space, and we're going to continue to do that. This bill really allows regulators to move that one step forward to ensure compliance is there.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Further questions?

Mr. Andrew Dowie: I want to thank both the speakers for their remarks.

I'm privileged to not have to deal with child and youth services in my career, but I have, as a volunteer with youth, run into a number of individuals who have had issues at home. As volunteers, we have a duty of care to the youth that we help or that we work with. And so, I was hoping to ask—I'll ask the member for Simcoe-Grey—how the duty of care is being improved upon for practitioners in child and youth services through Bill 188?

Mr. Brian Saunderson: I want to thank my colleague for the question. I spoke briefly, in my comments, about how we are continuing to protect the privacy of the individuals, but also allowing them to speak about their lived experience. But we're also making sure that, in a very confidential nature, information can be shared about the individuals in care through various different organizations to help make sure that their care is seamless and the services they receive complement each other.

This bill proposes to enable information-sharing between the children's aid societies and the College of Early Childhood Educators and the Ontario College of Teachers, which will allow for timely action when there is an allegation of a risk to a child involving a teacher or early childhood educator. Currently, Madam Speaker, that obligation to report only applies to the early childhood educators. This broadens the scope of those protections to allow other professionals who see a threat or risk to an individual in care to share that information to ensure that the child is being protected and served in the best way possible.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Further questions? A quick question.

Mr. Sol Mamakwa: Many instances—there have been reports of children being badly treated where I come from, when they come down for service. By "badly treated," I mean use of restraints; forbidding languages; in one case, being asked to be rescued.

It's racist and deeply unethical for our children's lives to be considered in terms of money and profits. I'm not surprised, but I am saddened that I have to say this here: No one should profit off our First Nations children. How does this legislation, Bill 188, stop that?

Mr. Hardeep Singh Grewal: Thank you to the member opposite for that question. The ministry currently—we have 50 children's aid societies across the province and 13 Indigenous children's aid services. This bill is designed to ensure that they too are well respected, and those new penalties that are assigned will also ensure that those providers in Indigenous communities that are not providing the service that we expect them to will be held accountable.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Further debate? Further debate?

Interjection.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Oh, sorry. Thunder Bay–Superior North.

MPP Lise Vaugeois: Thank you very much, Speaker. Thank you for the opportunity to speak today to Bill 188, Supporting Children’s Futures Act, 2024.

There are many things in this act that I’m happy to see: greater privacy protections, the extension of support for people in care up till the age of 23, the Ready, Set, Go Program—although, I have to say, I can’t see any teenager embracing that particular title. It sounds more like elementary school to me. But I do want to take the opportunity today to talk about things that need to be addressed by the Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services that are not addressed in this bill and are not being addressed at any other level either.

As the minister and many members of the House already know, there are continuing problems in group homes, especially for people with disabilities, where parents who raise concerns about the care or living conditions of their children are met with the improper use of the Trespass to Property Act.

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This is not a new issue to this government. We’ve raised it several times regarding people being banished from visiting their family members in long-term care, again by the improper use of the Trespass to Property Act. In fact, in 2021, the government unanimously passed motion 129—brought forward by my colleague from Ottawa Centre—called Voula’s Law, and I want to read that now:

“That in the opinion of this House, the Ford government should provide clear direction to operators that the Trespass to Property Act does not permit them to issue trespass notices to exclude substitute decision-makers and guests of the occupants of retirement homes, long-term-care homes and other congregate care accommodations when they raise concerns about their loved ones’ living conditions.”

Now I should say that the House voted unanimously in support of that motion in 2021, but I’m going to carry on a bit:

“The Retirement Homes Act, 2010 ... stipulates that residents have ‘the right to have his or her lifestyle and choices respected and to freely pursue his or her social, cultural, religious, spiritual and other interests as long as the resident’s lifestyle, choices and pursuits do not substantially interfere with the reasonable enjoyment of the home for all usual purposes by the licensee and other residents.’”

Also, “the Ontario Human Rights Code says the same thing: Tenants of care homes have the right to decide who they want to invite into their home, just as homeowners do. If the landlord tries to control who can visit the tenants, this can be considered harassment.”

Now where did this all come from?

When Maria Sardelis mustered up the courage to defy the Trespass to Property Act, she had been banished from visiting her mother for that 316 days. Her mom’s name was Voula.

“She called the Ottawa police and told the person on the other end of the line, ‘I’m going to defy this trespass to property order. I don’t think it’s a lawful order. I’m not going to put up any resistance, but I think what’s happening here is wrong.’ Police were called, and charges were laid.” She went to court. “Guess how long it took for a judge to throw this out of court? Twenty minutes—gone. The judge said, ‘What’s this doing in my courtroom?’”

My point is that, in 2021, the House acknowledged that the Trespass to Property Act should not be used, cannot be used—it’s not legal to be using it to prevent people from visiting somebody who is in care.

The situation seems to arise when a parent or caregiver raises concerns about the quality of care in the home, and then the threat of the Trespass to Property Act is used against that person.

A lot of people don’t actually know that it can’t be used and, unfortunately, many police services don’t know that that’s not the correct use of the act. Now there are some police services that do know. There are some police who specialize in elder abuse and they understand very well how that act can and cannot be used, but unfortunately it’s not the case.

Now, where we get into more of a problem—so I’m going to a letter. I’m going to read from sections of the letter that I wrote to the Minister of Children, Community and Social Services.

We need “a system-wide response from” the “ministry.” Since 2021, I’m aware of 100 cases of this taking place in long-term care and in group homes for children or adult children with disabilities living in group homes.

“There are ... two different violations” actually “taking place” right now. “One is the unlawful misuse of the Trespass to Property Act,” but “the other is also the use of unauthorized evictions.”

So what’s happening first, especially in group homes, is that somebody complains about the care that somebody is getting in the home. The Trespass to Property Act is used to threaten, and if the person says, “No, no, no, you can’t do that,” then they are not only threatening but actually evicting children or adult children with disabilities from these homes.

Now, in some cases, these threats or issuance of trespass and threat or action of eviction are in response to female residents who have asked that only female workers help with their intimate care. That doesn’t sound like it should be a tall order. The homes are refusing this and then threatening trespass or eviction when the resident or family member raises concerns. Requesting a same-sex worker for intimate care seems like a basic human dignity that someone with disabilities deserves to be accommodated for. We know the high rates of sexual abuse for people with disabilities. Staffing shortages cannot be allowed to stand as an excuse to continually re-traumatize

residents or deny their requests for dignity by refusing their intimate care done by staff with whom they feel safe.

We have a really basic problem here, and you might say maybe it's coming down to staffing, maybe there isn't enough money in the system so that the staff is there to provide the services, but threatening to evict somebody from a home because they want a woman—it's a young woman who wants to have her toileting done by another woman and not a man; that shouldn't be a problem, but it is. Once again, we're seeing the Trespass to Property Act used again and again and again.

I have another example here, and what's interesting is this case was already used as an example in 2021, only it's gotten worse since then. Joy Seguin, mother of Andre Seguin, a disabled young man living in an MCCSS facility, was denied his mother's visits via the unlawful use of the trespass act. When the mother fought back, Andre was evicted without notice and dropped off at his uncle's rural farm. Several court rulings were in favour of Andre's legal proceedings. However, the MCCSS agency ignored all the rulings, including the Ontario Superior Court ruling, for the immediate reinstatement of Andre in his group home. Four years later, Andre and his family continue to be victims of unlawfulness by the MCCSS agency. The Seguin family have repeatedly asked for assistance from the parliamentary assistant and from the minister. The last correspondence was October 2, 2023. Nothing has happened. Even though court orders have been made to reinstate this person in his care home, nothing's happening.

There is another issue here in that when these homes decide to illegally use the Trespass to Property Act and someone decides to take them to court, first of all, it costs a lot of money to go to court; secondly, the homes that are launching these legal problems are being funded by the province, so we are actually paying, through our taxes, to have these homes illegally trespass individuals who then have to pay out of their pocket to defend themselves. That shouldn't be happening. There is so much case law that says it's an improper use of the law. It just shouldn't be happening.

I've actually written to this minister, I've written to the Minister of Long-Term Care, I've written to the housing minister and I've written to the Solicitor General. There has been no movement at all. In the correspondence from Parliamentary Assistant Quinn, he wrote, "The ministry does not administer the Trespass to Property Act nor does the ministry provide legal advice to third parties, including licensees, visitors or residents with respect to bans or orders issued under the Trespass to Property Act. If a visitor has been issued a trespass order, independent legal advice may be sought, as required."

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But this answer fails on numerous grounds, and one of the most obvious—this comes from the Ontario Agencies and Appointments Directive: "Ministries must ensure compliance with legislation, directives, accounting, and financial policies." So the unauthorized abuses of the Trespass to Property Act and unauthorized evictions—

which, by the way, are taking place because a person can get evicted, and it should be going before the Landlord and Tenant Board, but it's not, so there is due process that is not taking place.

But those abuses are not simply interpretations of the law that only a judge can decide. Judges have repeatedly decided, and court rulings are clear: Across all scenarios, the only person who can deny access to a visitor is the occupier of the premises, the occupier of the unit. Notably, our courts have also ruled that neither behaviour, nor occupational health and safety or a pandemic, are grounds to issue trespass orders or to issue access restrictions. If a visitor is disruptive or behaving in a dangerous manner, there are other applicable laws.

The difference, and it's an important difference: With those other laws—if it's a disturbance of the peace, for example—there is due process. You've got to bring evidence, and there is a process, so a person can at least defend themselves against whatever evidence is brought forward. Also, staff has some means if there's a person there that really is dangerous, to have them removed, but not the Trespass to Property Act. The problem with the Trespass to Property Act is that there is no due process. There's no evidence required. It winds up being "he said, she said," and then the person who has been banned has no other choice but to go to court.

I've just been through this with somebody else who went through nine months of not being able to visit his mother because he had raised concerns. It took him nine months. He finally had a court hearing. He was out of there in 10 minutes. He won. But why did he have to go through that? Why was he kept from visiting his mother for nine months? This is something we already agreed on in this House. The abuse is still taking place, so we need action from the government to actually address this.

Actually, I have specific recommendations: We need a clear directive from the office of the minister for MCCSS, pursuant to motion 129, that the Trespass to Property Act does not permit the facility operator to trespass the invited guest of the occupier or a person with legally conferred authority for the care of the occupier. Your agencies must be told by you that they are to abide by, with group homes, the Residential Tenancies Act, and must apply to the Landlord and Tenant Board for a decision to evict or to restrict the visitors of their clients.

Further to written clarification on the Trespass to Property Act and the Residential Tenancies Act, the minister should state unequivocally that if facility operators continue to act above the law, there will be financial and legal consequences. These homes operate under the guidance of various ministries, whether it's long-term care or the MCCSS. This is Ontario law, and these institutions continually break the law and, as a result, abuse the people living there.

Isolation is deadly. We know that. And keeping people from visiting their loved ones, keeping people who are in care from having visitors, is not acceptable, and it's not acceptable that raising concerns about living conditions becomes a reason to impose a trespass-to-property order.

It's not right, and as I say, this government agreed to this in 2021, but has been unwilling to actually address what's really happening on the ground.

Now, I was speaking with a young man earlier today who is living in a supportive living home. It actually comes under long-term care, but what has happened in this case is that he brought up concerns. He brought up concerns, and ever since then, he's been threatened with eviction.

The workers there are saying, "Well, nobody else is complaining." But that's because everybody else is afraid to complain, because when you complain, you get threatened with eviction. This is happening too often. Now, this particular person has cerebral palsy, he's in a wheelchair, and yet, they're saying he's a bed blocker, so they're trying to find a reason to push him out. He says most of the other people living in the same place are quadriplegic. They just cannot risk raising concerns.

I have somebody in my own riding, also, who has been going through the same thing, and he is constantly being threatened with eviction, mostly because he wants to stay out at night. He's completely wheelchair-bound, but he works. He has a life. He likes to stay out. But if he comes home past 11, boy, does he get punished, and he's been left in his wheelchair overnight, obviously not able to relieve himself and so on. And because he has complained, he's constantly under pressure to be evicted.

As I said, I've only got a couple of minutes left. I have one more example that is a slightly different concern. This is a letter from Lori Ann Comeau. "This is my 13th letter"—this is addressed to Minister Parsa—"over the three years since May 2021." Thirteen letters.

"I express no confidence in the Ontario government's publicly funded group homes, with institutional abuse rampant, leading to the repeated request for investigation into the care and supportive services at L'Arche Toronto. Drug therapy changes were made at the direction of this ministerial partner, and in a year, there has been no investigation, no service options. However, L'Arche has paid over \$240,000 for their poor service since 2023."

I'll get to the crux of this: "It has taken DSO 25 months to provide an incomplete file on my vulnerable brother, and I'm his legally appointed guardian. On May 16, 2024"—so that's 25 months after the request went in—"I received one file on my brother. However, I also received files of seven other DSO recipients."

So take a moment to think about that. This person has now randomly received private information, the private files of seven residents of this home. So each of these individuals' families and legal designates now have the grounds to seek legal action against both the DSO and the ministry for breach of privacy, and what's unfortunate is that there has still been no response to this.

Also, she goes on to say, "It is noted the Residential Tenancies Act governs the MCCSS agencies housing people with disabilities, and yet, I am aware of at least four eviction notices in our family network across Ontario. More so, the DSO information shared with me, three of the DSO recipients are being evicted from their group homes.

MCCSS continues to be non-compliant with Ontario laws in their own program and service delivery."

These are issues that are important. They're not in this bill. I hope they will be addressed in future bills. In fact, we don't need any bills to address this. What we need is the government to recognize that they have a role, a responsibility and the power to insist that these agencies actually abide by the law.

I'll stop there. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Questions?

Mr. Andrew Dowie: I want to truly thank the member from Thunder Bay–Superior North for her comments and really getting into some subjects that are tough for us to discuss and really indicating where the rubber hits the road for a lot of these cases.

I mentioned I'm a scout leader on the side and the duty to report is something that I know is hammered into me as someone who is responsible for youth. Professionals in Ontario have an ongoing duty to report directly to authorities any information about a child suspected to be in need of protection, and that could include being harmed or neglected by their parents or their caregivers or suspected to be at risk of being trafficked or exploited.

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And so Bill 188 does look to address this by expanding the responsibility and the obligation to apply these rules to early childhood educators and adding to the overall number of professionals that have this duty to report and are looking out for children who are at risk of being harmed.

My question to the member opposite is whether she supports having the inclusion of the early childhood educators within the auspices of the duty to report?

MPP Lise Vaugeois: Yes. People who have that responsibility generally do have that duty to report. Hopefully they're being paid well enough to do their job well, but what's missing in the bill is actually protection for parents who also report. They are kind of missing from the duty to report; in fact, they're kind of excluded. That's fine. But when they do report, there's punishment happening. So they are being faced with this abuse of the Trespass to Property Act or their children are being threatened with eviction.

So there are some loopholes there where abuses are going to be able to continue to take place.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Further questions?

Mrs. Jennifer (Jennie) Stevens: I want to thank my colleague for really enlightening different parts of this bill.

I just want to say, given the tragic and well-documented abuses in the for-profit group homes, isn't it long, long overdue that a government prioritizes people and the services over profit? The record of this government across the board on the matter has been very grim, and I'm sure you'll agree.

How important is it that not-for-profit systems prioritize the well-being of our children over profits?

MPP Lise Vaugeois: Thank you very much for the question. I have argued many times in many contexts that

we don't have the money to be paying for profits—that public money needs to be going to care. It needs to be going to make sure that we have staff and that staff is properly paid, that staff are able to work safely and that all the resources that we have go into care.

We don't have the resources, nor should we be putting that money to line stockholders' or shareholders' pockets, so I absolutely would like these to have no for-profit care involved.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Further questions?

Mr. Deepak Anand: Any bill, every bill, that pertains to our children is important for all of us. Children, and especially those that are at risk of harm or are already in care come to many different professionals in their lives. This bill proposes to strengthen information-sharing practices when individuals providing service and care to the children are suspected of posing a risk to children. It would create an all-hands-on-deck approach, with professional colleges, like the Ontario College of Social Workers and Social Service Workers, ensuring that their members are working in the best interests of our young people and that those professional colleges are working together with children's aid societies to do that.

My question is very simple to the member: Does the member support timely coordination between our professionals and professional colleges when there are opportunities to make services safer for our children?

MPP Lise Vaugeois: Yes, I think that coordination needs to be there, but I have to say, I also think that the children and youth advocate still needs to be in place. Because there are ambitions here in this bill—there's a lot of hope to make things better, but the reality is, it's not going to happen tomorrow.

In addition to that, no matter how well a system of care operates, we know that we are a long way from having a well-functioning system in place, even with this bill moving significantly in that direction. Any child or youth in care has been traumatized and needs to know there is someone outside the system who is proactively listening and proactively looking out for their best interest—communication, but we need that child and youth advocate to support those kids.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Further questions?

Ms. Bhutila Karpoche: Before I ask my question, I just want to acknowledge that we have young people in the House here—students—who are watching the debate. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Okay. So, the member from Thunder Bay–Superior North—thank you so much for your presentation. You've talked about some really difficult topics, but it is something that needs to be brought to the attention of the House so that we can right these wrongs in our communities.

I know that in the member's riding there are many Indigenous communities, First Nations groups. As we heard earlier from the member from Kiiwetinoong, the Indigenous people, First Nations people have the right to

be able to determine for their own communities, especially when it comes to children, to be able to raise them in their communities and in their culture. But there are many, many challenges that they're experiencing, particularly when dealing with children in foster care.

Could you please share your insights, based on what you see happening in your riding?

MPP Lise Vaugeois: We do have Dilico in Thunder Bay, which is Indigenous child and family services. They, too, struggle with funding and staffing. We also know that children are often put into care because their families are poor, but that is not a good enough reason to take them away from their communities.

It's a long-standing problem that there are so many children who are in care who shouldn't be in care, or who are in care but don't have enough support or their families don't have enough support. I'm very good friends with a kid who used to be in care. She now has three children. Well, she's got us to help, but actually, she needs a lot more help than that. There are so many effects that have come out of colonization and those damages. There needs to be a recognition of those specific kinds of supports needed for those Indigenous kids.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Further questions?

Mr. Deepak Anand: Our children are our future. Our children are our asset. Our children are our responsibility. The children in care are some of Ontario's most vulnerable individuals. They're not in care as a punishment. The whole purpose of the child welfare system is to protect children at risk of harm or abuse and set them to be successful once they leave care and continue to do higher education, skilled training and work, and grow into healthy, happy young adults. There is no room in care for abusive practices like corporal punishment and there is no room in this province for care providers who intentionally put children in harm's way.

My question is very simple, Madam Speaker: Does the member support having a law on the books that would deter and punish individuals who harm children in their care? Is she going to support this bill?

MPP Lise Vaugeois: Yes, I support that law. Again, though we have a vision, putting that vision into practice requires putting the resources in place. That's what needs to happen. We can wish it all we want. We know those abuses are still going to take place until the staff and resources are there to prevent it from happening.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Further debate?

Mr. Rudy Cuzzetto: I appreciate the opportunity to rise this afternoon for the third reading of Bill 188. As well, I'll be sharing my time with the member from Windsor–Tecumseh.

The Supporting Children's Futures Act was introduced by my friend and my former colleague at the Treasury Board, and now the Minister of Children, Community and Social Services. I want to thank him and his team, including his parliamentary assistants from Thornhill and Markham–Thornhill, for all their work on this bill, including over 30

consultations right across the entire child welfare sector, including children's aid society service providers, but also youth and families with experience in the system, from every part of Ontario.

Before I begin my remarks, I just want to take the opportunity to congratulate Sabra Desai, a registered social worker from Mississauga–Lakeshore, on winning the Attorney General's Victim Services Award of Distinction yesterday. Sabra is chair of the board at the Gatehouse in Etobicoke, which provides support to victims of childhood sexual abuse. Many years ago, she helped to establish the Embrace Agency to End Violence in my community, which was originally known as the Interim Place. I was honoured to join the virtual awards ceremony last night. Again, I just want to congratulate Sabra and all the other award winners yesterday.

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Speaker, most of the witnesses who appeared at the consultations and at the committee hearings on Bill 188 were former youth in care or people like Sabra with direct work experience in the child welfare system. As the minister said, they told us that the province needed new rules to better protect the rights of children and youth, to improve the quality of child welfare services and to hold service providers accountable for the quality of services they provide. I know that this feedback was invaluable to the minister and his team in developing Bill 188.

I also want to thank my friend from Sarnia–Lambton, who has been an incredible advocate for children and youth in care, and for the improvements to the child welfare system. I know that some of the key measures in his private member's bill on this issue are now included in Bill 188.

Speaker, together, the measures in Bill 188 would build on all the work that we began four years ago to modernize Ontario's child welfare system and to ensure that Ontario's children and youth in care have all the support they need so that no one is left behind. That includes a \$170-million investment in the new Ready, Set, Go Program that we launched a year ago to help connect youth who are transitioning out of care with skills they need to succeed, including post-secondary education or training in the skilled trades. Last year alone, this program supported over 4,000 youths across the province.

And it includes a new \$310-million investment, as part of the 2024 budget, in community organizations that support children and youth in care, and other vulnerable Ontarians. In Peel region, it includes the Child Welfare Immigration Centre of Excellence program—the first of its kind in Canada—which helps children's aid societies address immigration status issues for children and youth.

If passed, Bill 188 would build on that work by modernizing the Child, Youth and Family Services Act, enhancing ministry oversight and introducing new and improved enforcement tools. Because, as the minister said, while it is true that the vast majority of service providers deliver the highest-quality care for children and youth, we also have to deal with the fact that there are a few who are

not acting in good faith, and others who should never have been allowed in the system in the first place.

I want to thank Carly Kalish, the executive director of Victim Services Toronto, for her recent testimony at the Standing Committee on Justice Policy in support of Bill 188, including heartbreaking stories about human trafficking of foster children in Ontario who were exploited by their own foster parents. As she said, this is a demonstration of the urgent need for reform, and there are stories like this right across Ontario, including in Mississauga, with victims as young as 13 years old.

That's why the changes provided in Bill 188 would allow us to expand background checks beyond the formal police record checks in order to better protect children and youth in care. As well, I know that the minister is working on new regulations to standardize the requirements for police record checks across the province and to allow the college of social workers to share information with other colleges in other provinces, or with children's aid societies, in order to confirm when a social worker is under investigation or to address any other serious risk that a child or youth may be harmed. At the same time, the bill will help restrict access to records about children and youth once they leave care in order to protect their privacy.

Bill 188 would also provide strong enforcement tools to hold bad-faith providers accountable, including new orders to comply and larger fines. In some cases, fines would increase from \$5,000 to \$250,000. As well, the bill would clarify that early childhood educators can be guilty of an offence if they fail to report child protection concerns to a children's aid society. This would be similar to the rules for other professions including social workers and teachers.

I'd like to conclude by reading some of the feedback that we have received on Bill 188 from experts in the child welfare sector.

Susan Wells, the CEO of Family Service Ontario, said that Bill 188 would enhance “the safety, privacy and rights of children and youth. Family Services Ontario strongly supports this legislation for its commitment to safeguarding the well-being of our children and youth.”

John Fleming, the chair of the Ontario College of Social Workers, said Bill 188 is a “step towards” strengthening “protection for the public, including the province's most vulnerable children and youth.”

Valerie McMurtry, president of the Children's Aid Foundation of Canada, said, “We value the government's commitment to making sure young people receive information on the high-quality supports that are available.”

Speaker, as I said, the voices of Ontarians with direct experience in the system have been the most important in developing Bill 188, so it is appropriate for me to close with the words of former foster child Diana Frances. She said, “Speaking from my life experience, I believe with all my heart that these improvements to the safety, well-being, and privacy of children and youth in care are of vital importance.”

Again, I want to thank the minister and his team and everyone from the child welfare sector who has come forward to share their story and their recommendations on Bill 188. This isn't a partisan issue; it's a looking-after-our-children issue. I also want to thank my friends from across the aisle for their remarks and for their support for this important bill.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Deepak Anand): I recognize the member from Windsor–Tecumseh.

Mr. Andrew Dowie: Thank you, Speaker. Certainly it's a privilege to rise today in support of Bill 188. Even though I'm not present on the committee, certainly in reading the transcripts I certainly got the sense that there are heartbreaking stories from all across Ontario. I know many are in my own community. My constituency office certainly receives a number of them.

I've taken the opportunity to sit down with Derrick Drouillard, who's the executive director of our local children's aid society in Windsor–Essex county, and he has given me a lot to think about, a lot of feedback, particularly about the limitations that exist in the system. That's exactly why we need to pursue a redesign of the system.

Some of the issues that have been brought to my attention locally have been a number of gaps in terms of service delivery. Organizations are doing their utmost to do what they do best, and sometimes that means that their mandates change, but, ultimately, gaps then get bigger and bigger and bigger as mandates are refined. We know we have to keep the child at the centre of everything we do. That includes safety, stability and access to the resources that can help them succeed and to thrive. Sometimes that means caring and love that they hadn't received from others, it could be skills development, but, ultimately, we want to have a system in which a young person in Ontario knows they can achieve anything that they put their mind to. If they have a dream, they should be able to realize it.

We have so much potential in our young people, and it's heartbreaking to see when there's trouble at home. Actually my wife and I spoke last night—and I remember a child who was in my scout group; they actually ran into each other out in the community. She had gotten something to eat with some friends of mine, and this former youth had covered her bill. I don't think he had ever met my wife, but he knew who she was. That's a great youth, and it's a youth who came from a place that I knew was difficult. His mom worked really hard to keep him on the right track, and ultimately, he developed into a remarkable young man.

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This is exactly the kind of potential that exists in our youth and why the government introduced the Supporting Children's Futures Act, which includes new and enhanced enforcement tools for those who are being victimized and those who need some support in order to get them to a place where they can look back at themselves and see the potential inside them.

I know that the changes are intended to support compliance by the different practitioners with requirements

designed to protect the safety and security of children and youth in out-of-home care. In many cases, being at home is the best medicine, but there are cases when it is not. It's not just among children and youth; I think of the victims of intimate partner violence, as an example. They should not be left with a spot where their only option is to go back to a horrible situation.

The changes in this bill also aim to protect the privacy of children. We do not want a child's future to really be ruined or harmed by casual or careless distribution of their personal information. We want to know that their information is not going to be accessible to just about anybody. One of the great things about the information age is we can actually find out a great deal of information. Someone actually is watching us right now, and they may be screen-capping it and archiving it, and that's a great thing to shed some light. But sometimes, there's a need for protection.

We all have made decisions I think we'd like to change, and we also sometimes have stories that we really don't want to have told. In cases like these involving children and youth, especially in care, it's not their fault, but they feel it's their fault that they're in that situation. This can be incredibly demoralizing to them.

The measures in the bill look like—it actually opens up an opportunity to share an experience. There's nothing better for a youth than to open up and not feel a stigma if they do and say, "You know what? It's important that I tell my story." Certainly, the committee heard instances in the past where youth felt that they had to keep everything quiet, even though probably the best remedy would have been daylight. So these changes as a whole are intended to better protect and support children, youth and their families and set them up for success.

Protection services are mandated and legislated under the Child, Youth and Family Services Act, 2017. They're provided by children's aid societies all across Ontario. I've got to tip my hat to everyone who's working in this sector. I can't even imagine how difficult it is to be knowledgeable of a situation in which you know you may not have a caring family or a family that cannot provide for the members of the family. Perhaps it's deliberate; perhaps it's not. But ultimately, you must get a sense of hopelessness for certain situations that you run across.

I tip my hat to the many boards of directors of children's aid societies across the province. There are 50, and there are also 13 Indigenous children's aid societies. I would like to give a special shout-out, should he be watching, to Adam Coates, who's one of my former colleagues who sits on the Windsor–Essex Children's Aid Society board. He's a professional planner. I worked with him at the city of Windsor. The fact that he is committing his time to helping support youth in our community is truly, truly commendable.

Looking at the investments in children's aid societies—\$1.5 billion this year—it's really a steady increase. I know we can have an amount that increases and may not see the immediate results, but the investment is worth it. And the increased investment in child protection is \$14 million,

approximately, and that builds on last year's increase of \$76.3 million. And there's \$109 million for children and youth services, which had been increased the year prior by \$92.4 million.

And so, we have a number of practitioners in this sector. We've got out-of-home care for those children who are not staying at home. That includes accommodation. It could include supervision and a specialized program for special needs. I know that we have a shortage of practitioners. Parents are certainly telling me that.

We have an interesting situation down in our neck of the woods, because we have Michigan and Detroit metro just 15 minutes away. Because of that international border, even though there are practitioners able to practise, that international border is precluding us. That's maybe one of the things I'd like to work on on a broader scale for us in border communities: that we have some access that could be out there, just in Michigan; that, perhaps, our families could have those services covered as if they were delivered by Canadian practitioners.

Care is also provided in foster homes, children's residences and staff model homes. Previous remarks have also mentioned kin families, and certainly I'm aware of many in our community. I appreciate the government's tremendous investment in kin families. It didn't exist before. There are still some challenges with the set-up there, and while there are solutions, they may not always be considered to be in the best interest of the child.

Looking at Bill 188, it was developed through widespread consultation. There was lots of testimony at committee. There were 35 written submissions, 30 virtual engagements, and really, the feedback was, I'd say, positive. I see that I just have a minute and 30 left to relay a few, but just in general: "Bill 188 is a fantastic piece of legislation" was one of the items heard. "As a former youth in care, I cannot overstate" the importance of this bill.

There was comment about progress in the past, such as Ready, Set, Go; that the enhancements are key; that inspectors have increased and penalties have increased. One of the children who had been in care said one of the sections was "groundbreaking" and that the status quo had been a "stigma that young people in care are problem kids," and this helps to address that and give hope and optimism for the future. And really, that optimism that you can be something better, something that you can dream about, is the best opportunity that we can give to our young people in Ontario.

So Bill 188 is a tremendously progressive bill that helps us get there and helps our young people who are being served by care agencies to realize the potential in themselves. It's important they see that value. Bill 188 gets us to where they can feel that inside them. I'm delighted to support it, and I want to thank the minister for bringing it forward and the Legislature for getting this through to third reading today.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): I recognize the member from Ottawa Centre.

Mr. Joel Harden: I want to thank the member for Windsor–Tecumseh for those remarks. I particularly enjoyed your comments when you were talking about the staff, and the burden on the staff when they are aware of an unsafe situation for a youth and how that must weigh on them. I completely agree. That has been my experience meeting with workers for the children's aid society in Ottawa.

I wonder if the member could elaborate on what this House could do, empowering this legislation even more to be mindful of making sure we hold on to those talented children's-aid-worker staff? The member for Kitchener Centre said it earlier in debate this afternoon, and she comes from this particular sector, so she should know that, at the moment, in some cases, for-profit group homes and for-profit foster homes are pulling some of the children's aid workers, paid non-profit, publicly, out of that system, because it's difficult to compete. It's difficult to retain talented people.

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Do you think it would make sense—my question to the member—for us to make sure that there was proper funding for children's aid societies so they can maintain the staff, the competence they have and reward those hard-working people?

Mr. Andrew Dowie: I thank the member from Ottawa Centre for his question. Certainly, one thing that I have noticed in my discussions is that staff have to feel that they're empowered and that they're supported. That's a big piece of this where responsibilities are more clearly defined in this legislation in terms of your duty to report, in terms of your obligations or the expectations for the protection of young people that you work with.

So I think instilling that confidence that, "Hey, the staff are there. Their management has their back" is a terrific way—it's just being established in this bill and reinforced in this bill. The funding has continued to increase over the last number of years while serving relatively fewer children. So we're getting there with this bill. I see lots of hope on the horizon as a result of this bill.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Further questions?

Mr. Logan Kanapathi: Thank you to my colleagues from Mississauga–Lakeshore and Windsor–Tecumseh for their thoughtful comments and passion about this bill. Thank you for your support. Thank you for sharing your own story about the children's aid society in Windsor and your good friend who is managing—he was a former staff, and we're getting all the inside information. Thank you for sharing that.

Madam Speaker, this bill is about working to fill the cracks in the foster care system and protecting our vulnerable children in our wonderful province by hiring more inspectors, conducting random inspections that never happened before and creating more accountability for licensees. My colleagues, could you elaborate on this: How are we protecting and enhancing this premise to protect our children in our foster care system?

Mr. Andrew Dowie: I want to thank the member for his kind words. There are a number of measures in here that help. So number one, I explained a list of professions that can receive personal information from children's aid societies beyond regulated health professions, social workers and social service workers now include teachers and ECEs. So that's one way that we're supporting. It clarifies with absolute justification that ECEs are a profession. We need to recognize them. This bill does recognize these ECEs are professionals that work with youth and that we are reliant upon them to help our youth succeed in life. So this also enables the call to social workers and social services workers to share information about their members with bodies that govern other professions, such as children's aid societies. So those are just a few of the measures in which we're supporting those that work with our youth.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Further questions?

Ms. Bhutla Karpoche: I want to thank both government members for their presentation. As we've already indicated, the official opposition NDP will be supporting this bill. But I have a question around inspection, because we know that good policies can only work if they are resourced and if there is appropriate funding that goes hand in hand with it. So when it comes to inspection, what resources have been given for inspections and enforcement? Will it mean that there will be proactive inspections? How many inspectors are there now and how many do you expect to have once this bill comes into force?

Mr. Rudy Cuzzetto: I want to thank the member for that great question. Our government will do whatever it takes to protect children and youth in this province. Not only that, we are creating 20 new inspection positions. As well, we're going to be boosting the unannounced inspections to increase transparency through the system.

I want to thank the member. We're going to continue to protect our children, because children are very important to all of us in here, especially myself. I have two young boys, and I know how important it is to protect our children through the province of Ontario.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Further questions?

Mr. Deepak Anand: When it comes to our children, our government launched our plan to redesign child welfare in 2020 and has taken action through many initiatives since then, from hiring more inspectors and increasing the number of inspections; to creating a new quality standards framework so there is a common benchmark across the province; to launching Ready, Set, Go, which ensured for the first time Ontario had a plan to support children and youth in care as they near adulthood and set them up for success. These measures made a real difference.

At this time, I'd like to ask the member from Windsor-Tecumseh if he can explain to us how Bill 188 complements and builds on the work done by the child welfare redesign.

Mr. Andrew Dowie: Learning about Ready, Set, Go, which was brought forward just prior to my arrival, although it was launched April 1 in 2023—this was something that I really, really appreciated seeing. At the time, the minister said, "Children and youth in the child welfare system face additional barriers throughout their lives. Our government is enhancing the way youth leaving care are supported so they can access the same opportunities as their peers. The Ready, Set, Go Program will help youth get the skills they need to build a brighter future for themselves."

That's a \$68-million program, and it helps children's aid societies focus on helping children plan their futures at an earlier age. Basically, it allows you to remain in care until the age of 23, up from the age of 21, which was what happened before. And funding increased \$850 per month to \$1,800 for age 18, \$1,500 for age 19 and \$1,000 for age 20. So, these are some supports that can help under Ready, Set, Go. It really gives our youth an opportunity for a better path for the future.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Quick question, quick response.

MPP Lise Vaugeois: I was sorry to hear from the Minister of Colleges and Universities yesterday that the government does not support a return of the Child and Youth Advocate. The work being done by that advocate cannot be replaced by the Ombudsman. An ombudsman is complaint-based, and an advocate is there to be proactive.

But the implication was that with this new bill, everything would be fixed right away. So my question is, how long do you think it will take to bring staffing levels up to the point where it is actually possible to implement the programs suggested by the bill and protect the children as we know they need to be protected?

Mr. Andrew Dowie: I know the office of the child advocate wrote 79 reports from 2008 to 2019, and about 10% of the calls to the Child and Youth Advocate led to investigations in 2008 to 2019. So the investigative powers of the Child and Youth Advocate were transferred to the Ombudsman. There's no loss of authority in this change; in fact, it provides a greater component of staff that can look into these issues. There have been inspectors hired as well in addition to the opportunities now with the Ombudsman.

The Ombudsman being part of the amount of information given to children and youth as an option—there's nothing that's brand new. That awareness is something that's important, that they know that they have an ally in the Ontario Ombudsman that is looking out for them.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Further debate? Further debate? Further debate?

Mr. Parsa has moved third reading of Bill 188, An Act to amend the Child, Youth and Family Services Act, 2017 and various other Acts. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

Be it resolved that the bill do now pass and be entitled as in the motion.

Third reading agreed to.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Orders of the day?

Mr. Trevor Jones: Good afternoon, Speaker. On a point of order, please.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): On a point of order, I recognize the member for Chatham-Kent-Leamington.

Mr. Trevor Jones: Speaker, if you seek it, you'll find unanimous consent to see the clock at 6 o'clock.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): I seek unanimous consent to see the clock at 6. Agreed? Agreed.

Report continues in volume B.

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