

Legislative
Assembly
of Ontario



Assemblée
législative
de l'Ontario

**Official Report
of Debates
(Hansard)**

SP-45

**Journal
des débats
(Hansard)**

SP-45

**Standing Committee on
Social Policy**

Supporting Children's
Futures Act, 2024

1st Session
43rd Parliament
Tuesday 14 May 2024

**Comité permanent de
la politique sociale**

Loi de 2024 visant à soutenir
l'avenir des enfants

1^{re} session
43^e législature
Mardi 14 mai 2024

Chair: Steve Clark
Clerk: Lesley Flores

Président : Steve Clark
Greffière : Lesley Flores

Hansard on the Internet

Hansard and other documents of the Legislative Assembly can be on your personal computer within hours after each sitting. The address is:

<https://www.ola.org/>

Index inquiries

Reference to a cumulative index of previous issues may be obtained by calling the Hansard Reporting Service indexing staff at 416-325-7400.

Le Journal des débats sur Internet

L'adresse pour faire paraître sur votre ordinateur personnel le Journal et d'autres documents de l'Assemblée législative en quelques heures seulement après la séance est :

Renseignements sur l'index

Adressez vos questions portant sur des numéros précédents du Journal des débats au personnel de l'index, qui vous fourniront des références aux pages dans l'index cumulatif, en composant le 416-325-7400.

House Publications and Language Services
Room 500, West Wing, Legislative Building
111 Wellesley Street West, Queen's Park
Toronto ON M7A 1A2
Telephone 416-325-7400
Published by the Legislative Assembly of Ontario



Service linguistique et des publications parlementaires
Salle 500, aile ouest, Édifice du Parlement
111, rue Wellesley ouest, Queen's Park
Toronto ON M7A 1A2
Téléphone, 416-325-7400
Publié par l'Assemblée législative de l'Ontario

ISSN 1710-9477

CONTENTS

Tuesday 14 May 2024

Supporting Children’s Futures Act, 2024, Bill 188, Mr. Parsa / Loi de 2024 visant à soutenir l’avenir des enfants, projet de loi 188, M. Parsa	SP-1181
Ms. Carina Chan; Ms. Ann Fitzpatrick	SP-1181
Statement by the minister and responses.....	SP-1189
Hon. Michael Parsa	
Mr. Rupert Gordon	

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

**STANDING COMMITTEE ON
SOCIAL POLICY**

**COMITÉ PERMANENT DE
LA POLITIQUE SOCIALE**

Tuesday 14 May 2024

Mardi 14 mai 2024

The committee met at 0900 in committee room 2.

**SUPPORTING CHILDREN'S
FUTURES ACT, 2024
LOI DE 2024 VISANT À SOUTENIR
L'AVENIR DES ENFANTS**

Consideration 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 Chair (Mr. Steve Clark): Good morning, everyone. I call the meeting of the Standing Committee on Social Policy to order. We're meeting this morning to resume public hearings on Bill 188, An Act to amend the Child, Youth and Family Services Act, 2017 and various other Acts.

To our presenters this morning: In order for you to be understood before the committee, I'd ask that you speak clearly into the mike. Remember that I will preside over it, so please recognize the Chair, and I'm going to ask the members to ensure that all their questions go through the Chair.

This morning, each of you will have seven minutes to present to the committee. That will be followed by a 39-minute time slot of questions that will run in rotation between the government members of two rounds of seven and a half minutes, the official opposition of two rounds of seven and a half minutes and the independent member will get two rounds of four and a half minutes.

I want to thank you for being here for this bill.

MS. CARINA CHAN

MS. ANN FITZPATRICK

The Chair (Mr. Steve Clark): With us today we have Carina Chan and Ann Fitzpatrick.

Carina, you can start. Just introduce yourself for the purposes of Hansard. Your seven minutes begins now.

Ms. Carina Chan: Good morning. My name is Carina Chan. I'm a family law and child protection lawyer in Toronto. I'm also someone who has lived experience in the child welfare system here in Ontario as a former crown ward who was in the care of a children's aid society up until I aged out at 18.

I'm honoured to be speaking to you about Bill 188, the Supporting Children's Futures Act, on Children and Youth in Care Day.

As a lawyer, part of my practice involves representing young people in family law and child protection court proceedings through the Office of the Children's Lawyer. However, I do want to be clear that my remarks here today are based on my own personal experiences and on my own observations from working and volunteering with children and youth in care. I'm not speaking on behalf of the Office of the Children's Lawyer.

I'm going to focus my remarks on the proposed provisions of Bill 188 that are aimed at protecting the personal information and privacy rights of individuals who have had involvement with child welfare agencies as children. Currently, even after young people turn into adults and are no longer receiving child welfare services, their records remain available and accessible in CPIN, the file management system used by children's aid societies. This includes personal and private information of individuals who have previously been in care or even those who have had only brief interactions with the child protection system as children.

The privacy framework in Bill 188 would result in the development of regulations to restrict access to these records, so that this information is not automatically accessible when individuals in care apply for a job or a board position in the child welfare sector, apply to become a foster parent or adoptive parent or become involved in a post-separation parenting dispute.

When you go for a job interview, you want to put your best foot forward. But imagine if your potential employer had the ability to pull up intimate details about your childhood, including everything from whether your parents struggled with substance abuse, to whether there was family violence in your childhood home, whether you ran away from home at some point or how many times you skipped school in grade 11.

I think we can all agree that if an individual who was involved with the CAS as a child is applying for a position in the child welfare sector or applying to be a foster parent or adoptive parent, the decision should be based on their qualifications and what they bring to the table as a person and as a professional, not anything else. If they want to disclose that they were in care and have lived experience that contributes to their role, that should be their choice, but they should not be treated any differently.

We need to see young people as rights-holders with the right to privacy and the right to decide if and how their personal information and experiences will be shared with others. This is an essential part of supporting their transition to adulthood and facilitating long-term successful outcomes.

Even before I began speaking publicly about my lived experience in the child welfare system, I received occasional comments from CAS workers I met in a professional context who seemed to indicate that they knew that I was a former crown ward. Comments like, “You must really be able to relate to the child,” or, “Good for you for doing this work after what you’ve been through,” may be well-intended and meant to be complimentary, but they also feel like a complete violation of my privacy, especially while working.

Even now when I work on child protection files where I’m counsel for a parent or a child, I often wonder, “Is the CAS lawyer or worker seeing that I have a child protection file when they search for my contact information in CPIN or if they document a call that they’ve had with me? What are they assuming about me, as a person and as a professional? Do they think that I’m biased in some way because of my own personal experiences?”

I can guarantee you that these are questions that most of my colleagues have never had to ask themselves, and I know for a fact that I’m not the only one. I have heard many stories from my peers who were formerly in the care of the CAS, ranging from throwaway comments at interviews for a child protection worker position, to details that they’ve never publicly shared, to questions about whether they can leave their personal feelings about the system at the door.

And as a family law lawyer, I have seen cases where there is high-conflict litigation about parenting and one spouse attempts to use the other spouse’s child welfare history to gain the upper hand, even when the other spouse was only involved with the CAS as a child. I feel as though we are constantly fighting against the stigma that young people in care are problem kids, even though in reality most of us became involved with the CAS for circumstances entirely outside of our control.

Even in the course of speaking about the importance of privacy rights for young people from care, I’ve often heard questions like, “Well, what if they have children of their own and they go on to abuse and neglect their children?”, as if that is a reason to not uphold the privacy rights that they should have. We need to shift the mindset about what young people from care can and cannot do, and most importantly help shift how they think about themselves.

My personal experience, as well, has been that the words and perspectives of young people are often not accurately or fully captured in the notes and documents prepared by child welfare professionals. There can be a tendency to give more weight to the information provided by adults, even if it’s not done with malicious intent and even when some of the information that’s recorded is factual. I’ve seen it firsthand with my own documents when I was in the care of a children’s aid society.

The Chair (Mr. Steve Clark): You’ve got one minute remaining.

Ms. Carina Chan: For example, when I was unable to attend plan of care meetings, which are meetings to review and discuss my placement and supports, what was documented was, “Carina refused to attend plan of care meetings,” without any mention of why or any explanation that I had a test at school or an extracurricular activity. And I’ve

also seen this in the courts of representing child and youth clients.

You might be thinking that some of these examples sound innocuous, but these are not rare or isolated incidents. There’s a compounding effect if months and years of your life are documented in this way and the overall picture can become skewed. It has a real impact on how young people see themselves and how others see them.

Lastly, when it comes to accessing mental health supports and wraparound supports, young people need to know that it’s going to be a safe space and that confiding in a professional about their very real fears and anxieties will not come back to haunt them later. I can tell you that, as a young person in care, when I was offered the opportunity to access free therapy, I was reluctant to go—

The Chair (Mr. Steve Clark): Thank you for your presentation.

We will now move to our second presenter. Do you want to introduce yourself for the purpose of Hansard—

Ms. Ann Fitzpatrick: Good morning and thank you for this opportunity to share my perspectives on Bill 188. I really appreciate the leadership of you as legislators for Ontario because you are the parents of the children and youth in care. I appreciate the improvements that are being made through Bill 188 and I’m going to address three areas of the bill.

I’m a retired social worker—

The Chair (Mr. Steve Clark): Can you just state your name again?

Ms. Ann Fitzpatrick: Oh, pardon me. Ann Fitzpatrick.

The Chair (Mr. Steve Clark): Thank you.

Ms. Ann Fitzpatrick: I’m a retired social worker and I worked in child welfare my entire career. I have my bachelor’s and my master’s of social work. For about three years, I worked in front-line child protection and with homeless families in shelters, but for the bulk of my career, I was in something called community development and prevention, working side by side with children, youth and families in low-income neighbourhoods, poorly resourced areas with diverse communities. We helped to develop supports and programs like after-school programs and child care to strengthen families and strengthen communities.

But we still realize that some children, despite the prevention supports, come into care. I believe that every child in care deserves to be nurtured, kept safe and supported through every developmental phase so they can be the best they can be, and I’m a big believer—as I know you have been—in listening to the voices of people with lived experience, like Carina.

I want to talk about the three areas of the legislation. One is the overarching foundation of the legislation, the second is the privacy protections and the third is the robust accountability, both at an agency level and at a systems level.

I really love the name of the bill, Supporting Children’s Futures Act—it speaks to the intention and direction of this legislation. With this name, there’s a clear vision towards looking at the futures of these children and youth, which I think is something that we haven’t done for decades.

We have to have the same high expectations of every child and youth that you have for your own children, that I have for my nieces and nephews, that you have for your

grandchildren. There should be no less for children in care. The preamble builds on that foundation, talking about safety, security, quality care and individualized supports to help children succeed and thrive. Again, this sets the vision and underpins the details of your legislation that follows.

The second area of Bill 188 I want to speak about is the strength and privacy protections. I appreciate everything Carina has said. I'm kind of speaking in the perspective of a social worker. I welcome section 10 of the legislation. I think it's groundbreaking to begin to look at the privacy interest protections for youth that have aged out of care.

We all care much more about privacy, I would say, in the last 15 to 20 years as we've grown in awareness about it. I know that we are concerned about our SIN numbers, our banking information and so forth. That is very vital. Kids in care have that information as well. But I truly believe our information on file pales in comparison to the level of information that is recorded for children in care.

It seems perverse to me that, at a time when they're no longer receiving financial support, counselling support, they can't go to their biological parents, they essentially have no parent, we are continuing to have their files that are searchable. As Carina mentioned, it's kept in CPIN, which is an Ontario-wide system for collecting files, and when I retired from child welfare, I wasn't aware of any safeguards that prevented different agency staff from looking at particular files in either Toronto or across Ontario, and I think that's a questionable practice.

0910

Speaking as a social worker who only did protection for a short period of time, but I worked with these workers, the lens of the social worker impacts what's in those files and what is written. We know children in care have faced trauma, both in their own families and sometimes in foster care, and yet social workers and foster parents and many do not have training in trauma-informed approaches. Therefore, they begin to weave a story or a narrative in these files that does not always align with how that youth who ages out of care—when they read that file, it doesn't align with how they feel about themselves. Sometimes the language uses labels or stigmatizing language which reinforces the kind of stigma that young people unfortunately have to internalize from the negative messages both in the community, in schools, in our larger province. These stories and words hurt, and they replicate harm.

It is a big step forward to improve this protection of private information for children leaving care, and it returns a greater sense of dignity and control over these young people's lives.

The last area I'll speak about is accountability, data and outcomes. Thank you—in this bill—for strengthening accountability measures on two levels, both at making sure rules and regulations are followed at an agency level, including very vital compliance for the places children are staying 7/24 in group homes and foster homes. These strengthening measures should help more children stay safe, and it will monitor the services provided.

I appreciate that you're increasing inspectors and inspections and the penalties that will put more teeth in the

legislation in the interest of children and youth. That's good news.

The Chair (Mr. Steve Clark): You have one minute left.

Ms. Ann Fitzpatrick: Children and youth in care will notice if you are enforcing high standards. This will encourage them to speak out more, if they actually see their issues are being addressed. Every single person who comes across a child or a youth should be their advocate.

The second area I'll just close with is your groundbreaking work that you're going to do to monitor the outcomes of youth when they age out of care and really use that data that you're going to collect to inform policies, inform services and make sure that there really is a brighter future for these children in care.

The Chair (Mr. Steve Clark): Thank you both.

We'll start with the government's first round of seven and a half minutes. MPP Smith.

Ms. Laura Smith: Through you, Chair, first of all, I want to congratulate both of you for coming today.

Carina, I want to congratulate you on your bravery and your line of work. It's ironic; I'm surprised we haven't run into each other. I used to deal with matters under the child protection act as well. Openness applications were my speciality, so it is a great honour to be here side by side with you.

I did want to talk to Ann Fitzpatrick. You talked about accountability. Children in care have faced trauma, and stricter practices—more eyes on the plan makes a difference, and I know this first-hand. But could you talk about some of the differences that the accountability—or some of the differences that you know of that will make a positive impact on children in care?

Ms. Ann Fitzpatrick: I think definitely the frequency of seeing children and youth makes a difference. But I saw Nicole Bonnie's presentation yesterday, and I agree with what she said: It's not just checking a box that I visited children so many times, it is the quality of that relationship and that engagement, because if young people don't develop that trusting relationship with care providers—and some of that comes from feeling they're being listened to, their issues are being heard, that social worker is a champion for them, is an advocate for them, if there are issues emerging in a foster home or in a group home, that that person is their person, just like a parent would be, who's going to address it.

So I think frequency definitely is a piece of it, but it's also the quality. I think that comes to how staff are trained and the fact that they realize that sometimes a foster parent might be complaining that this child is acting out or, "I want this child moved," and this results in frequent moves. Well, I think if you have a more trauma-informed approach, you'd realize that there are some pretty good reasons why that child is acting out. They're—

Interjection.

Ms. Ann Fitzpatrick: Sorry.

Ms. Laura Smith: No, no. I was about to say that I'm in agreement. One of the things this legislation does, if passed, is information-sharing between organizations like the ECE teachers, which had previously not been involved. How do you think that will impact the quality of the care going forward?

Ms. Ann Fitzpatrick: Information-sharing is great, but again, I think we need to make sure that the type of information that's shared about children isn't replicating harm, and that, across the system, we learn how to describe the kinds of issues that children are facing so that we're not creating a story that's replicating—

Ms. Laura Smith: I completely agree.

Ms. Ann Fitzpatrick: Definitely, ECE—we all know about early childhood development and the brain development, and that the more interventions and supports we can give to children from birth to age six, and of course beyond, that's very vital. They have to be a part of that team for sure.

Ms. Laura Smith: Knowing and understanding those ECEs and the colleges that they work with, I think that's part of the legislation as well. I know that the legislation will provide for more transparency, so I'm wondering if you want to comment about that—support for the work of the protection workers in the children's aid societies. I didn't know if you had any comments on that.

Ms. Ann Fitzpatrick: Can you just describe what kind of transparency you're talking about?

Ms. Laura Smith: Through this legislation, different professional organizations will be required to provide transparency on their members so that you can have a better quality—

Ms. Ann Fitzpatrick: Absolutely. Yes, absolutely. There has to be the highest standards of training and care for these people working with these vulnerable young people.

Ms. Laura Smith: Okay. Time?

The Chair (Mr. Steve Clark): Three 30.

Ms. Laura Smith: I'm going to pass my time over to MPP Kusendova-Bashta.

The Chair (Mr. Steve Clark): MPP Kusendova-Bashta.

Ms. Natalia Kusendova-Bashta: Thank you so much. Good morning, everyone. Thank you to our two presenters for coming and sharing your expertise as well as your personal and lived experience.

My questions will be addressed to Carina. Thank you again for sharing that you have had personal experience with the system. We've had many individuals like yourself come over the last few days and present. The resilience and the courage is just really inspiring, and to hear about your professional development as well. Yesterday, we had a medical doctor who was also a crown ward and many others. It's really giving us, I guess, hope and inspiring us that, working together, we can build a better future for the children in our system.

Carina, I did want to ask you, throughout your experience, were you aware of the Office of the Ombudsman? And I guess it depends on your age, but were you aware that there's such an office available to you to advocate for your rights as a child?

Ms. Carina Chan: The Ontario Ombudsman took over the responsibilities of the provincial advocate after I already became an adult, but to answer your question, while I was in care, I do remember getting a pamphlet that said, "Here are your rights while you're in care." I do remember being aware of the office that I could call if there was ever an

issue in my foster home or if I needed to speak to someone and make a complaint.

With that said, I do know of other young people over the years who have received dated information or information and pamphlets that are 15, 20 years old. I know that there was an article from APTN News several years ago where they looked at a child protection agency in Kenora, and there were pamphlets being distributed to children in care where the information still had language from the Young Offenders Act, which was no longer in effect at the time. It still had information for what was called the child advocacy office, which was the predecessor to the provincial advocate's office.

I do very much support the parts of Bill 188 that talk about the necessity to provide timely and accurate information to children in care about the Ontario Ombudsman's office and also their rights in care.

The Chair (Mr. Steve Clark): One minute remaining.

Ms. Natalia Kusendova-Bashta: I wanted to ask you to clarify: Was it just one pamphlet throughout your entire experience within the system? Was it just one time that you were given information about your rights?

Ms. Carina Chan: Yes, it was one pamphlet, and I can say, in my personal experience, it was not explained to me. I was able to read it and understand the information, and I felt that I knew who to contact. But it certainly does raise concerns for me that sometimes information is being provided to young people and time isn't being taken to explain it to them, to check their understanding.

0920

I know that when I meet with young people that I'm acting for, I explain it to them multiple times. I ask them to tell me their understanding of it so I can check: Did they hear what I said, and do they know who they need to contact? Is there a safe place that they can keep the information? I think all of those things are important, and I think that, as part of the bill, it's important to include rules about what best practices are.

The Chair (Mr. Steve Clark): Thank you.

We're going to now move the official opposition, your first round of seven and a half minutes. MPP Gélinas.

Mme France Gélinas: My first question for Ms. Carina Chan. Thank you, both of you, for coming this morning. I guess in your role in the Office of the Children's Lawyer—but you talked about people being able to access your CAS file for separation disputes, for foster parents. How do they do that? Who can gain access to your file like that?

Ms. Carina Chan: My understanding is that because child protection files and records are not archived, they're not sealed, they're still searchable in the database in CPIN. For example, if someone were to type my name into CPIN, I imagine that my child protection file would probably come up in that search. I don't work for the children's aid society, so I don't know exactly what that looks like. All I can speak about are my personal experiences, which—I know that even prior to speaking publicly about being a former crown ward and having lived experience in the child welfare system, I've had interactions with child welfare professionals where they seem to know certain details about

me, and also from speaking to other young people or adults from care where similar things have happened to them.

M^{me} France Gélinas: Okay. I'm all for sealing those off, the same protection that we give to young offenders—it's sealed off. If you need access, go through the courts. The courts will decide if you can gain access.

You did talk about the stigma and the shift in mindsets. Do you know of anybody who has been successful in shifting the stigma that seems to be attached to people who were in care and that could be replicated, that we should act upon—the same thing with shifting the mindset that you presented?

Ms. Carina Chan: I know that there are organizations now, such as the Child Welfare Political Action Committee, or there's an Ontario coalition of young people who were from care. I think that it's important for young people with lived experience or adults with lived experience in care as children to have a seat at the table, to be given the platform to share their experiences.

I think that part of shifting the stigma is showing young people and also the professionals that work with them—that young people are not just this population that CASs are working with; they grow up to be community members. They grow up to be doctors, to be lawyers, to be skilled tradespeople. They are contributing members of society, and I think that the more vocal that people are about that, I think, the stigma starts to fall away.

M^{me} France Gélinas: Like to really show success, to show that you can become a productive member of society, and not tie the two together?

Ms. Carina Chan: Correct. And I think success in different ways as well because I don't think that success should be defined as going to college and university or getting a certain degree, right? I think success means different things for young people, and at the end of the day, if you're centring the young person in terms of decisions that are being made about them, you can't go wrong.

M^{me} France Gélinas: I agree.

Ms. Fitzpatrick, I wanted to ask you—you went through the three parts that were of interest to you. Accountability was a big one, and then you went further down in the monitoring of the outcome out of care. Do you have specific data that you would like to see, that should be collected, that should be made public?

Ms. Ann Fitzpatrick: I think a lot of the research that's been done over the last 40 years and literature reviews, none of it has been led by the child welfare sector. It's all been in the grey literature or academics. And I think you all have seen the outcomes around looking at issues like: Are young people leaving care housed? Are young people leaving care having mental health issues? Are young people leaving care going to university or going into the trades or employed? Are they victims of suicide? We see some of this data coming up in different ways in inquests and other things but what we need is for the child welfare system, through the government that funds it, to be looking at those outcomes.

Too sadly, what has happened is when you've—I don't know; there are many different names for it—aged out of

care, emancipated, graduating from care, what I know from the young people I've worked with is that when they turn 18, it's a high-stress situation because they can no longer stay in foster care. Unlike youth in the general population, in that period where you should be building on your future and preparing to finish high school or go to university, these young people are put into survival mode at that age.

So it's no wonder that some of these negative outcomes happen, but they've not been measured. I do think that we've got a lot of world-class universities across Canada and in Ontario that could partner with the government and the child welfare sector to look at what the gaps are that we've been seeing and what the trends are that have been documented around these young people. What are the stories that we're hearing from them around what their lives look like from age 18 up, and age 21 up, when they age out of care?

I do think the Ready, Set, Go Program—having worked in child welfare—I think that enhancement of some other financial supports is key. But we have to measure that, too, and see how that is working. Do we need to do other things for young people? How do you fix something if you're not measuring it? How do you focus on something if you don't know what it is? Again, we have a patchwork across Canada, and Ontario could actually be a leader in this regard with this work. It could be something replicated in other places.

The Chair (Mr. Steve Clark): You've got about a minute.

M^{me} France Gélinas: You also mentioned that even in the language that is used in the notes that the social workers take, sometimes there's language that reinforces stigma. Same question to you: How can we change this? How can we make sure that doesn't happen?

Ms. Ann Fitzpatrick: I think the kinds of training that get built into universities and colleges that train ECE workers, social workers or people that are working in group homes have to be a part of that. I think that the child welfare training has to be a part of that. But embedded in it needs to be a deeper understanding of trauma, resilience and the positive interventions of the adults and the caregivers in these young people's lives from the time they come into care, so that they can write what is going on, but in a sensitive way and not in a labelling way. Also, I think young people sometimes feel when they see their files like they're a bad person—

The Chair (Mr. Steve Clark): Thank you.

We'll move to the independent member. You have four and a half minutes. Your round starts now.

Ms. Aislinn Clancy: I appreciate very much both of you coming here today. You give so many perspectives in two people; it's wonderful. And I'm so grateful, Carina, that you could speak with such passion and depth about what it has meant to you, and even wearing many hats and how it has kind of followed you.

Now, being a politician, it's that anger turned into action. It's really therapeutic, fighting for justice on behalf of so many young people who are in care right now that don't have to live what you've lived in terms of always looking over your shoulder wondering. It's a gross injustice that has happened for far too long so I'm glad you could

reinforce, with the good work the government is doing today to bring forward this legislation, to stop it altogether.

I'm a social worker, so I think the college and our profession have a lot to answer for: a legacy of judgment, colonization and equity issues that I think we are hopefully still working to repair, to transition to a better partnership with the folks that we support. I hope that that will show up in the notes. I know whenever I was writing a note, I was trying to say, "If someone read this, would I be proud of what I wrote and would I feel like they would be proud of what I wrote?" I hope that many other social workers now use that lens.

I do have concerns because I think accountability is key. We have too many group homes that have lasted too long doing really horrible service to kids, using them as kind of cash cows, as we've heard. So I'm glad that we can finally have the tool box to reckon with that.

0930

What do you think is needed to create more safe spaces for kids to live? My children's aid society is at a 10-year low of funding. From my understanding, from the last few years, they've been begging for people to volunteer to become foster parents. How do we make this opportunity more available to young people to have these safe places to live? Carina, do you mind starting us off?

Ms. Carina Chan: Of course. In terms of creating safe spaces, I think that the terms in the proposed bill that deal with oversight for foster homes and group homes will go a long way to making sure that certain standards are met. Like you said, there are certain homes or certain caregivers that have been given too much leeway and are not meeting the standards of care that children and youth deserve.

I think in terms of helping young people feel safe in care, a big part of that is making sure that they understand what their rights are. In my presentation, I spoke about needing to see young people as rights-holders. They're not just passive observers to what's happening with their parents or what's happening in the foster home or group home. They are individuals where they need to know that this is what you're entitled to, this is the standard of care that you deserve. If something is wrong or if you have questions, here is who you contact and there will be someone there to support you.

Ms. Aislinn Clancy: Thank you. Do you have anything to add, Ann?

The Chair (Mr. Steve Clark): One minute left.

Ms. Ann Fitzpatrick: I know it's a difficult question because, in terms of recruiting foster parents, for example, I do think that the stigma question and the stigma issue that we talked about earlier has a big effect on that. Because if the image that is presented around children in care—negatively—a lot of people may not want to do it, and the people that may want to do it may be doing it for some of the wrong reasons.

I've met some wonderful foster parents in my life, but I think some better type of promotion is needed to make this a mission for Ontario, that these are our kids, not just the state's kids. They're our kids in Barrie; they're our kids in Toronto; they're our kids in North Bay. I do think we

can make that an exciting thing for adults, maybe people of all ages, to get into fostering.

The Chair (Mr. Steve Clark): We'll move to the government's second round of questions. MPP Wai.

Mrs. Daisy Wai: I just want to say, first of all, thank you to both of you for coming in. My heart goes out to Carin—for you to have that courage and coming in and sharing with us. Congratulations on your success now as an adult. That makes a big difference for us, where you're coming in and telling us what happened and continuing to fight.

I also want to say thank you to Ann. You have been serving for your life. I can really see the care you have from the bottom of your heart. It is so good to have both of you to come in to share with us.

I just have a question for Carina. I understand that the CAS records from childhood have been shared, but can you tell us, or if you know, how it has been used in the adults' lives of the former children or youth that have been in care?

Ms. Carina Chan: Again, I think I can only speak about my personal experiences and stories that I've heard from other young people or adults from care that I know. But I think the stories that I have heard, again, are going for interviews for a child protection worker position and being asked: "Will you be able to handle this because of what you've experienced? Are you able to put your personal feelings about the system at the door?"

I know that there's also a concern for a lot of young people—this includes young people who are not yet adults—where they wonder: If I become a parent or I want to be a foster parent one day because I want to give back and do the same thing that my foster parent did for me, am I going to be allowed to do that? Or am I going to be judged in some way because I was in care myself?

I touched upon this earlier in my presentation, but something I have seen as a family law lawyer is that in some high-conflict disputes, sometimes about parenting, where professionals or lawyers obtain CAS records for both of the parents, sometimes in there, there is mention of one of the parents' child welfare involvement as a child.

I think no one's asking, if there's child welfare involvement as an adult, for that to be left out. That is completely relevant if the CAS involvement happened when they were a parent, and something happened involving their child. But it's more so what happened to them as a child because of circumstances likely outside of their control, that should not be available or accessible.

Mrs. Daisy Wai: Do you see that we should have better control, that this information should only be determined by CAS or the courts to share this information?

Ms. Carina Chan: My personal view is that that should be a decision made by the courts, just as it happens with youth criminal justice records. They get sealed when the young person becomes an adult. If there is a situation where their youth records are relevant and necessary, then a motion can be brought to a judge at the court and an explanation could be made as to why they are needed and why they need to be unsealed.

I think the same thing should happen with child protection records. I'm certainly not suggesting that they just be deleted or that they be purged from the system entirely. I think there just needs to be some layers of protection there. In the event that it's relevant and necessary to have access to those records, then the request can be made to a judge and a judge can decide if that is the case.

Mrs. Daisy Wai: Thank you very much, Carina. And I thank both of you for saying that this act is really helping and going toward the right direction in helping children in care. We have started it, and it's never too late. I thank, again, both of you for coming. Better success for you, Carina.

I'll pass my time to Laura.

The Chair (Mr. Steve Clark): MPP Smith.

Ms. Laura Smith: Through you, Chair: Carina, first of all, I want to congratulate you once again on your bravery and your advocacy. I know these changes are made in an effort to better support and have compliance. We talked about the information, which seems to be a focus of what we're talking about. I'm going to take advantage of you in this situation because you are a lawyer and you're a unique animal—you realize that.

Thinking of the society's operations and the best interest of a child transitioning to independence—we talked about information. Is there any reason why these should be accessible files?

Ms. Carina Chan: In my view, there is not. Certainly, in the course of speaking about this issue and advocating for privacy rights for young people from care, I have occasionally heard remarks or the opinion that, "Well, don't you think that there's a potential safety risk if a young person from care later on has children of their own, and they might be more susceptible to abusing or neglecting them?"

I think my response to that line of narrative is that's not supported by the evidence, by the body of literature on this research—certainly not by rigorous sources. I know that the Child Welfare Political Action Committee, a couple of years ago, undertook a literature review to address this potential line of narrative. Nothing was found to suggest that, just by virtue of having involvement with the CAS as a child, that means someone is more likely to abuse or neglect their children.

Ms. Laura Smith: Wouldn't you consider it prejudicial, in your opinion? Once again, I'm asking you as a lawyer and an advocate. We seal the records of young offenders who have committed crimes. Shouldn't we at least give that—we should have that available to the children or the youth in care.

The Chair (Mr. Steve Clark): There's one minute remaining.

Ms. Carina Chan: Absolutely. I think, at a minimum, they need to be sealed. The decision as to whether they're necessary to access them should not be made by you or me or a social worker, in my view. I think that if there is a real, tangible reason as to why they are relevant and necessary, then a judge can be the one to make that decision.

Ms. Laura Smith: Thank you so much.

Ann, if I could get you to respond to that as well.

0940

Ms. Ann Fitzpatrick: I honestly can't think of any reason why that information should have to be shared. I think that the way the system is designed currently, that young person ages out of care, they're no longer getting service, they're no longer getting care, they're no longer getting financial support. It doesn't make any sense to me in terms of a rights approach or any other approach why someone would need to see that very sensitive information. As Carina said, like the youth justice system, there are ways of seeing that information if there's a compelling reason, and a judge decides that.

The Chair (Mr. Steve Clark): Thank you so much.

We'll now move to the official opposition. MPP Taylor.

Miss Monique Taylor: My apologies; I was in a press conference for youth leaving care day today speaking with workers from across the province who have done a report showing the absolute abysmal state of homes for kids in care. Kids are being housed in Airbnbs, hotel rooms, cots in offices, trailers, as young as two years old. That's the work of today, right?

Thank you for being here and for sharing youth leaving care day with us, for raising your voice once again, for being part of a system that we hope to change. Bill 188 definitely has changes that have been asked for right in My Real Life Book, right? Ensuring that your files are sealed and that you have the right to dignity of your own story—I've heard other former youth in care ask for access to their file, to be able to see their entire file. I don't believe that's in this bill; I'm hoping that we can make that change, to see that for people, to be able to read their own story and what has been written about them, whether truth or not—you know what I mean—and to be able to edit that accordingly. So I really do want to say thank you for sharing your time, sharing your voice and for committing to change for the future. That's really what we need to do, right? Bill 188 does not go near far enough.

My colleague brought me up to speed quickly. You're a former youth in care worker as well as a social worker.

Ms. Ann Fitzpatrick: I don't have experience in care. I was a social worker, and I worked in child welfare for most of my career but only in front-line protection, for about three years.

Miss Monique Taylor: Right. Got it.

Today's state of the societies is running in deficit. Last year, they ran a \$5.3-million deficit; this year, they're projecting a \$50-million deficit. In this bill, they're asking for CAS workers to be able to visit once every 30 days instead of once every 90 days. They're saying that they're going to hire 20 more inspectors to visit group homes. Do you think that that's possible with the already stretched environment that they're working in to be able to provide more without extra funding to go with it?

Ms. Ann Fitzpatrick: I can't speak to the budgets of the children's aid. But I was here yesterday when Nicole Bonnie spoke, and some of what she said really resonated with me, that as the organizational change takes place around the regulations on this legislation, there are new things that

need to be done. But I liked what she said, that there are also some things that may not need to be done. There may be things that have been duplicate recordings or different ways of doing things—

Miss Monique Taylor: Too much bureaucracy and red tape.

Ms. Ann Fitzpatrick: And I also appreciated what she said, that you can have a visit whatever the frequency is now and move it to once a month, but it's the quality of those visits that is going to make a difference. One hour is still one hour. If you do that one hour in a way that's meaningful to that child and is quality services versus one hour where you're ticking boxes—we need to become, from the bottom up, very child-centred and really focused on the quality of that work.

I think, in terms of the budgets, I can't really speak to that, but I do think there is capacity in the system within the resources now to do things quite differently and to reverse it on its head to make the children and their futures the focus every day. And I think every social worker needs to be an advocate and a champion for those children.

Miss Monique Taylor: I agree. Thank you very much.

Carina, with today being youth in care day, if you had one wish of something different that you wish was added to this bill because you know that it would make a difference in the kids in care's lives today and tomorrow, what would that wish be?

Ms. Carina Chan: I think if I could only pick one, I—

Miss Monique Taylor: We have time; you can pick a couple.

Ms. Carina Chan: To start, I think it is critical to evaluate and measure outcomes for young people from care. We all know that there are limited resources. There are hard decisions that have to be made when it comes to funding. I think if the government is going to invest in young people from care—which they absolutely should—then they should have information to make informed decisions about what really works.

I would encourage the government to continue investing in programs like the Ready, Set, Go Program. As a lawyer for young people from care, I've seen first-hand the impact that that program has had for young people to have transitional planning where they're not just given a list of resources at the age of 18 and told, "Good luck," but to have that start much earlier and to have meetings where they have supports around them and they get to say, "Here are my goals: my short-term goals, my long-term goals. Here's what I want to happen by the time I'm 18 or I'm 23," and to have a room filled with adults supporting them and coming up with ways that we can all make it happen together.

The Chair (Mr. Steve Clark): You've got one minute left.

Miss Monique Taylor: Yes. I think data collection is so important to acknowledge outcome. We can't expect to know where we're going if we don't even know what that looks like and what kids need.

If you'll indulge me with the leniency, I really want to get on the record today of Mia, a 16-year-old girl who had asked—her family home had broken down, and she had asked for a placement in a safe home with a family. She

was refused, and she was sent to a shelter. She wanted a home, and she wanted to go to school. She was 16 years old and, unfortunately, died a few months later.

So today is the day where we need to acknowledge these young people who the system has failed, and we need to do better. And each and every one of us in these positions, in these roles, have the ability to do better. These are our kids. They are our most vulnerable children in this province, and every single elected member in this House has a responsibility to these kids as their parents—

The Chair (Mr. Steve Clark): Thank you, MPP Taylor—

Miss Monique Taylor: —and I hope today that we can do better by that.

Thank you for your time. Thank you for being here and sharing your voices.

The Chair (Mr. Steve Clark): MPP Clancy, you can begin.

Ms. Aislinn Clancy: Thank you so much, MPP Taylor.

I have a youth shelter in my riding and it's overcapacity. They have cut back their drop-in hours because of lack of funding. There are kids putting up tents on the front lawn. So we know that not only do we need more caring foster homes that really are well-trained and capable and funded, but also, we do see kids being turned away from getting those placements, and we need to invest in quality places for kids to live.

I wanted to touch on some of the supports in community. I know today is about regulation changes, but I think one of the stressors I hear of often is that because families can't access and young people can't access mental health supports, especially complex, expert, trauma-informed, culturally appropriate mental health supports and developmental services, 20% to 30% of the referrals to CAS are because of lack of support in the community and families struggling to meet the needs of their kids and hoping that maybe the child welfare system can do it. But as we heard, kids aren't getting that. There's no side door. Do you see that, Carina, in your work, and what would it have meant for you to have had quality, expert, trauma-informed support in those years?

Ms. Carina Chan: I will say that, for me, personally, I did have access to those. As I said in my presentation earlier, I, maybe foolishly, did not take advantage of that while I was a young person. Of course, I was kicking myself as soon as I became an adult and I had to pay for therapy on my own dime.

0950

But I think it does go back to the privacy piece and to the framework I was talking about, in terms of professionals working with young people. I think it's important for young people to be told, "If you're vulnerable, if you are honest about what you're struggling with, if you reach out for help, that is not going to be held against you." That's not going to be spun into, "You couldn't do it" or "You were a difficult teenager" or whatever else the narrative might be.

So I do think that there are resources that are available, but again—sorry to bring it back to the privacy piece—I do think it is an important piece of the puzzle in terms of

helping young people feel comfortable accessing what's available to them now.

Ms. Aislinn Clancy: I think you bring up a good point. And I felt like with some of the young people that I worked with who were in care, trust was huge. And it probably took me so many visits just to build a bit of a foundation with them, where they felt like I was here because I cared, not just because I was getting paid to be there. I think that's a hard thing to push past when you're trying to build a relationship.

Those services have been cut, so none of that complex trauma counselling exists now. The door is shut, and it's really the eight- to 15-session models that exist now.

I like your thoughts about outcome. I have a mentor of mine who always says, "You measure what you value and you change what you measure." What would you recommend right now?

The Chair (Mr. Steve Clark): One minute remaining.

Ms. Aislinn Clancy: We're seeing this change in legislation. What would you like to see? Sorry, Carina, what would you like to see that measurement look like?

Ms. Carina Chan: I think that in terms of measurement, it needs to be—right now, there are different factors for readiness for adulthood that have been identified that social workers at the CAS, when they're working with their clients, are working on. I think that evaluation needs to be tied to those factors, and you need to look at everything ranging from education to self-reporting on mental health and wellness, employment, all of those kinds of things.

From the existing research, we do know that, historically, young people from care have had much poorer outcomes than their peers who are not in care. I think now that there are certain initiatives that are being taken to help them transition to adulthood—

The Chair (Mr. Steve Clark): I want to thank both of you for your presentation. Our time's up for the deputations and questions. I would like to say that if you would like to submit anything in writing in addition to your presentation this morning, the deadline is 6 p.m. this evening. Again, thank you.

I thank the members of the committee. The committee will now stand in recess until 3 p.m.

The committee recessed from 0956 to 1500.

STATEMENT BY THE MINISTER AND RESPONSES

The Chair (Mr. Steve Clark): Good afternoon, everyone. I'll call the meeting of the Standing Committee on Social Policy to order. The committee members know we're resuming public hearings on Bill 188, An Act to amend the Child, Youth and Family Services Act, 2017 and various other Acts.

We have the sponsor deputation, so we're very pleased to have the Honourable Michael Parsa, Minister of Children, Community and Social Services, with us this afternoon.

Minister, you've got 20 minutes to make an opening statement, followed by 40 minutes of questions from the

committee. The question round will be divided to the committee: Two rounds of seven and a half minutes for the government, two rounds of seven and a half minutes for the opposition and two rounds of five minutes for the independent member, making a total of 40 minutes.

In terms of ADM Gordon and the other members of the ministry that are online for us, I'll just ask all of you, before you speak, for the purposes of Hansard, to give your name and title.

Minister, your 20 minutes begin right now. Welcome.

Hon. Michael Parsa: I appreciate it. Thank you very much, Chair, and good afternoon, committee members.

Chair, before I begin, I would like to highlight that May 14 is Children and Youth in Care Day in our province, where we celebrate the valuable contributions that current and former youth in care make across our communities. I appreciate the opportunity to be here with all of you on this important day to discuss Bill 188, the Supporting Children's Futures Act, 2024, which I introduced on April 17.

This work is a result of the collaboration and the valued input of children, youth and families with lived experience in the child and youth protection sector. The bill is also a collaboration with partners like children's aid societies and service providers, as well as First Nations, Inuit, Métis and urban Indigenous communities from across the province. I would like to take this opportunity to express my deepest thanks for the incredible work that these partners do. Their tireless efforts have a profound and lifelong impact on the outcomes of vulnerable children and youth as they transition from care into adulthood.

Furthermore, thank you to the many individuals and advocates who have attended and presented their perspectives to the committee at the public hearings over the past week. Our government values your input, and we are considering all the feedback that you have shared.

We're here today because our government, Chair, will never leave anyone behind, and it's especially important that no child or youth is ever left behind and that they have every chance to thrive and succeed, regardless of their circumstance or history. We have heard from sector partners and communities about the need to implement measures that will better protect the rights of children and youth, that will enhance the quality of out-of-home care services and will improve the accountability of service providers. It's why we have introduced a broad range of legislative proposals and a suite of regulatory and policy changes in this bill that will support the futures of some of the most vulnerable children in the province.

Before I outline these proposals in more detail, I would like to share some of the feedback that we have heard since Bill 188 was introduced last month.

From Leena Augimeri, the director of the Child Development Institute: "I applaud our Ontario government.... They introduced legislation that shows they do care by enhancing protections and accountability for children/youth in care and helping to strengthen the systems that are designed to help them."

By Carly Kalish, the executive director of Victim Services Toronto: "We commend ... the government for their com-

mitment to improving the safety, well-being and privacy of children and youth in care through the introduction of” Bill 188. “Every child deserves a safe and supportive environment to thrive, and these changes mark a significant step towards achieving that goal.... We look forward to seeing the positive impact of these measures on the lives of Ontario’s children and families.”

Chair, our government will always work towards a province where all children, youth and families, including those getting support through Ontario’s child and youth services sector, are empowered with the necessary resources to thrive and succeed in their communities.

Our proposal would, if passed, modernize and standardize important safeguards throughout the child and youth services sector. This includes stronger enforcement tools to hold licensed out-of-home care operators accountable to keep children and youth safe and healthy. It would create a framework that would enhance privacy protections of those who were formerly involved in the child welfare system. This will be done by further restricting access to records comprised of their personal childhood stories once regulations are developed. The proposals would also enable individuals to speak freely about their lived experience and give them more control over what they want to share publicly. These circumstances will be outlined following further consultations with the sector.

They would also provide authority to expand the information that individuals working with vulnerable children and youth can be required to provide. This would go beyond formal police record checks, such as offence declarations. The proposals will reinforce the requirements for children’s aid societies and out-of-home care licensees to explain the role of the Ombudsman and how to contact their office to children and youth.

Finally, they would clarify that early childhood educators can be subject to an offence for failing to report child protection concerns to a children’s aid society—

Interruption.

The Chair (Mr. Steve Clark): Minister, I apologize for interrupting you. There’s a 30-minute bell in the House for a vote, so we are going to have to recess the committee for—

Miss Monique Taylor: I would prefer to hear him all out, though, and ask him questions immediately after. I don’t know.

M^{me} France Gélinas: We could do this—20 minutes, and then we’ll vote—

Miss Monique Taylor: Yes.

M^{me} France Gélinas: How many minutes before he’s done?

The Chair (Mr. Steve Clark): Fifteen minutes—we paused him at 15.

M^{me} France Gélinas: Okay.

The Chair (Mr. Steve Clark): Okay? You’re okay? Everybody agreed?

Okay, Minister, I apologize; keep going.

Hon. Michael Parsa: Not at all. Thank you.

Finally, they would clarify that early childhood educators can be subject to an offence for failing to report child

protection concerns to a children’s aid society. This would be similar to other professions, such as teachers and social workers.

As I have mentioned before, this bill was developed from broad-ranging feedback and consultations. For this, I would once again like to take this opportunity to thank the individuals with lived experience, advocates, service providers and children’s aid societies for their contributions. Their input has been and will remain vital to help ensure the success of the government’s vision of leaving no child or youth behind.

This bill is another step forward in the work of child welfare, but not the final step. We’ll continue to engage and learn from stakeholders, including youth with lived experience, as well as many others as we work to improve safety, supports and access to resources for children and youth who are served by the child protection system. This includes engaging on topics such as reviewing the rules about placements in foster homes to provide more placement options and help siblings stay together.

We also acknowledge that the needs of First Nations, Inuit, Métis and urban Indigenous children and youth and families are unique. We are meaningfully engaging with these communities to ensure we are supporting the needs of Indigenous communities when implementing changes in the child protection system. In part, this includes working together with First Nations communities that are considering or transitioning to Indigenous-led models for child and family services, including those governed under Indigenous law.

The changes that we are currently proposing in Bill 188, combined with our ongoing work, may be categorized into three themes: first, strengthening oversight and enforcement of licensed out-of-home care; second, establishing clear and consistent practice; and finally, supporting stable transitions. I would now like to outline the specific actions we are proposing to take under each theme and how they will foster better outcomes for children and youth counting on us to support and keep them safe.

First, by strengthening the oversight and enforcement of licensed out-of-home care, we are working to enhance safety and care for children and youth. There are many hard-working people working in out-of-home care, such as foster and group homes, who dedicate themselves to the children and youth that they serve. Many strive to provide the best possible support to children and youth who are experiencing some of life’s most difficult circumstances. This is hard work and it’s important work, and they have my profound thanks for the care that they provide for the children and youth in their care. However, not all service providers care to that standard, and some do not always operate in compliance with licensing requirements.

The changes we are proposing in this part of the legislation will have little or no impact on the operators who are already complying with licensing requirements. But in cases where operators are contravening licensing requirements, the proposed changes will establish new and enhanced enforcement tools. These amendments would strengthen the ministry’s oversight of foster care and group homes,

support the quality of care for children and youth and introduce additional—or strengthen—enforcement tools to support better compliance with licensing requirements. These proposals are aimed at enhancing compliance with licensing requirements designed to ensure children and youth receive high-quality care that supports their health and safety while empowering them to reach their full potential.

I now would like to share a few additional public comments that we have received since this bill was introduced.

From Julie Despaties, the executive director and founder of Adopt4Life: “We’re encouraged to see this recognition of the need for improved safeguards for vulnerable children and youth in the care of our province. These children and youth deserve our highest commitments, collectively, to supporting their safety and well-being, their healthy development and long-term successful outcomes, including the protection of their privacy and personal information after they have left the child welfare system.”

From Susan Somogyi Wells, the CEO of Family Service Ontario: “Family Service Ontario strongly supports this legislation for its commitment to safeguarding the well-being of our children and youth, mitigating the risks of developmental trauma.”

Chair, I’m now going to the second theme I mentioned earlier: clear and consistent practices. By establishing practices that are clear and consistent, we aim to improve the safety and quality of services delivered by all providers. We’re proposing six actions here.

First, to improve the safety of children and youth, we propose to clarify that service providers such as the children’s aid society can share personal information with the College of Early Childhood Educators and the Ontario College of Teachers. Service providers are already authorized to share personal information with colleges of regulated health professionals and social work colleges. The clarification spells out that these two colleges are included. Information shared could be used to support proceedings such as investigations, hearings and new registrations to support the safety of children and youth, which would reduce potential delays, for example, in cases where either college required information from a society about a verified allegation against an early childhood educator or teacher.

1510

Second, in particular circumstances, we propose to enable the Ontario College of Social Workers and Social Service Workers to share information with governing bodies and others, including children’s aid societies. Several professional colleges already have this authority in their governing legislation, including the College of Early Childhood Educators, the Ontario College of Teachers and other regulated health professionals. To improve the safety of well-being of children and youth, we want to make this consistent for Ontario youth and we want to make sure that the College of Social Workers and Social Service Workers are included. This proposed change will help enable timely information-sharing about a member, to support responsive action during an investigation.

Currently, if a person engaged in the administration of the Social Workers and Social Service Workers Act believes that a member poses a risk to others, they would be prohibited by the act to share their concerns with anyone without the member’s consent, or until after the college has investigated and the result of the investigation is made public.

A practical example of this was when a social worker had their membership revoked by the Ontario College of Social Workers and Social Service Workers in February 2023 for professional misconduct involving sexual abuse and sexual misconduct with a student. The college opened their investigation in August 2019, but the legislation prevented them from sharing their concerns with others, such as the employers and other professional colleges, for four years. Situations like this are why we are proposing these amendments. If passed, it would help ensure that scenarios like this never happen again.

Third, to support the long-term success of adoptions and to help keep children safe, we intend to bring forward future regulations that would require children’s aid societies to do the following: conduct safety assessments; create safety plans as needed; and create plans of care for children in adoption placement settings.

The proposals for these regulatory amendments have been posted on the regulatory registry. Right now, children’s aid societies are required to take these steps for children in care when they are in other types of placement settings, and our goal is to include similar requirements for adoption placement settings as well.

The fourth action we are taking is to help children and youth know and exercise their rights. This includes additional clarity proposed in the Child, Youth and Family Services Act, 2017, concerning when children and youth must be informed about the Office of the Ombudsman. Some of the requirements are already included in the Ombudsman Act. This change would help clarify the requirements for children’s aid societies and licensed out-of-home care providers to notify children and youth that they have the right to be informed about the Ombudsman and their role, because vulnerable youth and children deserve to have private and frank conversations about the care that they are receiving.

I would like to note that this proposal complements an important piece of work that our government launched a few years ago called the children and young persons’ rights resource. We want all children and youth receiving services to understand their rights under the act, because the legislation’s paramount purpose is to promote their best interests, protection and well-being.

Fifth, we propose to clarify that early childhood educators will be subject to an offence for failing to report a child protection concern to a children’s aid society. The proposal will make it clear that all early childhood educators can be subject to the same offence as other persons who perform professional or official duties with children, such as teachers and social workers, if they fail to report a child protection concern.

Finally, to further improve the safety of children and youth who are in care or receiving services, we are proposing to

provide the Lieutenant Governor in Council with the authority to make regulations that would allow information other than a formal police record check, such as an offence declaration, to be required of individuals.

Above and beyond this, our government intends to bring forward future regulations to standardize police record checks for the child and youth services sector. Those are six actions we propose taking to establish clear and consistent practices.

I will now turn to the third theme that I mentioned earlier, and that's supporting stable transitions. Under this theme, we are proposing two actions which aim to support children and youth as they transition to adulthood.

First, we propose to enhance privacy protections for individuals with previous involvement in the child welfare system. We have heard concerns from former children and youth in care about their personal information being held in perpetuity and accessible in society databases. There are many examples when this information has been used negatively to impact their future—and to clarify, Chair, these are not criminal records.

Children and youth with involvement in the child welfare system have many details recorded about themselves over the course of service, much in the same way that any parent would observe their own children's experience growing up. However, parents do not permanently record this information, nor do they use it to limit their children's future. And children raised in care deserve the same respect and equal treatment under the law. By restricting access to and disclosure of these records, we would create a framework that would protect the private details of their childhood experiences and reinforce their control over their personal information.

Chair, I would now like to share some of the public feedback that directly relates to this third theme that I just mentioned to you. This is from Carina Chan: "As a former youth in care and a lawyer who practises family law and child protection law, I support the proposed amendment set out in Bill 188, because I have seen first-hand how childhood histories and records can be used as ammunition when former youth in care become parents themselves or seek employment in the child welfare sector, even though they were in care due to circumstances entirely outside of their control. Individuals who were involved with the child welfare system as children deserve to have their personal information kept confidential so they can have a fresh start as they transition to adulthood."

Likewise, from Ingrid Palmer of the Child Welfare Political Action Committee, who says: "The Supporting Children's Futures Act is a significant move in the direction of enhancing the well-being of children and youth with child welfare experience. One's time in care should never be a source of harm or discrimination years afterwards. Protecting the personal histories of these vulnerable communities must be of high society priority."

Chair, we agree with the Child Welfare Political Action Committee, which is why our government is proposing to make changes that would enable individuals who have a history of child protection involvement to publicly identify themselves and speak about their own experiences with

child protection if they choose to do so. This would help clarify the rules for publishing such information and give individuals more control and ownership over their own stories and experiences while supporting their right to express themselves.

The proposed legislative changes as well as the regulatory and policy changes that I have just outlined are another important step towards achieving our government's wishes where no child or youth is left behind in Ontario.

The Chair (Mr. Steve Clark): One minute left, Minister.

Hon. Michael Parsa: The Supporting Children's Futures Act is not the first step that we have taken to improve child welfare, nor will it be the last. We will continue to hear from experts, advocates, communities—including First Nations, Inuit, Métis and urban Indigenous communities—on how we can ensure that all children and youth have the resources and supports they need to succeed and thrive.

On that, I kindly ask for this committee's help to move this bill forward. I thank you, Chair and committee members, for your time and attention. I'll be pleased to answer any question you may have.

The Chair (Mr. Steve Clark): Thank you very much, Minister. Point of order?

M^{me} France Gélinas: I was just thinking: Given that there's still like 13 minutes on the clock, can we do the first seven minutes and we'll still have seven minutes to do one set?

The Chair (Mr. Steve Clark): Are you guys okay with that? Okay. And then we'll suspend it after that. So the opposition has seven and a half minutes.

Are you okay?

Miss Monique Taylor: No, that's great. I thought they would have started.

Thank you, Minister. It has definitely been an interesting time listening to delegations and hearing their voices and their requests. I have not heard anything bad about the bill, by no means. I think there are good measures—small measures, though, when we look at the entire spectrum of the system.

You mentioned Carina and Ingrid and their asks, but what they also asked for was data collection, which is something that's missing from this bill. As I'm sure you know, going forward, you need to be able to see the data of what's currently there, and how do you make changes according to data? So I would respectfully request that that be something that you would consider in the amendments to ensure that the bill is at the request of people who took the time to come here and to speak highly of the changes that are made but also knowing the importance of the changes that they still needed. That was one of the things that I heard from them.

1520

I also heard from another deputant who would like access—she was finally able to get it, but it was quite the process of getting access to her own file. I think it was quite a few hundred pages of files that she has just been able to retain after years of trying to get it. Then, there were things inside that she disagreed with, that were not true.

Being able to have access to their files and being able to edit their files, I think, is something that also should be

considered. Of course, there has to be a system of how you would edit that file, but her example was pretty clear. They said she had an eating disorder because she didn't eat lunch that day, and she clearly didn't have an eating disorder. She was like, "How can they say that about me when that's clearly not true?" Those were some of the things that we heard.

You talk in the bill about hiring more inspectors, about increasing the number of inspections that CAS workers would have to do to kids who are in external homes. Yet, we know that there's a deficit. They ran a deficit of \$19.3 million last year, and they're expecting a \$15-million deficit. This comes from the OACAS. These are not my numbers; these are their numbers. So they're very concerned about the state of the societies and being able to financially keep up with today's needs.

We clearly heard that a reactionary system isn't something that people want. They want proactive systems. I believe that's part of the reform that you're looking at, is how do we keep families together? That should always be the goal, but the societies are not able to do that work if they're not taking kids into care, which is the way the funding formula is set up. So the funding formula needs an absolute change from the current state that it's at to ensure that we can proactively keep kids home in their families and help build back that family structure and keep kids out of care.

The for-profit homes: We have clearly seen, throughout the years, horrific experiences of kids dying in care and being called cash cows, being called paycheques. This is the for-profit system that is not serving the best interest of kids. We all know that when you're putting a paycheque on that kid's head, they're not getting—at Christmas, they're getting some clothing because they need it instead of a gift that they should have because they're kids, and we're their parents, and we're taking care of them. We've seen horrible examples of the way that kids have been locked in rooms. I see those changes within this structure, and I'm grateful to see it there, but is it enough in a system that's not regulated, that's unlicensed, that really isn't there to serve the needs of the kids but yet making kids cash cows?

We see for-profit homes reaching out to Indigenous communities because they get more money for Indigenous kids with higher needs. That's just wrong. That is not the system that I would raise my own daughter in my home. These kids should have that ability to feel safe in loving families.

There are so many things that we need to work on to ensure that kids do have homes. I don't know how to legislate love. I don't think anybody's ever figured it out. But I think making an effort to create a community who wants to take in kids in their homes—they have to be paid accordingly, right? Even kinship, making sure that families have money to buy a crib for that kid who isn't expected to come into their home, but now their family is desperate—those are some of the kinds of things that I would like to see in this system for sure.

The shift from the duty to report to the duty to support, I think is an important measure that I clearly heard from the OACAS—

The Chair (Mr. Steve Clark): You have one minute left in this round.

Miss Monique Taylor: All right. I didn't really ask him any questions. It was just really a nice opportunity to be telling him everything that I think and have heard.

How is it that you're going to ask these agencies to do more? Are you planning on providing extra funding to the agencies, to be able to keep up with their mandate and to keep kids safe in their homes?

Hon. Michael Parsa: Thanks, Chair. I don't know how much time I have.

The Chair (Mr. Steve Clark): You have 25 seconds.

Hon. Michael Parsa: I've got quite a real list here to cover.

Miss Monique Taylor: Sorry.

Hon. Michael Parsa: No, no. It's good. I think we have other opportunities. There were some good points, so I need to cover a few of them.

First of all, on the measures that are in this bill, MPP Taylor: I said this in my remarks and it's important; I'll keep repeating it. The child welfare redesign was an initiative—and I want to thank my colleagues Minister Jill Dunlop and Minister Todd Smith, who were here, who initiated—

The Chair (Mr. Steve Clark): Thanks, Minister. That's the end of the first round. We'll have to pick up with that thought.

Miss Monique Taylor: I can't believe how fast that went.

The Chair (Mr. Steve Clark): It was fast.

As there is a division being called in the House, pursuant to standing order 130, I must suspend the committee meeting at this time to give members the opportunity to make their way to the chamber to vote. I'll ask that members return promptly to the committee meeting, and we'll resume shortly after the vote.

The committee will be in recess.

The committee recessed from 1530 to 1544.

The Chair (Mr. Steve Clark): We'll reconvene the meeting of the Standing Committee on Social Policy.

We'll now go to the independent member. MPP Clancy, you have five minutes for your first round of questions, so an extra 30 seconds.

Ms. Aislinn Clancy: I want to say thank you. The feedback we had—as much as I wish I could unhear the accounts that we heard of young people's experiences in care, there was resounding support, especially for the protection of their information, access to the Ombudsman and the ability to shut homes down that they said they had bad experiences in, where they didn't really feel like they had a voice in addressing the concerns.

I want to just echo what those folks have shared and say that there wasn't anything—I did reach out to my local CAS and they agree with the policies. They do share MPP Taylor's concerns. They said they're at a 10-year low in funding, and I know as a social worker, if we add on more expectations, it reduces the depth of a visit. So as we have social workers doing more visits, how do we ensure that the funding's there that they can still have a good quality visit?

I just wanted to see if you could answer—maybe you can carry on where we left off and address some of the funding concerns I'm sure you've heard from this sector.

Hon. Michael Parsa: Thanks very much. Look, it's important. For us, when we want to make sure—they're all partners, like you said. You heard me in the Legislature today; I'm grateful for the work that everyone is doing in our communities. We're talking about protecting children and youth—our assets, our future. This is something that every single one of us needs to do. Certainly as the minister responsible, no doubt it starts with me, but it's a role and responsibility—which is why, MPP Clancy, if you look at the investment that we made; the Ready, Set, Go Program that we talk about, more than \$170 million over three years to provide children and youth with the supports they need—I've spoken to societies. It's incredibly important to the children and youth who now have an opportunity to be able to succeed and thrive beyond when they leave care.

That funding support of \$170 million over three years provides early support as well. It isn't just support for post-secondary or support for the skilled trades, it provides financial support to the individuals who are leaving care. But it goes before that: As early as 13, they are trained and supported with life skills; at 15, they go on to the next step to provide more supports.

When we say that children and youth need to succeed and thrive, that needs to be backed by supports, which is why this investment of \$170 million over three years to societies to be able to provide children and youth is so important. Like I said, it starts providing support as early as 13, right up to their 23rd birthday.

Ms. Aislinn Clancy: Thank you so much. The feedback and the support for that is definitely needed, and definitely people are grateful for that.

One of the concerns that the society shared and that I've witnessed in social services is the lack of access to mental health care for complex needs. We've kind of moved all the money to an eight- to 15-session funding model. And the kids—we know that the kids in care have complex experiences, whether that's trauma, attachment, complex mental health. So there's kind of a two-tier way in which this impacts—not only did we hear from kids that few of them got access to this mental health care, but I know that it's being eroded. So the mental health care doesn't exist in the not-for-profit sector. It's been taken away, this tier 3, but also, that families are putting their kids—

The Chair (Mr. Steve Clark): One minute remaining.

Ms. Aislinn Clancy: —in care because they're trying to access developmental supports and mental health care. So 20% to 30% of the referrals that my society saw were kids who actually should have been diverted to this kind of care. Can you speak to that gap?

Hon. Michael Parsa: Yes, a couple of things—a very important question. A lot of important work and support that Minister Tibollo is providing as Associate Minister of Mental Health and Addictions, that is part of our Roadmap to Wellness—it's a \$3.8-billion investment. MPP Clancy, that investment for children and youth was increased by

25% in the ministry. It's prioritized to make sure that youth and children are receiving the support.

As far as support in our ministry, we have a particular program called the Complex Special Needs fund, and that's a \$100-million program that we provide through our ministry, as well. So it's important. We've got to make sure that those supports, again, are provided on the ground. And through Minister Tibollo's initiative and the—

The Chair (Mr. Steve Clark): Thank you, Minister.

We're going to move now to the government's first round of questions. They have seven and half minutes. I'll call on MPP Pierre.

Ms. Natalie Pierre: Thank you, Minister, for your remarks earlier this afternoon.

So we know every child deserves safety, stability and access to resources to help them succeed and to thrive. So that's why our government is introducing the Supporting Children's Futures Act proposing new changes that will enhance enforcement tools.

We also heard from a number of people who came to present, some folks with lived experience, other people who have worked in the child care and support sector.

We also heard from several of the presenters that talked about the Ready, Set, Go Program. So I was happy to hear you mention that. We're very supportive of that initiative and that program.

So in second reading debate, it was raised that the Child, Youth and Family Services Act contains language that prevents young people and adults who have a history of child protection involvement from identifying themselves and not being able to speak or write about their childhood experience growing up in care. We heard from several of the presenters, some who were crown wards, who, by coming today and presenting, were actually, I guess, in violation of the current act. How that has impacted them personally, how that has impacted them professionally is something that we've heard consistently from former youth in care—having heard outside of just what was presented in this committee. So I'm hoping you can maybe tell us a bit more why it's so important for us to remove this restriction.

Hon. Michael Parsa: That's a very good question. I'll get to Ready, Set, Go afterwards, if you don't mind, just because I've already touched on it.

It's a fundamental right of an individual. You think about those that were in care, and yes, the deputations that they provided when they came in front of the committee—I've spoken with them, I've spoken with individuals. I know individuals, at least an individual very close to me, who is unable, right now, to speak about her experiences, and this is an individual who has a lot to say, a very capable individual who contributes so much to the well-being of current and future generations because of her experience.

Right now, she's prevented, or others who are in care are prevented, by doing so, and we want to make sure that that right is given to them. That's why you heard it in my remarks when I said, as a parent, you don't record information about your son and daughter and then use it against them later on when they're looking to succeed in their profession, and that shouldn't be done to kids in care, to

those that have left care. It's just as simple as that. It's the right thing to do.

1550

I understand the intent that was put in, that it was to protect the children that were in care. But we want to make sure that we correct that, so that that right is given to the individual. If he or she wishes to talk about his or her experience while in care, that person should have the right to do so, full stop. That is the right of every individual. You and I have that. You and I can sit down and talk about our experience when we were kids, when we were in school, when we were part of teams, and nothing prevents us from doing it. What we have done is not counted against us. It's just the right thing to do. I thank those members and those individuals who have come forward to share that with us. That's why it's included in this bill.

As far as the Ready, Set, Go Program: Thanks for mentioning that. I'll just say this: It's a very, very important initiative and one that supports youth, as I said, as early as 13 with the life skills, increasing the supports when they turn 15 and providing support, including financial support, up until their 23rd birthday for post-secondary school or if they want to pursue the skilled trades, for example, or other professions.

Ms. Natalie Pierre: This bill also contains a new suite of tools for oversight and enforcement, including the introduction of administrative monetary policies in response to non-compliance that are identified by inspectors. Will these be sufficient to enforce compliance from service providers who refuse to provide quality care?

Hon. Michael Parsa: As you know, placements are decisions made by children's aid societies, but we require these placements to be safe for children and youth who are in care. We want to protect children and youth. That is the duty of every single person—those who are in the sector, all of us. We want to provide tools for our inspectors, which is why we increased the amount of inspections across the province, which is why we hired more inspectors. But now, we want to provide them with the tools, as well—the tools they need to hold bad operators to account. It's important.

As I said in my speech, the vast majority of those who are operating in good faith and are in compliance with the law have nothing to worry about. It's for the bad actors. If you are not complying and you're contravening the law, we are going to hold you to account. There is nothing more important than protecting the children and youth, and we will make sure that happens—including the AMPs, the administrative monetary penalties, that we have now proposed in this legislation, up to \$100,000. It's just another tool in the tool box for our inspectors to hold those bad actors accountable.

Ms. Natalie Pierre: Chair, I'll share my time with MPP Smith.

The Chair (Mr. Steve Clark): MPP Smith.

Ms. Laura Smith: Through you, Chair: Thank you, Minister, for coming today and presenting fair information. I'm sorry if I sound like a broken record: I used to work under the child protection act, so this hits a real string for me when I talk about children, especially children in care. This is a very strong issue. I know that the families

that I visited personally were very good people, but what is the driving force behind this bill?

The Chair (Mr. Steve Clark): One minute remaining.

Hon. Michael Parsa: Again, just before we left to vote, I mentioned to you and I thanked Minister Smith and Minister Dunlop. There is not going to be a day that we're not going to be looking at ways to protect every child and youth. That means looking at every possible opportunity, which is why in my remarks, MPP Smith, I mentioned to you that this bill isn't the first or the last. We're going to continuously look at ways to improve the system. We're going to continuously look at ways to hold bad actors to account. We're going to continuously look at ways to make sure that the kids who are in care have the opportunity to succeed and thrive.

The child welfare redesign is an initiative that was undertaken by previous ministers that I am now honoured to be a part of with the help of everyone. There are 124 of us who come into work to make the lives of Ontarians better. That's the responsibility of every one of us, including me—

The Chair (Mr. Steve Clark): Thank you, Minister.

Now we'll move to the official opposition for your second round. MPP Gélinas.

Mme France Gélinas: Thank you, Minister. I would start by making sure that once a child exits children's aid, the file is not available. We have something like this in the Young Offenders Act: that is, if you commit an offence before you're 18, after 18, it is sealed and only the court can reopen it. Would you be open to copying the language that we have in the Young Offenders Act that makes it really clear that you cannot reopen their file unless the court gives you permission to?

Hon. Michael Parsa: I'll just say this, MPP Gélinas, before I ask ADM Gordon to just talk about some of the regulations that we're going put in: Right now, with the default being where they do have access to information, we want that default to be reversed so that information is available only to the individual or through court orders, for example, and that's something that we're going to be working out as we go through the regulations. But it's paramount and it's very important—you've heard some of the deputations of people of that have come in—to make sure that their privacy and their information is protected.

ADM Gordon, can we just go over the process with which will be developing and initiating this, please?

Mr. Rupert Gordon: Yes. My name is Rupert Gordon. I'm assistant deputy minister of strategic policy in the Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services.

The minister notes that the default rule, as proposed in the amendments, will go from records open to closed. It's important to note that the legislation, in part IX, includes a lot of limitations on access to information already, but this will go further and create a default closed setting.

It's also important to remember that this legislation covers not only child welfare services but licensing matters. So one of the provisions that's allowed in the current amendments for access to information is to support the oversight of a licensee's compliance history.

There's access to records for individuals who want access to their own information. It's important to note that this piece of legislation also has a role for the Information and Privacy Commissioner in overseeing the privacy of individuals' information, so there is a provision that relates to providing access for that purpose. And this—

M^{me} France Gélinas: Okay—because my time is limited—this is something that we heard. They want it as robust as the Young Offenders Act. The Young Offenders Act: It's sealed. Nobody sees it unless the court gives you the okay to see it. It has been requested. I'm putting it out there to see if you're open to it.

Other things being requested are—we talked a lot about how we used to have the child advocate and we now have the Ombudsman. The Ombudsman takes the complaints and investigates them. The child advocate had the right to start their own investigations. He did not have to wait for a complaint.

Would you be open to having the person who is the Ombudsman for children to be allowed to do their own investigations so that—a two-year-old is never going to complain. They just can't. But they still need our protection. They had this under the child advocate, who could start their own investigations, but we lost this with the Ombudsman. Would you be open to that?

Hon. Michael Parsa: MPP Gélinas, to clarify, the Ombudsman's office currently has the ability to proactively investigate. That is the Ombudsman's role, which is what we're looking at, also making sure that that role and responsibility which was transferred onto the Ombudsman's office is made aware so that children and youth that are in care are aware this office exists.

Now that, currently, is in the Ombudsman Act. We are now proposing through this bill to include it in the CYFSA, which is the act that governs, as you know, the sector.

M^{me} France Gélinas: I will hold you to this, that the Ombudsman is allowed to do investigations without complaints.

My colleague wants to ask questions.

The Chair (Mr. Steve Clark): MPP Taylor.

Miss Monique Taylor: Minister, before the break, we talked about funding levels. We have historic deficits never seen before in this province. You're going to be asking them to do more, as well as hiring inspectors. Will you be providing more funding to the agencies?

Hon. Michael Parsa: It's an important question. When you look out of the funding of CASs and the societies that are doing great work—and you heard me in the Legislature when I thanked them for the work that they're doing—it's important to note that the \$170 million that we're providing to societies over three years through the Ready, Set, Go Program is funding for the kids that are in care, to protect the children and youth that are in care.

1600

If you look at the funding across the last few years, MPP Taylor, going back to 2011, 2012 up until now—if you look at the funding, even though the number of cases of children in care have reduced, the funding has remained. So we have not—

Miss Monique Taylor: But they have yet to receive the capital funding that's necessary—

Hon. Michael Parsa: Yes, but if you look at the number of cases, as I mentioned, that have reduced over the years, with the societies, funding has not been reduced. If you look at the—go ahead.

Miss Monique Taylor: It costs more money to keep them at home, which is where they're struggling. They've run deficits that they've never, ever done before, right?

Hon. Michael Parsa: MPP Taylor, as I mentioned to you, I'm frequently, as our ministry is, in touch with the societies. They're providing great service and support to children and youth, and those who have faced pressures, we've been there to support them. There are ones that have faced some pressures. As you know, and I'm sure that you've spoken to them, we've been there to support them, and we'll continue to be there to support them. With partners on the ground—

Miss Monique Taylor: Bailing them out after the fact, though, isn't helpful.

The Chair (Mr. Steve Clark): There's one minute left.

Hon. Michael Parsa: Proactive funding is available to societies. There is a budget that's allocated and there are multiple factors—

Miss Monique Taylor: Last thing—sorry.

Hon. Michael Parsa: Yes.

Miss Monique Taylor: The Ombudsman's report on the case of Mia, the 16-year-old that we've talked about previously, had 20 recommendations to the York CAS. Part of their problem was that they didn't have the money to put Mia in a group home. So, once again, we're coming back to a funding issue. So how is it that you're going to make sure that no kids like Mia are left behind?

Hon. Michael Parsa: Very simple, MPP Taylor: As I mentioned to you, even though, as a ministry, we don't make decisions on placements—those are made by CASs and societies; this is the law—we expect them to make sure that the children and youth that are placed in care are done so in places that are safe and secure for children and youth. That isn't a suggestion; it's enshrined in the law.

Miss Monique Taylor: They're using lines of credit.

Hon. Michael Parsa: That decision needs to be made and—

The Chair (Mr. Steve Clark): Thanks, Minister. That concludes this round of questioning. I want to remind members to direct their comments through the Chair.

MPP Clancy, your second round of five minutes begins now.

Ms. Aislinn Clancy: This was preplanned, but I did have a concern about the amount of placements. I know that there's a lot of teens that need support through the children's aid societies—a lot of those end up in shelter systems. We have a shelter in my community that's too full, underfunded—they've cut back on day programs.

I know, aside from just the youth shelter portion, I'd love to hear your insights about the crises of overburdening the system there, but also the lack of placements. I've heard this for years from the CAS, at least in my community, that they are struggling to find enough placements. Can you

speaking about efforts we could make to expand the number of placements we have available?

Hon. Michael Parsa: Look, as I mentioned to you, we work with societies. We work with the children's aid societies as partners, and this is why, as I mentioned to you, the funding is one that looks at geography, for example, the socio-economics. So there are multiple factors.

This is what partnership entails—those conversations to see what else can be done to be able to protect children and youth towards the services that are being provided on the ground. Those conversations will continue to happen. They have happened and they will continue to happen. We want to make sure that children and youth that are in care are supported.

As I mentioned earlier, when MPP Taylor was asking a question, even though the number of cases have reduced, our funding to societies has remained the same. We haven't reduced—in fact, we increased funding, as I mentioned to you. The \$170 million is going directly to support children and youth. It's there. That's funding to be able to provide a better future for the children and youth, to have those skills that they need, to be able to pursue post-secondary education, to be able to pursue trades, to be able to get employment. Those supports are provided and they're backed by real investments by the government of \$170 million. That's to societies, and that's not going to change.

As I mentioned to you, that work is a partnership. It's a collaborative effort between us and all the partners who are working on the ground in the communities.

Ms. Aislinn Clancy: Because that's what I heard when I talked to them—that they're at a 10-year low. I do appreciate this new funding. I know there was a gap for kids leaving care and the kind of outcomes and harms and troubling stats around suicide and trafficking about kids leaving care, but what I heard from our CAS was that it was a 10-year low in funding. Maybe that's related to inflation. Maybe that doesn't account for this bucket. Maybe that's an ongoing conversation we need to have, right—

Hon. Michael Parsa: MPP Clancy, sorry to interrupt, I just want to elaborate on one point. It's not just the youth. The support through the program that I'm talking about, again, isn't just about youth leaving care, although that's a very important part of it, but it also provides the supports to the youth that are in care as well, as early as 13, 15. Those are kids that are in care.

At 13, they're learning life lessons. At 15, the life lessons moved on to the next steps to learn more, to be able to give them that opportunity to be able to succeed and thrive. And as I mentioned, when it comes to funding, even though the number of cases has decreased in time to the tune of maybe more than 30%, the funding has not been reduced.

Ms. Aislinn Clancy: I do worry that some people might be getting turned away because there is a lack of capacity. So I guess we'll keep digging, I'll say. I'll leave it at that because I know that that's been the reality. Even as a social worker, I have witnesses that my colleagues—

The Chair (Mr. Steve Clark): One minute remaining.

Ms. Aislinn Clancy: —weren't getting the same response we would have a couple of years back where we could refer

a family as experts, confident in that the referral is appropriate, and then not getting a connection made there because they're reducing eligibility criteria and I think trying to move away from the mental health parts.

Could you just share a little bit more about the Indigenous lens, because I know those were comments that I read, that this bill sometimes doesn't translate into a lot of remote communities? Could you just share that?

Hon. Michael Parsa: Yes. I will tell you, right after I got elected, MPP Clancy—it was within weeks; I think it was two or three weeks—I had the honour of participating with one of the Kitchenuhmaykoosib Inninuwug, which was the second—it's a First Nations community that was providing and was now exercising jurisdictional—

The Chair (Mr. Steve Clark): Minister, I'm sorry. We've finished this round of questions for the independent member.

We'll now move to the final seven and a half minutes for the government: MPP Smith.

Ms. Laura Smith: Thanks, Minister. I apologize, because I don't think I allowed you to truly finish on the point you were talking about with respect to the driving force. I wanted to know if there's anything you wanted to add to that.

Hon. Michael Parsa: Yes. Just on that point, you probably have heard it from some of the presenters that have been here, the passion—that driving force, I think, is what gets me as a minister to make sure that we do everything we can for the children and youth that are in care, to make sure that they have every opportunity to succeed and to be contributing members in their communities, to be given every opportunity and to make sure that when they are in care, that they receive the best care, making sure that those bad operators are held accountable.

That's why we have initiatives proposed here in this bill. There are initiatives that will come in through regulations, as you may know. For example, we're looking at self-declarations. In my speech, I mentioned police record checks. That's an important step from between the time period of a set time, a police record check to the next, for the individual to come and declare that a wrong was committed.

Every single step—we will leave no stone unturned to make sure that every single child and youth in the province, regardless of their circumstance, is cared for and protected. It's important. It's an imperative. So that's the driving force, and as I've mentioned to you and I'll say it again, this isn't the first and it's not going to be the last initiative that we're going to put forward to carry that work forward.

Ms. Laura Smith: When I used to walk into these homes, I think we've said, most of these families—and that's what they were, sincerely—were good, upstanding individuals. But out-of-home care is such an important area of my previous life. We want to make sure that these children, these youth—they're so vulnerable, and they've gone through so much at this time. We want to make their lives better.

You've talked about some of the redesign efforts. I'm wondering is there anything else that you want to talk about specifically that you think would enhance the redesign of the system?

Hon. Michael Parsa: The most important thing is the voice of those that have gone through the system or are in the system. Through the consultations that we had—and there were over 30 consultations that we had—and through the Ontario Regulatory Registry, when we posted, we had more responses back to us and feedback that we received. That's important because you want to make sure that those with the experience have input. That's really important to us.

1610

I touched on the new areas that we're looking at for the AMPs, of increasing up to \$100,000 for areas where they're not in compliance. This isn't available as a tool to our inspectors now. Making sure that CASs are talking to the director if there is an issue on the ground—that collaboration between service providers, to talk to one another.

You heard in my introductory remarks when I talked about the fact that a particular college had to wait four years before they were allowed to share information about something serious—

Ms. Laura Smith: Sorry to interrupt—that was previously a college that wasn't a part of this circle.

Hon. Michael Parsa: They weren't captured in the act, which is why we want to make sure that we leave no stone unturned. We want to make sure that we capture it.

And you've heard me: In this ministry, I keep talking about partnership and collaboration. What does that entail? Us communicating with one another, us sharing information with one another. When I say that, I mean service providers, those that are providing care, the inspectors—everybody involved. Because that's truly the only way that we're going to make sure there's no gaps: making sure that the kids that are in care are receiving the best support possible. That's why we wanted to make sure that that is included in this bill.

Ms. Laura Smith: And more eyes on that child as well.

Hon. Michael Parsa: It is. It's more oversight, 100%. There's more oversight through more inspections, as I mentioned to you, and more tools at their disposal as well. All of that collectively contributes to a better system with more oversight, more accountability, so that children and youth that are in care are receiving the best possible service.

Ms. Laura Smith: Thank you, Minister. I'm going to pass the baton over to MPP Kusendova-Bashta.

The Chair (Mr. Steve Clark): MPP Kusendova-Bashta.

Ms. Natalia Kusendova-Bashta: Thank you, Minister, for your presentation. I just do want to put it on the record that the Ombudsman indeed has a right and all the tools disposable to put forward an investigation, as he has done. He has published a report, *Lessons for the Long Term*, about long-term care. If you google it, it's there—September 2023. I just want to make sure the opposition is aware that the Ombudsman indeed has that right and those tools available to them.

We've heard a lot about the Office of the Ombudsman, Minister. One of the things that I found quite striking is that many of the people who were themselves in the system told us that they actually never knew about the Office of the Ombudsman, or that maybe they received a pamphlet

at one point as a child but their rights were not explained to them. So I think we need to do better, and we are doing better through this act.

Can you tell us: Why is it important is it important that this is explicitly included in the CYFSA?

Hon. Michael Parsa: Yes, it's a very good question. MPP Kusendova-Bashta, I'll tell you this: Right now, that oversight exists—we're including it in the CYFSA, but right now, it exists in the Ombudsman Act. But to your point, not everyone is aware of it. We want to make sure, since it's the Ombudsman who has the authority to be able to provide children and youth with the investigations that they may require—

The Chair (Mr. Steve Clark): One minute remaining.

Hon. Michael Parsa: —we want to make sure that the children and youth are aware of it. We want to make sure that information is made available to them. We want to make sure children and youth have the opportunity to say, "You have this right to be able to talk to the Ombudsman, to be able to share your concerns privately with the Ombudsman." That's the intent behind making sure—as I mentioned, it is right now. That does exist under the Ombudsman Act. We are capturing it under the CYFSA to make sure that, because the CYFSA is an act that governs the sector, it's captured under the CYFSA as well.

Ms. Natalia Kusendova-Bashta: Thank you.

The Chair (Mr. Steve Clark): Thank you.

Minister Parsa, ADM Gordon, thank you for your presentation. This concludes the public hearing portion of Bill 188.

I want to remind people that the deadline for written submissions—

Interjection.

The Chair (Mr. Steve Clark): You have a point of order?

M^{me} France Gélinas: No, just a question.

The Chair (Mr. Steve Clark): Okay.

M^{me} France Gélinas: I would like to ask research to clarify for us how much investigating power the Ombudsman has. My experience has been that if you make a complaint to the Ombudsman, they have extensive power to look and make an investigation into a complaint, but they do not have the power—I'm not sure I'm using the right words—to initiate an investigation without a complaint. I would just like to have this clarified by research for all of us.

The Chair (Mr. Steve Clark): And then provide it back to the committee?

M^{me} France Gélinas: And provide it back to the committee.

The Chair (Mr. Steve Clark): Do we have consensus? Okay.

So written submissions: 6 p.m. this evening; the deadline for filing amendments, to members of the committee, is 5 p.m., Friday, May 17.

The committee will stand adjourned until 9 a.m. on Monday, May 27, when we'll begin clause-by-clause consideration for Bill 188.

We're adjourned.

The committee adjourned at 1618.

STANDING COMMITTEE ON SOCIAL POLICY

Chair / Président

Mr. Steve Clark (Leeds–Grenville–Thousand Islands and Rideau Lakes / Leeds–Grenville–Thousand Islands et Rideau Lakes PC)

Vice-Chair / Vice-Présidente

M^{me} France Gélinas (Nickel Belt ND)

MPP Jill Andrew (Toronto–St. Paul’s ND)

Ms. Aislinn Clancy (Kitchener Centre / Kitchener-Centre G)

Mr. Steve Clark (Leeds–Grenville–Thousand Islands and Rideau Lakes / Leeds–Grenville–Thousand Islands et Rideau Lakes PC)

M^{me} France Gélinas (Nickel Belt ND)

Mr. Hardeep Singh Grewal (Brampton East / Brampton-Est PC)

Ms. Natalia Kusendova-Bashta (Mississauga Centre / Mississauga-Centre PC)

Mr. Billy Pang (Markham–Unionville PC)

Ms. Natalie Pierre (Burlington PC)

Mr. Nolan Quinn (Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry PC)

Ms. Laura Smith (Thornhill PC)

Substitutions / Membres remplaçants

Mr. Logan Kanapathi (Markham–Thornhill PC)

Mr. David Smith (Scarborough Centre / Scarborough-Centre PC)

Miss Monique Taylor (Hamilton Mountain / Hamilton-Mountain ND)

Mrs. Daisy Wai (Richmond Hill PC)

Clerk / Greffière

Ms. Lesley Flores

Staff / Personnel

Ms. Sandra Lopes, research officer,
Research Services