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Standing Committee on Social Policy

Estimates

Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services

Comité permanent de la politique sociale

Budget des dépenses

Ministère des Services à l'enfance et des Services
sociaux et communautaires

1st Session
43rd Parliament

Monday 16 September 2024

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43^e législature

Lundi 16 septembre 2024

Chair: Steve Clark
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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

STANDING COMMITTEE ON SOCIAL POLICY

COMITÉ PERMANENT DE LA POLITIQUE SOCIALE

Monday 16 September 2024

Lundi 16 septembre 2024

The committee met at 1300 in committee room 2.

ESTIMATES

MINISTRY OF CHILDREN, COMMUNITY AND SOCIAL SERVICES

The Chair (Mr. Steve Clark): Good afternoon, everyone. The Standing Committee on Social Policy will now come to order. We're meeting to consider the 2024-25 estimates of the Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services for a total of three hours. We're joined today by staff for Hansard, broadcast and recording, and legislative research. From the ministry, I'm pleased to be able to welcome the Honourable Michael Parsa, Associate Minister Charmaine Williams, Deputy Minister Denise Cole and lots of ministry staff, both here in person and also via Zoom.

I want to remind you that the ministry is required to monitor the proceedings for questions or issues that the ministry undertakes to address. I trust that the deputy minister has arranged to have the hearings closely monitored with respect to questions that are raised. If you wish, we can also verify the questions and issues that are being tracked by the research officer at the end of the appearance.

Do any members of the committee have any questions before we start? Seeing none, I'm now required to call vote 701, which sets the review process in motion.

We will begin with a statement of not more than 20 minutes from you, Minister. I will prompt you with "one minute remaining" to give you a time check.

Minister, welcome. You may begin.

Hon. Michael Parsa: Thank you very much, Chair. I really appreciate it.

Good afternoon, colleagues. I'm pleased to be here with you today to discuss the 2024-25 estimates for the Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services and how these investments support our ongoing efforts to modernize and improve services for vulnerable Ontarians.

I'd like to start off by recognizing my colleague the Honourable Charmaine Williams, Ontario's Associate Minister of Women's Social and Economic Opportunity, who's here with me today. Associate Minister Williams has been focused over the last year on increasing women's social and economic opportunities, so that all women can thrive and contribute to their families, their communities and, of course, our province.

I'd like to take this opportunity to also thank all of the staff across the ministry for their hard work and professionalism, and to extend gratitude and appreciation to the ministry's partners and stakeholders right across our province.

Chair, the 2024-25 printed estimates include approximately \$19.9 billion of spending forecasted for the Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services this year. This represents an increase of more than \$630 million compared to last year, as we continue to make investments and improve services for people in our province.

Let me outline how our government is investing these new funds, keeping in mind that these are precious taxpayers' dollars. Many Ontario families are facing difficulties with the rising cost of living, and these new expenditures will help build better outcomes for people across our province.

It starts with \$120 million for the Ontario Autism Program, bringing the total funding allocated for that program to more than \$720 million this year. This funding will support the continued enrolment of more children and youth in core clinical services and will help provide access to other services such as applied behaviour analysis, speech-language pathology, occupational therapy and mental health services, including counselling and psychotherapy.

We're also investing an additional \$310 million over three years to help address increasing operational costs for community organizations that support vulnerable people right across our province.

We're investing an additional \$230 million into financial and employment supports for vulnerable Ontarians. And to meet increasing demand for developmental services support, we're investing an additional \$137 million this year in that area.

We're also in the second year of an exciting \$170-million program called the Ready, Set, Go program, which helps connect youth in the child welfare system with additional services and supports they need to prepare them to succeed after leaving care.

Finally, through our four-year action plan to end gender-based violence, Ontario-STANDS, we continue to work to end gender-based violence and support survivors and victims of violence. The action plan builds on Ontario's existing investment of \$1.4 billion to end gender-based violence and support victims, and it's done

by working in partnership with the federal government, with a contribution of a \$162-million investment from the National Action Plan to End Gender-Based Violence during the same time period.

Chair, our government is very proud of these new investments, and I will have more to say about them throughout my remarks. But at a high level, our investments in 2024-25 are being made across four key categories. These include:

- approximately \$10.5 billion for financial and employment services, through Ontario Works and Ontario Disability Support Program and associated supports like the Ontario drug benefit;

- about \$5.5 billion for supports to individuals and families, which includes supports for adults with developmental disabilities; children and youth with special needs, including autism; women and children experiencing violence; Ontario's deaf-blind community; and to help youth who are in our communities facing systemic barriers;

- around \$2.2 billion to support children and youth at risk, including child protection services delivered by children's aid societies, youth justice services, as well as community and prevention support;

- as well as close to \$1.3 billion through the Ontario Child Benefit, to provide direct financial support for low-to-moderate-income families.

Chair, as important as these numbers are, how we provide support to vulnerable people across our province to live a full and successful life is just as important, which is why I'd like to take some time to speak about the everyday work that our ministry is doing with nearly \$20 billion in funding for the 2024-25 fiscal year.

The Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services supports Ontarians as they transition through the various stages of life. We're there to help individuals and families in financial need by providing monthly income support and benefits as well as access to employment support.

The Ontario Works program supports low-income people in their temporary financial need while they work with Employment Ontario to find meaningful employment.

The Ontario Disability Support Program assists low-income individuals who have a disability and refers people seeking jobs to Employment Ontario.

We're there for young people who may need to transition from receiving children's special-needs services at the age of 18 to receiving adult developmental services, including Passport funding and the Ontario Disability Support Program.

We're also there for survivors of gender-based violence who may also be receiving child support enforced by the Family Responsibility Office.

We're there to help survivors of human trafficking rebuild their lives with dignity and compassion.

And we're there for individuals who involve with the youth justice system and the child welfare system and may need support in finding a job, pursuing training or furthering their education.

The Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services provides programs and services that support Ontarians at key moments in their lives. Chair, these are all vital services that bind communities together, strengthen individuals and make our province a compassionate and caring place in which to live.

Just as important as the services we offer is the way in which they are delivered. The Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services is streamlining administration, updating and standardizing transfer payment processes, aligning and integrating service contracts, embracing technology and transforming programs to better serve clients.

Some examples of our government's work in this area include launching a digital, universal newborn hearing screening form in March 2024 so that Infant Hearing Program screeners can enter assessment information electronically. At the same time, we launched a new data connection with Newborn Screening Ontario. These digital projects are reducing manual data entry and enabling staff to provide faster access to services and interventions and to help meet the goal of early intervention.

We've also created a single online application for both Ontario Works and the Ontario Disability Support Program, in addition to phone and in-person channels.

By moving from paper-based to digital processes, we're making it easier and faster for people to apply for social assistance. This saves applicants an average of 74 minutes compared to the previous process.

We've also increased the use of the digital MyBenefits service by 37% since December 2022, with more than 350,000 social assistance clients registered to use the service as of December 2023.

The ministry also introduced an online option for families applying to the Special Services at Home program and the Assistance for Children with Severe Disabilities Program in April 2022. Since the launch of this online option, families have submitted more than 25,000 applications electronically for the two programs, significantly reducing the number of paper applications.

The ministry is also working with partners to strengthen and coordinate community and developmental services, child welfare, special-needs services, early intervention services and the Family Responsibility Office. In addition, the ministry supports Indigenous-led approaches to improving Indigenous healing, health and well-being through holistic and culturally responsive supports for First Nations, Inuit, Métis and urban Indigenous communities, families and individuals.

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Chair, to continue all of this important work, several areas of the ministry's operations will require additional expenditures in 2024-25. Our 2024-25 budget includes an increase of \$230 million for social assistance, \$137 million for developmental services—a \$109-million increase for children and youth services, \$14.1 million for infrastructure, and \$14.2 million for children protection services. I want to explore each of these expenditure increases in

more detail here today, starting with the increase of \$230.4 million for social assistance.

Our government is increasing social assistance rates for people with disabilities to help ensure they get the support they need. We're supporting people with disabilities who are able to work, by increasing the earnings exemption by 400%. We're also delivering on the government's commitment to annually increase disability income support rates. And I'm pleased to confirm that we increased ODSP payments by 4.5% this year, in line with inflation, to help people with their expenses. This boost took effect two months ago with the July payment. Additionally, to help families with increased costs of caring for a child with severe disability, we also increased the maximum monthly amount for the assistance for children with severe disability, ACSD, by 4.5%. This means that the maximum monthly amount for ACSD has been increased to \$646 per month, starting with the recent July instalment. The latest rate increase brings Ontario's total increase in social assistance disability benefits to nearly 17% since the last election. This is just one of the ways our government is working to make life more affordable and improve outcomes for people with disabilities across our province.

At the same time, we're also working to connect people on social assistance with the best supports through partnership and connections to Employment Ontario. This integrated approach to employment training and supports enables social assistance recipients to receive the same opportunities and assistance as everyone else, which maximizes their chance of finding and keeping a well-paying job.

Let me now turn to our plan of expenditures in protecting Ontario's most vulnerable individuals.

In 2024-25, we're investing approximately \$3.5 billion in the developmental services sector. This figure includes an additional \$114 million to continue supporting people currently receiving services and high-risk individuals who are starting to receive supports. People with developmental disabilities—and their families—expect and deserve to fully participate in their communities and to make choices and decisions about their own lives, such as pursuing school or perhaps finding a job. Our long-term plan for developmental services reform, Journey to Belonging: Choice and Inclusion, aims to improve services and supports for people with developmental disabilities. Our reform focuses on what people need and adapting our system to respond appropriately to address those needs, and not the other way around. The Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services is working in partnership with people with developmental disabilities, their families and caregivers, as well as service providers and other partners, to shape this reform. And we're deliberately taking a gradual approach with this reform to better support people being served throughout this period.

Chair, this year's estimates include additional expenditures for children and youth services, including a further \$120-million increase to the Ontario Autism Program, to support the enrolment of more children and youth into core clinical services as well as other streams. As part of a new

investment in pediatric care, there's \$45 million in new annual funding for children's rehabilitation services, which will mean speedier access to speech-language pathology, physiotherapy and occupational therapy services.

Our estimates for 2024-25 also include an increase of almost \$14 million primarily to continue supporting the planning and construction of children's treatment centres. We're modernizing these facilities to increase access and improve critical programs and services. These investments will help better support children with special needs. Among these projects are the groundbreaking of a new facility in Chatham-Kent and the upcoming grand opening of the new Grandview Kids facility. These are all exciting projects which will lead to improved care and outcomes for Ontarians.

And now, Chair, let us look at the planned \$14-million increase for child protection services in 2024-25. Our vision is for a province where all children and youth and families, including those receiving child welfare services, have a safe, loving and stable home, regardless of their circumstance. Although the government does not direct children's aid societies on placement decisions, we require that the placements are safe, are appropriate, and meet the child's needs. That's not an option, Chair; it's the law. And despite a 29% decline in children and youth in care over the past 10 years, funding to societies has increased by \$128.9 million, or 8.8%. This year, we increased funding for child protection services by another \$14 million, in addition to last year's increase of \$76.3 million. In total, the government invests nearly \$1.7 billion annually in 50 children's aid societies across our province, including 13 Indigenous societies, to provide support to children and youth in need of protection.

Since 2020, we've also been working to redesign Ontario's child welfare system, which is continuing with an audit of the children's aid societies, with a focus on enhancing child safety. Our goal is to ensure the safety of all children, and we welcome the Ombudsman's review and recommendations to support the ongoing work of the redesign. Through child welfare redesign, we've introduced new initiatives to improve the quality of care that children and youth experience. We've also made changes through the recently passed Supporting Children's Futures Act that will modernize and standardize important safeguards across the child and youth services sector.

We're also making significant changes to the child welfare system so that youth leaving care have the supports and skills they need to achieve their full potential. As I mentioned earlier, our government is investing \$170 million over three years in the Ready, Set, Go program, which was launched in April 2023 and is designed to connect youth in the child welfare system with the additional services and supports they need to prepare and succeed after leaving care. In 2023-24, this new program supported almost 4,500 youth as they prepared for adulthood. Redesigning the child welfare system won't happen overnight, but as with other transformational initiatives already under way, we'll continue our work to

make progress and achieve positive outcomes for children, youth and families right across the province.

I'm also pleased to report that the Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services is continuing to work with representatives of First Nations, Inuit and Métis peoples to support the implementation of Indigenous-led child and family services, including those governed under Indigenous law. To date, there are three First Nations in Ontario implementing their own child and family services, and they operate according to community-developed laws. This is an example of reconciliation in action and demonstrates our government's commitment to collaborate with Indigenous partners to support children, families and communities to thrive.

Chair, I'd now like to say a few words about the ministry's work to help end violence against women in all its forms. Our government has zero tolerance for violence against women and children, and we're taking action to prevent and address gender-based violence in all its forms.

Last December, Minister Williams, the minister for women's social and economic opportunity, and I launched our four-year action plan to prevent and address gender-based violence. Ontario-STANDS is backed by an investment of more than \$1.4 billion in gender-based violence services and prevention initiatives, and this plan is supported by an investment from Canada's National Action Plan to End Gender-Based Violence.

As part of the action plan, last month we launched a call for proposals that will support community-based programs aimed at preventing and addressing gender-based violence in our province. The funding for the call for proposals is \$100 million over three years, and I'm pleased to say that we're anticipating a strong response to this call. I'd encourage all organizations in all of your communities to apply for this funding by the deadline of October 11. These initiatives will focus on preventing violence through education and awareness; building faster, healthier communities; as well as providing economic opportunities for women and families. We know that preventing gender-based violence before it occurs is critical to breaking the cycle of abuse. This call for proposals will fund projects that address violence and tackle its root causes. By focusing on prevention, we're working towards safer and healthier communities for generations to come.

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The Chair (Mr. Steve Clark): Minister, you have about one minute remaining.

Hon. Michael Parsa: This \$10-million investment will help more people gain financial independence and support survivors to build their lives so that they and their families can live safely and securely.

And, Chair, funding will go to addressing staffing and operational challenges so that survivors can access the services they need when and where they need them.

We're also investing in Indigenous-led approaches that address gender-based violence through healing, health and wellness programming. As part of this, this is an investment of \$13.5 million over three years to enhance initiatives that support women, children, youth and others at

risk of violence or exploitation, such as the Indigenous and racialized communities and children and youth in the child welfare system.

Chair, the issue of women's personal safety is closely connected to their ability to be socially and economically empowered in today's Ontario, and this is tied to our government's priority of increasing women's participation in the workforce and supporting their economic security and prosperity.

The Chair (Mr. Steve Clark): Minister, thank you very much for your presentation.

We're now going to move into the question-and-answer portion. We're going to begin with the official opposition, which will have a 20-minute rotation, followed by the independent member with 10 minutes, and then, finally, with the government for 20 minutes, and we'll continue until the end of our time.

As always, I want to remind members to direct their comments through the Chair.

Again, to the deputy minister, assistant deputy ministers and ministry staff: Just ensure that when you're speaking on the mike, you introduce yourself and your title for the purposes of Hansard.

We'll begin with the official opposition. MPP Taylor, your 20-minute rotation begins now.

Miss Monique Taylor: Good afternoon, everyone. I'm going to get right into the core of things.

I know the minister—you laid out what you believe is a fruitful plan for the people of Ontario. Particularly under this minister, our most vulnerable people in Ontario count on your ministry to be able to provide the necessary services and funding that they need—and we all know, I'm sure, from talking to our constituents that that clearly is not the case. Just look across the province and see how many people are living in tents across this province mainly because they can't afford the rent. So when we see OW and ODSP at the rates that they are, we know that's clearly not going to cut it.

I want to thank the Financial Accountability Officer for the work that they've done.

Right off the bat, Minister, the FAO believes that your ministry will be short \$3.7 billion of what's needed to be able to fund these programs right through until 2026-27. Is that correct?

Hon. Michael Parsa: First of all, thanks for the question.

This is a very important ministry. You've heard me talk about it many times; so has the Premier, which is why, MPP Taylor, you have seen investments in the Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services increase year after year for us to continue serving the people of this province. These are very important programs and services that people rely on, and we've always been there to make sure that the programs we provide are backed by investment.

Miss Monique Taylor: Are the Financial Accountability Officer's outcomes, which are based off of your numbers, correct—he says \$3.7-billion shortfall.

Hon. Michael Parsa: Let me just tell you this: Often, members of the opposition in the chamber will ask questions about point-in-time questions that the FAO references.

I'll tell you this: When public accounts truly reflect the true representation of our programs and the funding that's backing them up—every year the public account shows. Again, as I mentioned to you, even in my remarks, we increased funding of this program by \$630 million—

Miss Monique Taylor: Increasing funding—

Hon. Michael Parsa: Increased funding throughout the programs, increased funding last year to the programs to the tune of more than a billion dollars—when these are important supports and programs that people rely on, we'll make sure that the programs that we're offering are funded. That's why you heard me again in my remarks, when I said we've increased the Ontario Autism Program by \$120 million—

Miss Monique Taylor: Well, we know where that is, and we'll get back to that, Chair. We'll get back to the autism program, in particular.

The FAO said \$3.7-billion shortfall—you are talking a lot about what you're doing, but you're not talking about the forecast that the FAO is responsible for. Do you disagree with the FAO?

Hon. Michael Parsa: Again, first of all, I appreciate the work that all independent officers do and all the work that they put in. But the true reflection of ministries will come out in public accounts. We've seen it. We've seen the opposition ask about particular spendings, different times of year, especially on quarters. But during public accounts, when the true numbers are out, they will show the investments. They will show that we will leave no stone unturned to make sure Ontarians have the protection and the supports they need, backed by investment—

Miss Monique Taylor: That doesn't answer the question, Minister.

Hon. Michael Parsa: It is, because if you look at, as I mentioned, the increase in the program, our ministry has seen an increase of more than \$630 million this year and saw an increase in funding last year, so—

Miss Monique Taylor: But projected forecast means cost of living; it means inflation—it means all of those things that programs need to be able to continue to do the work in the future.

So if the FAO is basing the numbers off of what your ministry has given them—did your ministry give them the proper information to base these forecasts off of?

Hon. Michael Parsa: I'm actually glad you bring up the cost of living, because it's an important point. If you noticed some of the programs like the Ontario Disability Support Program, which saw a nearly 17% increase as a result of us tying that to inflation—that's exactly because we know that the cost of living is high for people. There's so much that's happening with interest rates and global uncertainties. It affects everybody, which is why, not just in our ministry, we've made decisions across our government to make life more affordable for Ontarians, and—

Miss Monique Taylor: No, you've left people in poverty across the government—

The Chair (Mr. Steve Clark): I just want to remind members to direct their comments through the Chair.

Go ahead.

Miss Monique Taylor: Thanks.

Minister, let's start with the Ontario Autism Program because, like you said, you have put more money than ever before, and yet we are seeing more kids needing services. The last number that we're seeing is 73,000 kids waiting for autism services—that is a huge failure on behalf of the \$723 million that you're spending on autism. Can you give me a breakdown of how that money is spent? Are there third parties involved—I'm sure there are—to administer the program? How much is the actual administration of the program costing compared to how much kids are receiving?

Hon. Michael Parsa: Thanks for the question.

You're absolutely right; we have increased the program to more than \$720 million. But it's important to note—you talk about the people who are accessing these programs. Tens of thousands of families, MPP Taylor, are accessing the programs that we have in the Ontario Autism Program, which I give full credit to the autism community for putting this—

Miss Monique Taylor: Oh, they wouldn't want your credit.

Hon. Michael Parsa: Core clinical service—you compare the programs that we have today. It's not even comparable to what it used to be before, under the previous government. Expanded core clinical service includes ABA, speech-language pathology, occupational therapy, mental health supports, which were never included under the previous government. The reason that families are registering for the program is because, unlike in the past, where only 8,500 families were receiving supports and that's it—there was no other way for them to access any other supports—they know that under this program, families can register; they can have access to programs like entry to school, like family foundational service, like urgent response, like the caregiver-mediated early years program. These are available to families upon registering with AccessOAP.

Miss Monique Taylor: I'll disagree. For personal facts—I will completely disagree that they're available to families, because they are not. We are talking about \$723 million and only having 12,000 kids who are able to receive core clinical services.

Can you tell me how many families are in receipt of core funding today?

Hon. Michael Parsa: Yes. We'll go over that, but I—

Miss Monique Taylor: Core funding, not all—I don't want to hear the basket. I want the core funding.

Hon. Michael Parsa: Yes, I will. It's important, MPP Taylor, to recognize that you are referencing one stream under the Ontario Autism Program, but it is—

Miss Monique Taylor: The most important stream to families.

Hon. Michael Parsa: Do you know what, MPP Taylor? As you know, just as you have, I've travelled the province and I've talked to families. You should talk to some of the families who have accessed the entry to school program—as you have, I'm sure—and listen to the feedback that they're getting from the results that they are getting as a result of accessing the entry to school program, and the impact that it's having on their son or daughter.

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These are very important programs. The core clinical service that you're referring to—

Miss Monique Taylor: They are important programs, if they can gain access to them, Minister. And they're not gaining access. There are specific cases—I can tell you, for sure—not gaining access to the services that you say are available.

I'm interested in this question. I'm interested in the core funding. How many kids are getting funding for the core services today, and how many are able to access those services with that funding?

Hon. Michael Parsa: MPP Taylor, I will just make sure that we will share the numbers with you, but it is important, again, to emphasize that that is one part of the program; that if families choose to participate—you and I both know—

Miss Monique Taylor: They're begging for it.

Hon. Michael Parsa: —that all children and youth are unique and they have different needs. They have different needs for—

Miss Monique Taylor: Do you track the numbers of actually who are getting what programs?

Hon. Michael Parsa: Chair, if you don't mind, I'm going to ask the deputy minister to talk about some of the numbers in core, as MPP Taylor has asked.

The Chair (Mr. Steve Clark): Sure.

Miss Monique Taylor: If she's going to tell me what I'm asking for, please.

Ms. Denise Cole: We'll do our best, MPP Taylor.

I'm Denise Cole, the deputy minister for the Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services and the deputy minister for women's social and economic opportunity.

Actually, I'm going to ask my colleague ADM Jennifer Morris, who is already here, to give you the breakdown, MPP Taylor.

Ms. Jennifer Morris: I'm Jennifer Morris, assistant deputy minister, children with special needs division.

Thank you very much, MPP Taylor, for the question.

In response to your question about numbers—as of August 31, 20,474 children are actively enrolled in core clinical services. That means they have accepted their invitation and are in the process of doing a determination of needs interview to determine how much money they will receive to purchase services. Of those, 15,089 have an active funding agreement and are receiving funding for those services.

Miss Monique Taylor: So you're saying 15,000 are actually using the funding to get core services?

Ms. Jennifer Morris: Yes. They have active funding agreements, and they have received funding.

Miss Monique Taylor: And are they able to access—are they paying for services at the time?

Ms. Jennifer Morris: Yes.

Miss Monique Taylor: Is there the capacity for them to be able to access—

Ms. Jennifer Morris: Yes.

Interjection.

Ms. Jennifer Morris: Sorry.

Minister, would you like to take—

Hon. Michael Parsa: No, it's the correct answer, and that is the 15,000 families who have, currently, access—

Ms. Jennifer Morris: Yes.

MPP Taylor, at the same time we are giving families money, we're also investing in workforce capacity. Funding is being invested across the province to build the capacity to provide those services to families, and the number of clinicians across the province has increased quite significantly over the past four years as a result.

Miss Monique Taylor: So what about the DON? And how many times people are trying to get back in? What is the cost of the DON program for new clients, as well as reassessments of the DON? People are appealing their DON. How many are actually appealing the DON? What is the cost of the DON program for the actual first intake and then for the appeals?

Hon. Michael Parsa: Sorry, MPP Taylor; I just want to make sure I understand. You're asking when they initially—and then the follow-up, subsequent years when they are conducting—

Miss Monique Taylor: Correct, because that's in a backlog, wait-list, too, right?

Hon. Michael Parsa: Well, as I mentioned and ADM Morris mentioned, the workforce capacity fund that we have allocated in this program—again, this is why I talk about having this program that provides multiple supports in all areas. We know that there has got to be capacity to provide those supports and the services that are being rendered, which is why we allocated funds through that workforce capacity grant, to make sure that there's adequate staffing to provide—ADM Morris, can I pass it to you, please, just to share that?

Ms. Jennifer Morris: I think the question you're asking, MPP Taylor, if I'm making the assumption right, is what we're investing in AccessOAP to support families through the process, to receive services through the Ontario Autism Program.

Miss Monique Taylor: I would love to know how much the third party costs us, to administer the program.

Ms. Jennifer Morris: AccessOAP is responsible for all aspects of the administration of the program—intake, registration. Critically, over half of their budget is invested in care coordinators who support families through both the determination of needs interview to determine how much money they will receive for core clinical services, but also to support them through service navigation, accessing the services they need, and supporting them through their journey in the program.

Miss Monique Taylor: So how much does the OAP cost?

Ms. Jennifer Morris: Last year, the cost for AccessOAP was \$54 million—again, over half of that is direct service to families.

Miss Monique Taylor: And the DON process—who is the third party for that?

Ms. Jennifer Morris: AccessOAP administers the DON process, so that's part of that cost.

Miss Monique Taylor: So for all of the administration cost in total for the AccessOAP—it's \$54 million?

Ms. Jennifer Morris: Yes. Again, half of that is direct service.

Miss Monique Taylor: And all of the rest of it is going into service?

Ms. Jennifer Morris: Yes.

Miss Monique Taylor: For 14,000 kids?

Ms. Jennifer Morris: No.

Hon. Michael Parsa: Sorry, ADM Morris. I apologize.

Once again, MPP Taylor, we're talking about a program that has multiple streams: family foundational service—

Miss Monique Taylor: But only 14,000 kids are getting service.

Hon. Michael Parsa: Actually, she mentioned the number, as you noted. You're talking about the funding in hand. More than 20,000 have already signed an agreement.

What you're not looking at is, as I mentioned, all the other programs that families have access to, which is the family foundational service, which is urgent response, entry to school, the caregiver-mediated early years program. Tens of thousands of families across the province are accessing these supports. What you're referencing, MPP Taylor, is just one area of the program.

Miss Monique Taylor: Last week, during a press conference, the Premier was asked about the number of families waiting for autism services—again, that number is over 70,000. He seemed to express surprise at the number, how it has increased from before he formed government—when it was, I believe, 20,000 kids.

Does the minister share the Premier's confusion on how we have so many kids on wait-lists?

Hon. Michael Parsa: MPP Taylor, as I mentioned to you when we started this conversation, families in Ontario know now that there is a program that provides support to them as soon as they register with AccessOAP. They didn't have this opportunity before—

Miss Monique Taylor: No, they don't. Minister, I know you think that they do, but I can tell you first-hand: Families are not able to access—some families access zero services because they're waiting for services. So as much as you want to make it sound great, unfortunately, I have to disagree.

Hon. Michael Parsa: MPP Taylor, the facts are the facts—

Miss Monique Taylor: Facts are facts, I know. I live it.

Hon. Michael Parsa: Before, when you're looking at the numbers—families in Ontario knew that after 8,500

families, you can't access any more supports, under the previous government. They weren't registering, because they knew there was nothing to access. The funding had maxed, and they had nothing.

Today, they know that if you registered—which is why I said, outside of the one program that you're referring to, there are other streams that tens of thousands—

Miss Monique Taylor: The most important one—

Hon. Michael Parsa: These are facts. Tens of thousands of families are accessing those programs. And when I talk to the families and get the feedback about the impact that entry to school has on their child, or the family foundational service, or the caregiver-mediated early years program—these are all programs that families are accessing, and they knew they can once they register with AccessOAP.

Miss Monique Taylor: They can't, because there are wait-lists.

With the \$723 million, there was a one-time increase—I think the increase was \$120 million. That was, at the time, we believe, set as a one-time basis.

Seeing that you're not even able to make the 20,000 that you had promised before the \$120-million increase, are you planning on keeping that \$120 million on a continual basis?

Hon. Michael Parsa: I'll ask ADM Morris to reiterate the number of families who have already signed on and enrolled in the program, and I'll just ask that—

Miss Monique Taylor: Is the \$120 million staying on a continual basis?

Hon. Michael Parsa: As I mentioned to you, the base of the program was \$600 million. We increased it last year by an additional \$60 million, and we increased it this year by an additional \$60 million, to now more than—as you said—over \$720 million.

ADM Morris, can you expand on the program funding, please?

Ms. Jennifer Morris: Further to the minister's comments, there are 20,474 children actively enrolled in core clinical services. That means they are scheduled for a determination of needs interview and will be receiving funding to purchase core clinical services in the next few months. Of those, 15,089 are already in receipt of funding.

Miss Monique Taylor: You said that kids who are getting their DON are going to have money within a few months?

Ms. Jennifer Morris: Yes.

Miss Monique Taylor: Do you realize there are 73,000 kids on that wait-list? I don't understand how you're saying they're all going to get—kids have already had a DON, and it has been months and they still haven't received any funding. So I'm not really sure what that—

Ms. Jennifer Morris: After families have their determination of needs interview, they receive funding notification within five business days, at which point they're given a funding agreement. They sign that back, and within 10 business days, they receive funding. That's the trajectory for that process. Some 15,089 families and children have gone through that process, and they're in receipt of

funding. The remaining balance of the 20,474 who are currently enrolled will complete that process over the next number of weeks.

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Miss Monique Taylor: Will the \$120 million stay, or is it one-time funding?

Hon. Michael Parsa: MPP Taylor, it is funding that has been mentioned that is there to provide the support—

Miss Monique Taylor: Is it staying? Is it moving forward—

Hon. Michael Parsa: —and it is staying. It's a \$720-million program, and what we're looking at is providing as much support to be able to serve as many families as possible. The funding of the program is \$720 million.

Miss Monique Taylor: And it's staying at \$720 million going forward? We're not even reaching the 20,000 that your own binder says it's supposed to reach.

The Chair (Mr. Steve Clark): You've got one minute remaining in this round.

Hon. Michael Parsa: I'll just reiterate one more time the number that ADM Morris mentioned: 20,470 have already signed an agreement. When the agreement is signed, within five business days families will then receive the contract. The families will then sign on to programs and receive funding within days.

Let me just reiterate, MPP Taylor, so that you've heard it directly from me: For us, we want to make sure that families, children and youth in this province are supported. This is why, when we formed government, it wasn't a—

Miss Monique Taylor: And 73,000 kids on a wait-list says you are not supporting them, Minister. That number has grown by over 50,000 since your government came into power.

The Chair (Mr. Steve Clark): I'll just remind everyone to make their comments through the Chair.

Hon. Michael Parsa: MPP Taylor, tens of thousands of families are receiving supports with the Ontario Autism Program; they weren't before—

Miss Monique Taylor: Core funding is a very different number.

Hon. Michael Parsa: There are different needs for every child and youth.

Miss Monique Taylor: Yes, I agree.

Hon. Michael Parsa: Our parents know, and that's why they're registering for all the programs that are available—

The Chair (Mr. Steve Clark): Thank you, Minister. We've completed the first round of 20 minutes. We'll now ask the independent member to begin her 10-minute round.

MPP Clancy.

Ms. Aislinn Clancy: I want to thank you both. I know you work very hard. You care a lot. I know there have been lots of good things over the past few years, and I've found you approachable and open to conversing about the situations in our community.

And thank you to those who are the great team behind these politicians, who I know are there every day, trying to make these complex programs possible.

Inequity in our community, especially when it comes to our finances, is hitting my community in a very big way. We have record numbers of folks facing homelessness, and in my community alone, we've had a doubling of folks using the food bank in one year, in a 12-month span.

You're not responsible for inflation, but there are lots of factors that I think could help alleviate the pressure, not just for folks getting income supports, but for folks who are working and struggling to pay the bills.

One of the things I wanted to start with was the Canada Disability Benefit. Our local disability community has really been lobbying hard for many years to get income supports from the federal government. Five provinces have committed to not clawing the \$200 a month back when it comes in in 2025.

Will the Ontario government commit to not clawing back the Canada Disability Benefit, which is meant to help those living in legislated poverty who live with disabilities?

Hon. Michael Parsa: MPP Clancy, first of all, thank you for the question. It's a very important question.

On this topic, I've been very clear, and I'll repeat it again: The intent of our government is to make life more affordable for Ontarians, including those with disabilities, in particular those who are facing other barriers. And yes, that's why we increased the support for the Ontario Disability Support Program to nearly 17% in two years. That's why we adjusted the earned income threshold from \$200 to \$1,000, so that they can keep more money in their pockets without it impacting their benefits.

I was actually part of an FPT last week where all provinces and territories met with the federal government, and I provided my feedback to the federal government and to my colleagues. We need to do everything we can to make life more affordable. You're absolutely right; with the rising cost of living on everything these days—obviously, the interest rates—all of that has had an impact on families. We have to do everything we can to increase supports for them, and I conveyed that. We will support any initiative that makes life more affordable for Ontarians. I expect nothing less—

Ms. Aislinn Clancy: So does that mean you won't claw that back?

Hon. Michael Parsa: We'll see as soon as the details are up. But again, I just want to be very clear: I want to make life more affordable for Ontarians, and I want the process to not be onerous. I want to make sure that Ontarians who can access this support can do so in a way that is not onerous for them. So I'll just say this again—and as I said with my colleagues: We are looking at making life more affordable for Ontarians, and I will support any initiative that makes life more affordable for Ontarians. So once the details are out—if you don't mind—

Ms. Aislinn Clancy: Five provinces have committed to not clawing it back, but as far as I know, Ontario has not committed to ensuring that \$200 a month is not clawed back.

I hear the value statement. I think that just—yes.

Hon. Michael Parsa: Just this last week, we had our FPT with the federal minister where feedback was provided, and I conveyed our thoughts very clearly that that was—

Ms. Aislinn Clancy: Do you think you'll have an answer soon?

Hon. Michael Parsa: Well, I think the federal government will make some decisions.

Chair, if you don't mind, I'm just going to be asking the deputy minister, who is in contact with our counterparts as we are negotiating, to shed some light.

Ms. Aislinn Clancy: Ms. Cole, do you have anything to add?

Ms. Denise Cole: As the minister indicated, there are some principles and values that Ontario is working with.

The ministry is not in a position to give you a definitive answer today.

Ms. Aislinn Clancy: I look forward to it, yes.

Ms. Denise Cole: The reason for that, though: There are a number of intertwining programs. There are 24 different programs across government that—we need to understand what the implications are so, as the minister says, nobody is worse off. Ontario has called on the federal government. The easiest thing to do would be for the federal government to not treat the CDB as income. That would fix a number of issues that the province would have across 24 of our tax programs.

Ms. Aislinn Clancy: I look forward to your answer.

I know it's great when folks talk to each other—because I know people got a grocery benefit and then they lose their dental, and then people who are living in a vulnerable situation feel extremely frustrated.

My next question is about Ontario Works. While I appreciate the increase in ODSP and that that's tacked to inflation, it still is only 54% of the income for the poverty line. Ontario Works—folks in shelters don't even get the \$390, so they're living off of \$343 a month. Ontario Works has not increased since 2018. When folks get the full amount, they get \$733. I think you and I both know housing costs alone—no one can get anything in my community for \$390, and no one can live off \$343 a month.

With almost 500,000 people living in Ontario—a lot of the folks I talk to who are faced with—seniors and folks living without shelter for the first time ever, folks using the food banks. What they say would alleviate the stress on our community is increasing these income supports.

Tell me why the folks on Ontario Works are not seeing an increase. If we look at the estimates, the number went down by \$222.9 million. Can you explain that?

Hon. Michael Parsa: Yes. Let me just first talk to you about the two social assistance programs that we have here in the province.

We have the Ontario Disability Support Program, which provides long-term support. As you indicated, we increased the supports by 17% in two years, tied it to inflation so it can keep up with the cost of living, as well as increased the earned income threshold so they can work more—up to \$1,000—without it impacting their benefits.

The Ontario Works program that you're talking about was always meant to be support to connect people to employment as quickly as possible. There are thousands of jobs in our province that are not being filled right now, MPP Clancy.

This is one of the reasons that at the Association of Municipalities of Ontario, AMO, conference, I announced to our partners that we will be providing them with an additional \$52 million of funding to continue administrating the Ontario Works program—because, as you know, it's on the ground.

We're taking multiple approaches so that, on the ground, those caseworkers are emphasizing all of their attention on individuals. We've digitized social assistance so that it's now, as you heard in my remarks, done online—so that they have less time to do paperwork and more time on spending getting people ready, to connect them with the jobs that are not being filled.

1350

Ms. Aislinn Clancy: Unfortunately, the reality is, if you are homeless, if you don't get dental supports, you might be missing teeth. If you don't have a home, if you don't have a shelter—enough that you can live somewhere—it's very difficult to find a job. That requires housing and showers and executive functioning.

When I talk to folks on the front line—I was a social worker myself. I know that the vast majority of people on Ontario Works actually face disability; they just haven't qualified. There's a bunch of red tape. I know that we've done a lot to make it more streamlined. I'm grateful for that, but I think we haven't gone far enough to support folks with disabilities to navigate that system on their own, let alone if they're struggling with English etc.

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

Ms. Aislinn Clancy: So I urge you to, Minister, please—\$733 is really—it gets in the way of these labour connections that you speak of.

Hon. Michael Parsa: All the points you just raised right now about accessing the supports and navigation is exactly why I mentioned to you that we want to make sure that the programs and the service providers on the ground—these are caseworkers who know their clients, who know the individuals—can spend more time on helping them with the supports they need to connect them with the programs that are available—you referenced ODSP, for example—or to connect them with employment or to connect them with supports towards employment. They didn't have this time, MPP Clancy, before.

Ms. Aislinn Clancy: I hope you talk to those workers. I do get different feedback—that it actually went from taking three days to almost three weeks, when people need emergency dollars, and that some of the centralization is a bit glitchy. So I hope that there is an ongoing process to take the feedback and ensure that we continue—

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

We'll now move to the government's first 20-minute round. MPP Smith.

Ms. Laura Smith: Through you, Chair: I want to thank the entire team at MCCSS for being here.

What I did want to concentrate on was a series of questions, but I did want to give the minister an opportunity—I know he began talking about gender-based violence, and I don't think he finished his comments, so I would like to give him the opportunity to finish his remarks. Perhaps I can really get in depth in the questions. I think it was just getting into gender-based violence.

Hon. Michael Parsa: Yes, I really appreciate it. Thank you very much, MPP Smith, for the question, and thank you so much for the great work that you have been doing as parliamentary assistant in the Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services, with your experience and background.

The reason we wanted to talk about this is because this is a priority of our government. We want to make sure that people have the supports and have access to the supports that they need. The supports that are provided through many of our partners across the province are funded and backed by investment.

I just want to point out the Ontario-STANDS action plan that Minister Williams and I announced at the end of last year, which is backed by \$1.4 billion of investment. In addition to the supports that are being provided by our government provincially, here in Ontario, we also signed on to the National Action Plan to End Gender-Based Violence, and, as a result, secured \$162 million in additional funding for the duration of Ontario-STANDS, to be able to provide those—a lot of it is on prevention, and a lot of it is support that is being provided to some of our partners in the province. We provided more than \$18 million at the end of last year to our community partners, and this year, through a community call for proposals, there will be an additional \$100 million, which will also augment the funding that we currently have in place, and which is why I mentioned to you and all of the members who are here—we announced it; Minister Williams announced it at AMO—that partners should be applying for this fund, and it closes in October.

Thanks for that opportunity.

Ms. Laura Smith: Minister, you talked about children and youth who are supported. I want to go back even further.

I sat on parent council for over a decade. I took my role, probably, far too seriously. And I'm being reminiscent on perhaps when I had early days with my child, even as far back as the first few days with my child. I think parents across this province can agree that having a baby is a very exciting time, but it can also be a challenging time. I remember, when I brought that child home, I actually did not know how to change a diaper. It was pretty bizarre for me. I didn't know what I was doing. New parents often have many questions and need support adjusting to a new life with a new baby—and it is a very new life, I can assure you.

I'm just wondering what the ministry is doing to help new parents, to make sure children and families have the supports they need to thrive.

Hon. Michael Parsa: It's a very good question, and thanks for asking it.

You've heard me talk about this many, many times, and I'll say it again because it's important to state it: When we're talking about children and youth in our province, they are a portion of our population, but they're 100% of our future. They deserve a healthy start so that they can participate at home, at school, when they grow up in the community.

The particular program that I'd like to reference is the Healthy Babies Healthy Children Program. When I was touring the province, MPP Smith, I went into some of our local public health units and spoke to some of the people who are providing this service on the ground. They talked about the examples and, exactly as you mentioned, just how close they are connected with members in their communities. I learned a lot more about the program. And that often happens. When you travel the province and you talk to some of the service providers on the ground, delivering these programs, you walk away with one or two things that you probably didn't know of in the past. That was really good feedback. We increased the funding of the Healthy Babies Healthy Children Program, which was a really important program, by \$8.6 million this year, to a total of \$94 million, now, annually. It's really important because it provides prevention—there are identifications and interventions for families, and that early detection is so important. That's what I kept hearing when I was on the ground. Right now, in our province, about 93,000 newborns and their families are screened for risks that could compromise their healthy development. About 7,000 families also receive home visits from either a nurse or a qualified practitioner.

We're also increasing funding to the Infant and Child Development Program by \$1.5 million. That brings up the total funding of this program to \$21.5 million. That helps children with developmental disabilities and those who are at risk of developmental delays.

The other program that we increased funding of is the young parent services program in our province. We increased the funding for that program by \$1.8 million. That brings the total funding of that program, as well, to \$10 million.

The last program in this area that I would think that you would want to know about is the young parent services that are delivered, really, by a lot of our community agencies and partners on the ground—that's to help pregnant and parenting youth, which is to your earlier reference. We have now 2,000 clients who are receiving the young parent services across our province.

I'm going to ask Deputy Cole to elaborate a little bit more about the programs that I just mentioned, the impact on a new family—and you're right; it is an incredibly exciting time for a young mom and dad or young parents.

1400

Ms. Denise Cole: To build on the minister's comments, I'm delighted to have the opportunity to share more about the ministry's support for children, young parents and families.

I think it's worth noting that some children and youth need extra support because they have challenges or delays in their physical, intellectual, emotional, social, language or behavioural development. Ontario funds specific services for these children so that they can participate more fully at home, in school and in the community.

Healthy child development programs can help to minimize the need for more intensive services later in life by supporting optimal infant and child growth and development, positive parenting and family well-being in the early years, early identification of potential developmental challenges and delays, and early intervention to address and identify challenges and delays. When children and families are facing challenges, identifying and responding to concerns and risk early leads to better outcomes and more efficient ways of providing services. To assist with this, the ministry funds agencies to provide screening, assessment and early intervention supports for children and families at various stages of development.

The ministry is working with service providers to make sure that children are receiving the services they need when they need them.

We also continue to work with Indigenous partners to improve the overall health and well-being of First Nations, Inuit and Métis children and youth.

I'd like to take this opportunity to go into some more details about some of our ministry's programs. When it comes to healthy child development broadly, the ministry supports a range of programs which fall under a few categories:

At the outset, Minister Parsa spoke about the Healthy Babies Healthy Children Program and the young parent services program. These two programs fall under the category of "healthy families." In total, Ontario is investing over \$105 million this year to deliver "healthy families" programs.

Minister Parsa also spoke about the Infant and Child Development Program. This program falls under the category of early intervention. In total, Ontario is investing \$108 million this year to deliver early intervention programs. Aside from the Infant and Child Development Program, we support the Preschool Speech and Language Program, the Infant Hearing Program and the Blind-Low Vision Early Intervention Program. I will share some details about these programs, as they complement the other programs that Minister Parsa has already outlined.

Ontario's Preschool Speech and Language Program provides assessments and services for children with speech and language difficulties and disorders from birth to transition to school, helping them develop communication and early literacy skills. About one in 10 children need extra help developing speech and language skills, and without help it may be harder for these children to listen, talk, read and play with others. Preschool Speech and Language Program staff can teach parents how to help their child develop their communication skills, giving them the best opportunity for healthy development. Speech and language therapy is provided by agencies across the province and includes parent training as well as

direct therapy with the child, when appropriate. Early therapy can help children to listen, talk, learn and read; improve their readiness for school; improve their self-esteem and confidence, and help them to play with other children. The program provides services for children from birth until they start school.

Ontario's Infant Hearing Program identifies children born with permanent hearing loss or who are at risk for developing permanent hearing loss in early childhood through universal newborn screening and follow-up assessments. The program provides services and supports needed to develop language and communication skills for children with permanent hearing loss. Ontario's Infant Hearing Program also provides intervention services such as amplification—for example, hearing aids—and language-development services until children enter school. With early intervention, children with permanent hearing loss can develop language skills on par with their hearing peers by the time they start school.

The Blind-Low Vision Early Intervention Program supports families of children with significant visual impairment, from low vision to total blindness. Intervention services are provided by specially trained early childhood blind-low vision consultants in the family's home to help parents support their children's development. When it comes to family support, social workers provide many of these services. They can help families understand and cope with the implications of the diagnosis to make informed decisions about support services. Specifically trained early childhood vision consultants provide intervention services in families' homes and help children develop many skills, including:

- motor skills, so for example, rolling, reaching, crawling, walking and use of hands to manipulate and explore objects;
- daily living skills, so for example, eating, dressing and toileting;
- concept development, such as object identification, function and characteristics;
- social and emotional development;
- language and communication development;
- how to make the most of residual vision, if they have it; and
- how to use all the senses to promote development.

For a child with visual impairment, touch, hearing and the use of remaining or residual vision are important for learning and development. Trained and knowledgeable professionals in the area of child development and visual impairment can help children develop these senses. In terms of consultation services, early childhood vision consultants will work with early childhood educators in child care settings to learn how to best work with and teach children. They will also work with other community partners, such as speech-language pathologists, occupational therapists, infant and child development consultants, to coordinate services and goals for children and their families.

Almost 30% of children in Ontario have at least one developmental vulnerability at school entry that could pose a risk to their lifelong health, learning and behaviour.

Developmental delays and challenges can be the result of health conditions or disorders, or can be impacted by parenting challenges and family circumstances.

The goal of healthy child development programs is to maximize infant, child and family well-being and minimize the need or intensity of costly services later in life.

Ontario's increased investments in these programs will help more children across the province participate more fully at home, in school and in their communities.

Thanks for the opportunity to elaborate.

Ms. Laura Smith: Thank you.

I'm just going to be passing over some of my time to MPP Pierre.

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

Ms. Natalie Pierre: My question is around youth programs.

During your remarks, Minister, I heard you talk about the Ready, Set, Go program, and I'm curious—we live in a province with an exciting job market and job opportunities, new technologies and connectivity, and all young people should be able to participate in those activities and take advantage of the job market.

I'm hoping you can tell us a little bit more about what the ministry is doing to open doors for youth. Specifically, what is the government doing to help youth find their way to a path of success?

Hon. Michael Parsa: Thanks very much for the question. I also want to thank you for the work that you're doing. I know how involved you are with the youth in your riding. I visited many facilities—especially the trades program that you and I went to. It's fantastic work. It sets up youth for success. So thanks for your leadership.

Through the recent budget, we actually increased funding for children and youth services in our province by \$109 million.

There are several programs that I'd like to point out. One of them is the youth outreach program. The other one is one of my favourites, which is the Youth Opportunities Fund that we actually—for these two programs, we increased the funding of \$11 million for the youth outreach program and \$14 million for the Youth Opportunities Fund.

Now I'm just going to go into a bit more detail on both of the programs.

The Youth Opportunities Fund supports about 39 community—and these are community-led initiatives and projects that help youth overcome social and economic barriers and help them be able to access opportunities through these community initiatives. It actually empowers youth.

1410

You may know that in my previous life, prior to becoming an MPP, through my business, I did a lot of work with youth through our service club. That was my entire involvement—to make sure that youth in our communities have a chance to succeed and thrive, whether that was through hiring them in our business or helping connect them with some of the other community partners. That was

something that I had done prior to this life, as well, and it's so important.

I went to another program which is called—you'll recall the Ready, Set, Go program.

One of the other programs that I absolutely love is the YIPI program, which is the Youth in Policing Initiative. By the way, many of our police services—in fact, I think it was 35 police services in Ontario that actually were part of this program and mentored about 460 youth in our province. So far, to date, through the YIPI program—about 8,400 youth have graduated this program. It's a fantastic initiative that connects youth with our police services. They work with them, whether it's after school or in the summer, depending on the program, and just that relationship—you think of that positive relationship with law enforcement. We'll continue—

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

Hon. Michael Parsa: Thank you very much, Chair—just to make sure that we provide that help, that support they need to steer the youth in the right direction.

The Ready, Set, Go program—I hope that somebody else will ask me about this, because I would really like to expand on this program. It is a wonderful program that helps children and youth in care with support, from as young as 13 right up until their 23rd birthday.

I wanted to share a little bit of news with everybody here. Our wonderful Deputy Minister Cole is actually leaving us here at children, community and social services and will be moving on to education, so I want to thank her for all her leadership, for all she has done in this incredibly important ministry.

The Chair (Mr. Steve Clark): Thank you, Minister. Thank you, Deputy—great job.

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

Miss Monique Taylor: I would like to continue from the independent's questioning on Ontario Works.

You have an employment program that has recipients who participate in the government's employment services.

Can you tell me how many of the Ontario Works recipients have participated in the employment services program?

Hon. Michael Parsa: If you don't mind, for the exact numbers—I think the assistant deputy minister should be online.

Ms. Cordelia Clarke Julien: I'm Cordelia Clarke Julien, assistant deputy minister for the social assistance programs division here at the ministry.

Thank you, Minister.

Thanks for the question, MPP Taylor.

At this point, we have over 75,000 who have been referred to the Employment Ontario system, working closely with our colleagues at the Ministry of Labour, Immigration, Training and Skills Development.

Miss Monique Taylor: So 75,000 are referred. How many of those would be successful? Do you have that number—who have completed successful employment?

Maybe it's easier to ask how many have left the employment services and then come back to Ontario Works because they were unsuccessful at gaining employment.

Ms. Denise Cole: MPP Taylor, that is one of the questions we're going to have to get back to you with a specific answer—

Miss Monique Taylor: Do you track that information?

Ms. Denise Cole: With the program, we're working quite closely with the Ministry of Labour, Immigration, Training and Skills Development, so we do track the number in partnership with them. I want to make sure you have the most current, accurate-to-date numbers, so we will get back to you on that.

Miss Monique Taylor: I'll receive that in writing?

Ms. Denise Cole: Yes.

Miss Monique Taylor: Thank you very much. That was the question that I wanted to ask for Ontario Works.

We know ODSP recipients are continuing to fall further and further behind. The cost-of-living increase that you have given them is definitely not enough to be able to pay the rent. I mean, \$1,338—I believe it is, or right around that figure—is not enough to pay for an average one-bedroom apartment in the city of Hamilton, which is \$1,800 a month.

Do you have intentions of increasing benefits for people on ODSP and Ontario Works?

Hon. Michael Parsa: I will just tell you this: Mindful of the fact that, as I mentioned in my remarks, we know with the rising cost of living, there are consequences for Ontarians, and it will have an impact on the most vulnerable, which is why we not only raised ODSP rates by nearly 17% in two years—and we also indexed that to inflation so that it can continue to keep up with the cost of living—but also, the earned income threshold for those who are able to work, from \$200 to \$1,000, without it impacting their benefits. So not only did we increase ODSP rates by nearly 17% in two years; we indexed it to inflation. These were the largest increases to this program in decades in our province. That had never been done—

Miss Monique Taylor: Thank you, Minister. Yes, I agree; the Liberals failed also. But that doesn't make your forcing people into legislated poverty any better. So please don't use that as "leaving nobody behind"—because you are certainly leaving people who have disabilities in this province completely behind.

We talked about the Canada disability program. Will that be a clawback? We're waiting with bated breath for that announcement to come.

Can you tell me how many folks are on Ontario disability and have received other clawbacks from things such as EI, CPP, WSIB? You're forcing people into work who are disabled and possibly now getting WSIB because they've been injured even further on the job—and all of that's being clawed back. So what are the numbers of clawbacks that actually happen under the ODSP program?

Hon. Michael Parsa: Before I ask the deputy to share some of the stats and some of the numbers with you, I will just add that, MPP Taylor, again, it was our government that made the decision to be able to provide more supports to people on ODSP—more than in decades. In decades, the supports had not been there. So increasing it by 17% in less than two years, indexing it to inflation so it can

continue to stay—as well as that income threshold, as I mentioned to you, increasing that from \$200 to \$1,000 for those who are able to work to have more income.

As far as the federal government, MPP Taylor, from day one, I was very clear on this: We will support any initiative that helps Ontarians, and we will support any initiative that makes life more affordable for Ontarians.

You're only looking at one of the programs. If you look at some of the work that we're doing as a government as a whole to make life more affordable, whether it's the One Fare that saves Ontario transit riders more than \$1,600 a year, whether it's the 10.7 cents a litre at gasoline that Ontarians are saving because of our decision—all of the decisions that we look—

Miss Monique Taylor: You think those people have cars, Minister? Come on.

Hon. Michael Parsa: As I mentioned to you, the \$1,600, the one transit, the people—

Miss Monique Taylor: They can't pay the rent. They're eating at food banks—125% increase in food banks—

The Chair (Mr. Steve Clark): Let the minister continue. We can't be talking over each other.

You're not going to be recorded in Hansard if you guys keep talking over each other.

Miss Monique Taylor: Mind-blowing. We'll just—

Hon. Michael Parsa: I will just—

Miss Monique Taylor: We'll just go on because, honestly, thank you, Minister—

Hon. Michael Parsa: You wanted to get some—

Miss Monique Taylor: I do want answers, but I'll take it in writing, after the fact.

People are living in legislated poverty in this province. We're seeing tents grow across this province—and a 125% increase to food banks across. This is an absolute failure for the most vulnerable people in our province. This is definitely leaving vulnerable people behind.

1420

You talk about employment services. You talk about the fact that they can earn income. That's a privilege for people with disabilities. Many people with disabilities in this province don't have the privilege of having a job.

I'll just leave it there.

I'm going to move on to child welfare, because that is definitely in shambles, as we see very clearly on a daily basis.

The number to come out in the last three years, of 354 kids who have died within the purview of the child welfare system in this province, is absolutely mind-blowing, since the fact that we have many less children—we had known that one child every three days was dying in care before. But I actually expected those numbers to not be as stark and to not be as bad as they were, since in 2012-13, the peak was 28,236 kids, and now, in 2023-24, we have an estimated 14,000 kids in care—so we have half the kids, and yet we still have as many kids dying every three days in this province under your watch, under the child welfare system.

We see that unlicensed facilities continue to be a problem. We have kids who are sleeping in Airbnbs. We

have kids who are sleeping in motel rooms. We have kids who are sleeping in children's aid offices. And yet, the funding for children's aid—the increase is probably for the Ready, Set, Go program. That's probably where that—the deputy minister is shaking her head. So I would love to hear that.

We also know that children's aids ran deficits, and the projected deficits coming forward—you had to bail the children's aids out in the last fiscal year. That's no way to be able to run a society, to ensure the safety of our most vulnerable kids, to ensure that kids are not dying every three days—but that doesn't seem to be in the numbers that we're seeing before us.

So can you tell us what funding formula will be used to determine how much agencies will get going forward?

Hon. Michael Parsa: Thanks for the question, MPP Taylor.

Let me just say that when it comes to protecting the children and youth in our province, as I mentioned many, many times, every single child, every youth in this province deserves to live in safety and deserves to have the same supports regardless of their circumstance. Through supporting the 50 children's aid societies in our province with funding, we want to make sure that they do have that opportunity to continue to survive—to continue to thrive and succeed—

Miss Monique Taylor: Survive?

Hon. Michael Parsa: To succeed and thrive in their communities. And what we've done this year, MPP Taylor, is, we're investing \$1.7 billion in children's aid societies to keep them safe. That includes the 13 Indigenous children's aid societies.

The point of investment that you made about the Ready, Set, Go program—you're correct; the funding towards this was increased last year by \$76.3 million.

This year, we increased funding to societies by \$14 million, towards child protection. As well, in budget 2024, we increased the funding by \$41.7 million—additional support to societies. I want to just put this in perspective for you, MPP Taylor, and my colleagues here—while care has gone down by more than 29% in our province over the last 10 years, we've increased funding by \$128.9 million over that time frame.

Miss Monique Taylor: So why are they in deficits?

Hon. Michael Parsa: That is a great question, which is why I have said we want to make sure that we have—we're always looking at how the services are being provided. Can we look at improving our systems? If you look at some of the societies that have challenges, we've always stepped up to support those that could not, for some unforeseen circumstances, be able to stay within budget. We have been there to support them. We've been there to provide them with supports so they can continue to get back on budget.

Make no mistake, we'll leave no stone unturned when it comes to protecting children and youth in our province.

If you look at the recent bill that we've passed—I thank you, the members of the opposition, and everyone who's here who supported the bill—that provided the much-

needed oversight and accountability for us to be able to protect the children and youth. As I said, irrespective of their circumstance, every child, every youth needs to succeed and needs to thrive in our community. The supports that we put in—

Miss Monique Taylor: I was happy to support that, Minister, too—for the Ready, Set, Go program—to ensure young people have the opportunity to learn and to grow and to succeed, but we're clearly not seeing that with the majority of kids who are left without.

Tell me, how much is it costing to house kids through unlicensed providers?

Hon. Michael Parsa: I'll pass it to the assistant deputy minister, but I would like to expand on the Ready, Set, Go program—

Miss Monique Taylor: No, no. We've talked about the Ready, Set, Go program plenty of times. I understand it; I've got those numbers.

There are certain things that I'm looking for today—

Hon. Michael Parsa: But that was the only program that you referenced.

Miss Monique Taylor: Thank you. I said, "Congratulations. I was happy to support that legislation," and I moved on.

Now I want to know about unlicensed facilities that are housing our kids. I want to know how much it's costing us to provide that housing for those kids.

Hon. Michael Parsa: Before I pass it on to our ADM for some of the numbers, I would like to, because it is important to mention—through the Supporting Children's Futures Act—

Miss Monique Taylor: Thank you, but, Minister, this is my time.

Hon. Michael Parsa: I just wanted to talk about some of the provisions that we put in exactly for the areas that you're talking about, to protect those children who are in—if you don't mind, Deputy Minister, can you talk about—she asked for a specific question, but I also want to talk about, through the Supporting Children's Futures Act that we've put forward, which everybody supported, some of the measures that we put in that better protect children and youth, protections that were much needed.

Miss Monique Taylor: I'd like to reclaim my time, Chair.

The Chair (Mr. Steve Clark): Okay, go ahead.

Miss Monique Taylor: I reclaim my time. Thank you. I would like to know, specifically, what it costs the province to house children in unlicensed facilities, please.

Hon. Michael Parsa: Chair, do you mind if I ask the ADM?

The Chair (Mr. Steve Clark): Go right ahead.

Hon. Michael Parsa: ADM Linda Chihab, please.

Ms. Linda Chihab: I'm Linda Chihab, ADM of the child welfare and protection division.

Societies are responsible for placing children and youth in unlicensed or licensed homes. They are in the best position to decide what appropriate placement is.

I want to just tell you a little bit around why some youth may be in an unlicensed setting; for example—

Miss Monique Taylor: I understand why they're sometimes there.

I want to know how much the cost of the programming is and how much we're paying out to these third parties in unlicensed facilities.

Ms. Linda Chihab: Because societies are the ones placing the children—it would depend on the children or the youth's need, where in the province of Ontario—they are the best to determine what those costs would be help ensure that the kids are safe and thrive.

Miss Monique Taylor: So the government doesn't track those numbers?

Interjection.

The Chair (Mr. Steve Clark): Deputy Minister, do you want to continue?

Ms. Denise Cole: Yes.

We do track the numbers, MPP Taylor. We are in the process right now. The societies have until the end of this month to be able to provide us with their budget for this fiscal year.

So we can get you historical numbers, retrospectively—we wouldn't be able to provide you with numbers for this fiscal year. We are dependent on the children's aid societies, through our regional offices, to provide us with that number—so I will add it on my growing list of questions that we will get back to you in writing.

Miss Monique Taylor: Can I have the last five years, please?

Ms. Denise Cole: Certainly.

Miss Monique Taylor: Would those numbers not be forecasted, for the fact that we know that we don't have enough licensed group homes, and that the system is forcing—if we're putting kids into Airbnbs and motel rooms, you should be forecasting the fact that we don't have enough going forward. So are there any forecasted dollars to be able to make up for the government's lack of action in making sure that we have public group homes?

1430

Ms. Denise Cole: I don't think it's an accurate statement, MPP Taylor, to say that there is a lack of sufficient licensed homes. There are choices that societies may make in terms of where they place those children, based on the unique needs of those children. Not all licensed homes can provide the kind of care that every single child may need. Not all children who are in children's aid societies are children in need of protection, and so—

Miss Monique Taylor: I understand that, but when we have kids in hotel rooms—

Ms. Denise Cole: That's one of the reasons that we work with children's aid societies annually. And part of the information that we're expecting that they will provide us when they do their budget submissions by the ending of this year is that kind of projection, so that the ministry has a line of sight into what it is that they are projecting.

Miss Monique Taylor: Can you tell us when you expect the redesign to be finished and operational?

Hon. Michael Parsa: The work is ongoing, as I mentioned to you. If you look at some of the measures that we put in place last year—for example, when we introduced a

quality standard framework, it brought a standard of care that needs to be provided across our province. This year, through the Supporting Children's Futures Act, we brought in more measures.

MPP Taylor, when it comes to protecting children and youth, we will always look at ways of doing things better. I've made this very clear. We will always do our very best to look at ways to continuously improve the system, every opportunity that we get.

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

Miss Monique Taylor: Are there third parties involved in the redesign, and if so, what have they been paid for?

Hon. Michael Parsa: The redesign is focused on keeping children and youth safe in our province. We get feedback. We get to have—

Miss Monique Taylor: Have you paid to have any of the redesign done?

Hon. Michael Parsa: The answer is no.

What I'm going to tell you is that the focus of the redesign isn't just to do one thing and call it a day. That's not how you protect children and youth in care. That's not how you set them up for success. It's continuously looking at, how do you improve the services and programs that they're relying on, which is why I was so proud of the Ready, Set, Go program—because past the age of 21, it provides support, including financial support, right up until their 23rd birthday. It provides them with life skills like opening up a bank account, helps them with groceries, résumé writing—

Miss Monique Taylor: Minister, thanks. There's one second left.

I hope that with the death and the numbers that we've seen in care—

The Chair (Mr. Steve Clark): Thank you, MPP Taylor. MPP Clancy, your 10 minutes begins now.

Ms. Aislinn Clancy: Thank you very much. I do appreciate the effort, and I was happy to support that bill, as well. I think it's one rung on the ladder. We're heading up.

I do want to bring it back to kids with complex needs. As a social worker, what I've seen is that we've tried to do more, but for some kids with complex needs—like those who sexually offend, those with complex disabilities, those with complex mental health—it is a gap that I'm seeing. I see expert clinicians in the not-for-profit sector all moving out, whether it's because—I know in Ms. Pierre's riding, the clinic that serves kids who sexually offend was closed. Others have moved toward a brief intervention model, and that has led to those with complex trauma not being served. That pressure falls on families and leads kids to also go into care. I feel like there are a lot of interconnections to why kids end up needing care. We know that a lot of kids are in care because there are gaps in the community for the group who have complex needs, and they end up in hospital or they end up institutionalized. I think we can do better as a community to ensure those specialized treatments are properly funded in community, so kids can stay in their homes.

I am going to bring it to disability. I have spoken with a lot of families who end up at my office because of these wait times. I know you're working hard at reducing them, but I have a responsibility to my constituents and the people of Ontario to talk about some of those stressors. I hope you can partner with the Minister of Red Tape Reduction, because what I hear from families is that there are a lot of gaps and glitches and challenges in navigating your child through trying to get funding for disability supports.

For example, you're always encouraged to get your assessment early. Early intervention is the best, and we know, for young kids, if we can hit the services and the treatments at an early age, they have lifelong outputs; the benefits are exponential. So what is the frustration? A lot of families are getting that assessment early—they're told early intervention—but the funding isn't there when they need it, and the wait times exist.

So I love hearing you talk about the ready for school program. I think if we can expand that entry to school program, we will alleviate the pressure on the Ministry of Education—I encourage you to go those kindergarten rooms; half of the students are not toileting—and I think we would hit those developmental milestones we really need to address.

I will share with you a conversation I had today with a family in my riding. Jenny had her child diagnosed at age four, in 2019. She did get the first round of funding, got into some supports; funding was used up, then got another little nugget of funding, got into supports, didn't know that the funding wouldn't continue—again, cancelling the funding because it didn't continue. She has been on the wait-list for core funding for five years. She says her husband quit his job to stay home to care for their child. They have used up all their RRSPs. They have no more savings. They've borrowed money from family members, used every tax return. They said they have about one month of funding money left from all they've been able to scrounge, in order to keep their child getting the vital services they need to stay in school. Their child is in school, and he does bite, he does kick, because he isn't able to get adequate supports. So it's landing on our school system.

Can you commit to looking into some of these long wait times that families are experiencing?

Hon. Michael Parsa: Thanks for the question. You covered a lot.

Ms. Aislinn Clancy: Sorry.

Hon. Michael Parsa: No, no, that's good. Thank you very much. I appreciate it.

Thank you, as well, for the work that you do for your constituents in your riding. We've chatted on multiple occasions.

You started off with children with complex needs. I will tell you, we actually, through just one initiative—in budget 2024, we increased the funding for children with complex special needs by \$12 million this year, and that's base ongoing support that we're providing. The children with complex special needs actually has funding of about

\$100 million. That support is so important to families, and we recognize that, which is why we are providing additional support and additional funding to it.

I'll just talk about one initiative which is called the Integrated Pathway for Children and Youth with Extensive Needs. It was an investment of \$97 million over three years, and it was in partnership with CHEO, Holland Bloorview and McMaster Children's Hospital. That helped with about 1,100 children and youth with complex needs. So you think about the supports that 1,100 families are now getting—that specialized care and support through this one initiative, which was backed by \$97 million.

As far as the Ontario Autism Program that you're referring to, MPP Clancy, that's exactly the reason we not only doubled the program—we increased it by \$60 million and then increased it by an additional \$60 million, to now more than \$720 million in funding annually. That is to provide more families with more support than ever before, and part of that—and, again, I'll go back to what the program used to offer: 8,500 families across the province had access to support in our province. That was it. There were no additional supports or funding. Now tens of thousands of families are accessing some of the programs.

You talked about the entry to school. I know you speak to your constituents. They will tell you about the impact that entry to school, one of the programs, has on their child. These are programs and services that are having a huge impact on them as they get ready for school—or the family foundational service, or the caregiver-mediated program.

Ms. Aislinn Clancy: Is there a way to look into some of those who have experienced these long wait times? This is one family, and I've had many others with these excessively long wait times.

I do appreciate the investment, but I think we have to acknowledge that there are some who've waited a very long time and they're buckling. So I hope that you'll consider looking into some of those families who've had really long wait times.

I do think an expansion of the entry to school program would alleviate a lot of pressure. As a school social worker, I've seen so many kids end up in kindergarten classrooms—I think if you talk to anyone in the Ministry of Education, they'll say it's curveball after curveball after curveball every September. We know that this is happening.

1440

I want to bring it to housing, and I will just beg again for an increase in shelter costs for ODSP and OW, to meet even whatever CMHC says shelter costs—I'll beg that, and I'll beg you to stop the cutbacks for OW. None of us in this room pay 50% tax. People on OW, after they make \$900, pay 50%—of a clawback. That's excessive. That's inhumane. If we really want people to get toward labour fulfillment and to alleviate poverty and alleviate homelessness, we have to pay what shelter costs, and we have to encourage people to want to work. If I got a 50% tax, I probably wouldn't want to work as much. So we have to stop that—\$900 is not enough. Stop the clawback.

The housing, I will say, is especially relevant for folks with disabilities. I talked to service providers in my community who said that folks who are living with disabilities—the supportive housing that exists in the community isn't growing, and we are not seeing people leave the wait-lists. In my community, we have the same number of people in supportive housing as on the wait-list, so they say that someone has to die, be in the hallway of a hospital or have a parent pass away in order for them to get an emergency spot, if possible.

Can you tell me what you're doing to address the housing shortages for folks with disabilities?

Hon. Michael Parsa: Thanks for the question.

I'll just start by saying that we are investing more than \$3.5 billion in the developmental services sector; just to put that in perspective, MPP Clancy, that is \$1.2 billion more than when we formed government six years ago.

Of the supportive living that you're referencing, of the \$3.5 billion—

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

Hon. Michael Parsa: Thank you, Chair—\$2.3 billion funds more supportive living; that is an increase of \$798 million from when we formed government.

Through budget 2024, there were additional funding increases, and the developmental services sector saw an increase of \$90 million in the sector. They do important work; they do great work. It has been our government that has continuously provided support to them as much—when you look at increase—

Ms. Aislinn Clancy: Can you talk about spaces, though—like number of beds people funded. I know dollars because—

Hon. Michael Parsa: We could talk about some of the specifics if you—

Ms. Aislinn Clancy: Yes. Even if you follow up with me—how that can grow or what the plan is to grow those beds—

Hon. Michael Parsa: I wanted to ask ADM Clarke Julien, but if we won't have time, then perhaps yes, we can do that.

When you provide investments, it also provides more support on the ground. And like I said, when you increase investment by—out of \$3.5 billion, when you increase, that's an increase—

The Chair (Mr. Steve Clark): Thanks, Minister. That's all the time we've got for this round.

We'll move to the government. MPP Pang.

Mr. Billy Pang: Mr. Chair, through you to the minister: Thank you for the presentation and sharing, and answering the questions earlier. To me, it's very impressive that the ministry is providing so much support, investments and initiatives for the social services; compared to the previous government, it's historic.

My question is on women's economic empowerment programs. While women's participation in the workforce has advanced in recent years, women continue to face barriers to employment and are under-represented in key sectors, like STEM fields and skilled trades. So what is the

ministry doing to help women overcome barriers and build careers in vital sectors with better-paying jobs?

Hon. Charmaine A. Williams: Thank you, MPP Pang, for the question.

Our government is working to help women across the province thrive at home, at work, and in their communities. Women's participation in Ontario's economy is critical to their prosperity and independence, and it's also key to addressing the pressing labour shortages that we see in vital sectors here in Ontario. It also promotes economic security and independence for survivors, helping to prevent gender-based violence and to support recovery.

We are removing barriers so that more women can excel as entrepreneurs, as leaders in sectors where need is greatest and in the jobs where they are under-represented, like skilled trades and STEM fields. This includes promoting a wide range of fields and careers to women and girls through our elementary and high school curricula as well as our skilled trades strategy. It also includes helping entrepreneurs find support and resources to foster more women-led businesses through programs like Digital Main Street, Futurpreneur Canada and the Racialized and Indigenous Support for Entrepreneurs Grant, the RAISE Grant.

Chair, I would like to take a few moments to outline in more detail how our government supports the dreams and aspirations of women entrepreneurs in Ontario. As the minister for women's social and economic opportunity, I have a particular passion for supporting Ontario women who are entrepreneurs or who are seeking to become entrepreneurs and to help build our province further.

That's why Ontario recognizes Women's Entrepreneurship Day, coming up on November 19 each year. Put out a post, highlight somebody in your community who is an entrepreneur, and let's get the message out there—because if you can see me, you can be me; that's the message we're trying to put out. It's a day to celebrate and support the incredible array of women entrepreneurs and small business owners in this province.

Our economy depends on innovation and entrepreneurship. Some of the best stories in this area are being told by Ontario women. In 2020, an estimated 19% of small and medium-sized businesses across the province were majority women-owned, which is good, but it should be even better; we should have more. While women entrepreneurs represent an important part of our province's business ecosystem, women continue experiencing unique and systemic barriers to starting and growing their businesses. Research shows that Indigenous and racialized women are more likely to be majority owners of small businesses compared to other women. However, they can face even greater barriers when starting and scaling their businesses.

That's why Ontario has been leading a range of initiatives and commitments to build a better foundation under women who own small businesses or who are entrepreneurs. To help small businesses and entrepreneurs, our government continues to fund a network of 17

regional innovation centres and 47 business enterprise centres, to support small businesses.

Women are equally critical to helping Ontario address many of the pressing labour shortages that our economy faces. That's why I have a particular interest in focusing on attracting more women and girls to the tech and construction sectors.

Our government has implemented a four-year plan to increase awareness of and exposure to technology and skilled trades and apprenticeship pathways.

In fact, women are significantly under-represented in many of the skilled trades, which can be very entrepreneurial, and a mobile occupation. Our government is making an historic investment of more than \$1 billion over four years to the skilled trades strategy. That has gone to the funding of women-led training centres, like A Women's Work. Women make up less than 5% of Ontario's construction workforce, and less than 30% of workers in the skilled-trades-related occupations are women. Over the next decade, Ontario will need over 100,000 workers in the construction sector alone, so there is a tremendous opportunity here for women to be a part of the solution—and women are picking up this area.

I've been meeting with women across Ontario, and they are highly interested in getting into the skilled trades. They see how it has changed their family members' lives, or their father was a skilled trades worker—maybe discouraged to get into it, but now they're seeing the value of getting into it, even as a second career. Careers in this sector are exciting. They're diverse and in demand, with good pay and benefits.

As our Premier said, when you've got a trade, you've got a job and entrepreneurial skill for life.

My ministry is also offering targeted training, skills development and employment programs for women experiencing social and economic barriers such as poverty and gender-based violence.

Chair, we also see an important role for women-owned small businesses in our economy.

Small businesses are the backbone of Ontario's economy, representing 98% of all businesses and employing millions of people. That's why our government is committed to making Ontario the best place in Canada to start and grow a business.

Through important programs like Futurpreneur, regional innovation centres and Starter Company Plus, we are equipping entrepreneurs with the tools and training needed to succeed in today's digital economy.

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Late in 2022, we launched our \$10-million new Digitalization Competence Centre, which provides training and support to small businesses looking to leverage emerging equipment and processes.

Now, we have our young entrepreneurs—and we provide \$3 million in total funding to Futurpreneur Canada; and through the 2023 budget, we invested an additional \$2 million, bringing the total up to \$5 million.

The Digital Main Street program has helped Ontario small businesses boost their online presence and digitally

transform so that they can better compete and reach new customers in today's digital economy. We've seen how the pandemic forced many businesses to pivot, and because of that, we've seen a large number of women-owned businesses being able to go onto the online market to continue to operate during such a tumultuous time and after. Since 2020, the province has invested almost \$120 million into the Digital Main Street, with an additional \$40 million allocated throughout 2024. That's a total of \$160 million towards this program that has helped thousands of businesses in Ontario continue to keep moving.

Ontario is fortunate to have an incredible array of women entrepreneurs and small business owners strengthening our economy. Helping women participate in the workforce as entrepreneurs and innovators helps them support themselves and their families and achieve financial independence. That, to me, is key. I worked in this sector for many years before becoming a politician. Many women ended up going back to unsafe relationships, abusive relationships, because they couldn't afford to stay away. If we get more women, empower them, help them rebuild their lives through our programs across Ontario, we're going to see them build their financial independence, which is key to their safety.

Chair, we've also introduced changes to make our workplaces safer and more welcoming for women. This is key for our skilled trades sector. It includes ensuring access to at least one women's-only washroom and requiring menstrual products on larger construction sites, providing properly fitted equipment, and requiring that washrooms are clean and sanitary—something that some people might find trivial, but I've been able to go on construction sites, and women on the sites have come up to me and said, "Thank you for ensuring that this is happening." One woman told me that she would have to park and change at the nearest Tim Hortons before going to the job site because she knew that there weren't sufficient and adequate clean washrooms for her to be able to change in. By making this change, we are getting more women to feel comfortable to be on the job site, and we're changing the culture of these job sites, which is key.

We're also investing in targeted employment and training supports to help women overcome socio-economic barriers, build skills, gain employment or start their own businesses, so they can achieve financial independence. This training is provided through our ministry's flagship programs—we have the Women's Economic Security Program and the Investing in Women's Futures Program.

In August, I was pleased to announce an investment of up to \$26.7 million over three years to support 25 local programs across the province through the Women's Economic Security Program. This new round of funding is supporting the continuation of 16 previously funded programs, as well as an additional nine, so that more women have access to supports to increase their skills and get better-paying jobs. This builds on the expansion of the Investing in Women's Futures Program that I announced last year. With an additional \$6.9 million invested over three years, we have added 10 new program locations and

increased our total investment to the program to \$14.5 million, from 2022 to 2025—and in 2023 to 2024, we added an additional francophone delivery site.

While supporting women's participation in the workforce, we are also working with partners across the government to provide broader supports for women. That includes improving access to child care, making child care more affordable, getting more affordable and attainable housing built faster so that women can have a safe place to call home—and mental health and addictions needs, through our Roadmap to Wellness strategy.

We will continue to work together with our partners to improve opportunities for Ontario women, because we know that when women succeed, Ontario succeeds.

And we'll continue to meet with the women who have come up to me and shared their personal stories of how they've been able to see their lives completely transform through some of the programs that are offered. We offer programs at George Brown College. We have programs at St. Clair. The feeling of empowerment and life change and knowing that they are able to support not only themselves, but their children and also their larger family, has been really transformative for these women.

I will turn it over to Deputy Cole to provide any further response that she may have.

Ms. Denise Cole: Thank you, Associate Minister Williams. I'm pleased to expand on the work that our ministry is doing to increase women's social and economic opportunity.

As Associate Minister Williams mentioned, our ministry delivers two flagship programs to help women overcome barriers, build skills and gain employment: the Women's Economic Security Program, and the Investing in Women's Futures Program.

The Women's Economic Security Program offers training to low-income women in four streams: the skilled trades, entrepreneurship, information technology, and general employment. To help remove barriers to participating, the training programs also include additional supports such as providing meals throughout the training day, transportation to and from training, and support funding child care. Through the program, women, including those who have experienced or are at risk of gender-based violence, can also access wraparound supports, including referral to mental health and well-being supports, counselling, housing and legal support. This program is designed to help low-income women gain skills, knowledge and experience, including in fields where women are under-represented, such as information technology and skilled trades. A few examples of these unique programs that we have been able to fund—community organizations—are the YWCA's mobile application development program, which improves the employment skills of low-income immigrant and refugee women in the fields of technology and communication and provides current industry-led certifications; Connecture Canada's entrepreneurship program, which supports women from francophone, Black, immigrant and racialized communities to gain the knowledge and experience they need to start a hair-

braiding business; and Canadore College's general carpenter pre-apprenticeship program, which provides training mostly to Indigenous women with low incomes to help them prepare for jobs in the construction industry.

The Investing in Women's Futures Program is also helping women build skills, get jobs and start businesses, while also increasing their well-being. The program provides flexible services and employment readiness for women facing social and economic barriers, including those experiencing gender-based violence and social isolation. Through the program, women have access to services such as employment readiness, counselling, life skills, employment assistance, financial literacy and gender-based violence prevention programming, to help them overcome barriers and transition to employment. As a result of the expansion of the program last year, it is now available at 11 new locations across the province, bringing the total number of sites to 34, so more women can access the supports they need—this includes newly funding organizations serving Indigenous, Black, racialized, newcomers, francophone women and women experiencing homelessness across the province. For example, Roots Community Services Inc. serves primarily Black, African and Caribbean communities, providing a 12-week program focused on social enterprise, where women will build confidence, heal from past trauma and build towards financial independence.

Keepers of the Circle uses a holistic approach to build pathways for Indigenous women, girls and 2SLGBTQIA+ individuals to pursue meaningful careers. This includes entrepreneurship, skills development, sector-specific training and culturally appropriate wraparound supports for those experiencing gender-based violence.

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The Women's Multicultural Resource and Counselling Centre of Durham provides specialized trauma-informed counselling, financial empowerment, skill-based training, mentorship and self-help support. They support women, including young women and women experiencing homelessness, through entrepreneurship and worker co-operative development programs.

Based on testimonials from participants in the Women's Economic Security Program, which we get through our program evaluations, we know that women have received help to get off social assistance; pay off their student loans and debts; regain their self-esteem, confidence and independence; start up their own ventures; grow their own businesses; find full-time careers in fields they love; and rejoin life. Many of the testimonials acknowledge the dedicated front-line staff leading this work in communities, providing tireless support and encouragement to women. We thank all of the organizations delivering the program for their work.

Combined, the Investing in Women's Futures Program and the Women's Economic Security Program served more than 14,000 women from 2021 to 2023. In addition to supporting women's participation in the workforce, these programs are crucial to prevention and supporting women's economic independence to enable them to leave

circumstances of gender-based violence, and supporting their recovery.

The Chair (Mr. Steve Clark): Deputy, there's one minute remaining.

Ms. Denise Cole: Thank you, Chair.

The \$26.7-million investment in the Women's Economic Security Program announced in August is part of Ontario's four-year action plan to prevent and address gender-based violence. In addition to the province's \$15-million investment in the program, Ontario is providing up to another \$11.7 million through the bilateral agreement with the federal government, through the National Action Plan to End Gender-Based Violence. In August, the ministry also announced another key part of this action plan, launching a call for proposals for new community-based programs, which Associate Minister Williams noted. This is in addition to working closely with partner ministries to provide a stronger socio-economic environment for women so they have the opportunity to play a full and robust role in our province's post-pandemic economic recovery. With support across government, we're—

The Chair (Mr. Steve Clark): Thank you, Deputy. I appreciate the response.

We'll now move to the third round—the official opposition, a 20-minute round. MPP Gélinas.

M^{me} France Gélinas: My first series of questions has to do with funding to the Integrated Services for Northern Children. Anybody who knows about this program, come on up.

When can the Integrated Services for Northern Children program expect an increase in their base budget? And why is it that other services are getting a little bit of an increase but the services specifically for northerners are not?

Hon. Michael Parsa: I will make sure that we can clarify this, but service providers, as I mentioned, through budget 2024, MPP Gélinas, all saw an increase in funding, in their base funding increase, as of—in budget 2024. But if you don't mind, we'll put that in one of the things to take away and get back to you on it, just to confirm—unless you have, ADM Morris—

Ms. Jennifer Morris: I can answer part of your question, if you'd like.

M^{me} France Gélinas: Sure.

Ms. Jennifer Morris: The Integrated Services for Northern Children: The annual allocation for that is \$32.4 million. It serves roughly 3,300 children in the north.

In total, though, in northern Ontario, we are investing from the ministry close to \$96 million in services for children with special needs. That includes an increase of about \$13.5 million over the last four years. Those increases came through a number of investments the government made—the first in 2021, in children's rehabilitation and preschool speech and language; about \$5.8 million was invested. In 2023, through a pediatric recovery investment, an additional \$5.5 million was invested in the north, again, for children's rehab and preschool speech and language. This coming year, about \$625,000 is being invested in maternal health support, so that's some of the

programs that you heard about earlier—the Healthy Babies Healthy Children Program and the Infant and Child Development Program. Also, in 2024, about \$1.4 million is being invested in the north to address service pressures across all of those systems. We expect, in 2024, the total investment in the north for children with special needs is \$95.9 million.

M^{me} France Gélinas: Coming back to Integrated Services for Northern Children: I serve 33 little communities. Whether we talk about Ivanhoe or Foleyet or Biscotasing or Shining Tree, those are all little communities—too small to have any service providers. So they depend on Integrated Services for Northern Children for any services that the children need, whether it has to do—you know the program; I'm guessing most of the rest of you don't. But for some strange reason, if the child also has autism, he or she is no longer allowed to have Integrated Services for Northern Children, although this is the only way for kids to gain access to services. Who dreamed that up?

Ms. Jennifer Morris: MPP Gélinas, that should not be the case, and I would like to follow up on that for you. Children who are engaged in the Ontario Autism Program are not excluded from any of our other special-needs programs. So I'm not sure why they're getting that response, but we'd be happy to follow up with them.

M^{me} France Gélinas: So I get from you that if a parent has applied and has a little bit of funds for the transition to school through the autism program, they will still gain access to the education services that come from Integrated Services for Northern Children?

Ms. Jennifer Morris: They would not be excluded from determining their eligibility for integrated services by virtue of the fact that they're receiving autism funding. I know there are other requirements of that program that they—it's a multi-agency, multi-ministry response to very complex needs for children, but by virtue of the fact that they are receiving Ontario Autism Program funding does not preclude them from being considered for that funding. So if that's the response a family is receiving, we'd be happy to follow up on that.

M^{me} France Gélinas: Who do I call? I expect a phone call.

Hon. Michael Parsa: Please send it over.

The Chair (Mr. Steve Clark): The minister is pointing to himself.

Hon. Michael Parsa: Yes, absolutely.

M^{me} France Gélinas: Okay, good enough.

Question number two has to do with children's treatment centres. The same thing—I was happy to hear the minister, in his opening statement, talk about the \$14 million to construct children's treatment centres, to look after children with special needs. The children's treatment centres have had to change the ways they provide services to some of the kids with the highest needs because of funding. Where it used to be that you would go in until the child is ready to move on, now, you have an eight-week program—you qualify for a 12-week program, and at the end of the eight weeks or 12 weeks, it doesn't matter if you're finished or not; the wait-list is so long that you have

to move on. Why can we not fund our children's treatment centres in a way that will support the kids with usually the highest needs, so that, if you support them now, they will do so much better in the future? Where do those eight weeks for this diagnostic—and if you have an amputation, you have 12 weeks to learn to use this, and in 12 weeks, whether it works or not, you're off the list. Again, when they speak to me, they all say, "It comes because of funding." What in the funding of children's treatment centres don't you understand—that the kids may need more than eight weeks in order to get their new prosthesis to walk the way they're supposed to, but the children's treatment centres don't have enough money to keep them on.

1510

Hon. Michael Parsa: A couple of points, MPP Gélinas, before I ask ADM Morris for some of the specifics—and you are right; we are investing in children's treatment centres across the province. I'll name four, just to be exact. So \$98 million in the Grandview children's treatment centre in Ajax; \$416 million in CHEO, 1Door4Care; \$59 million in Children's Treatment Centre of Chatham-Kent; and \$60 million in Lansdowne Children's Centre, thanks to a lot of the advocacy of some of our—and, of course, the MPP for Brantford-Brant, who is a champion—

M^{me} France Gélinas: But that is for capital. I'm all for capital—

Hon. Michael Parsa: So that's just capital.

Also, if you remember, through the investment that we made toward children's rehabilitation programs, \$45 million of that went through supports to exactly the programs that you're talking about—children's treatment centres. Many of our partners were there at the announcement, talking to me afterwards about what this is going to mean for their local children's treatment centres across the province, when I made that announcement with Minister Jones in Ottawa, at CHEO.

So you're absolutely right; there's a need, and that's why we increased investments. This is why, through budget 2024, we increased some of the supports. Most of it was base funding, so it's ongoing for some of our partners—because we know the importance of this program.

ADM Morris, can you expand on some of the northern children's treatment centres that MPP Gélinas is referring to, please?

Ms. Jennifer Morris: Thank you, Minister.

As the minister noted, since 2021, base funding for children's rehabilitation services has increased by \$105 million a year through two investments, one in 2021 and one in 2023. The northern region received over \$11.3 million of those investments—that annual investment.

Decisions like you are describing are typically clinical decisions. We don't dictate those clinical decisions. The clinicians at the children's treatment centre would determine an appropriate level of service for a child receiving service. So I can't comment specifically on the examples that you've given. That would not be a direction from the ministry.

The ministry has, though, through these government investments over the last four years, increased the capacity of all children's treatment centres, to reduce wait-lists and serve more kids.

M^{me} France Gélinas: Have you ever looked at the pay scale in a children's treatment centre versus other health care centres? Children's treatment centres have OTs, PTs, speech pathologists, social workers. If all of them make, on average, \$15,000, \$20,000 less a year than if they go next door to a hospital to work—because hospitals also hire OTs, PTs, speech pathologists and social workers—how do you expect children's treatment centres in northern Ontario to be able to recruit and retain a stable workforce? Working with disabled children requires specialty skills—not only are you a PT or an OT; you have the speciality skills to do pediatrics. Yet, if you work in a children's treatment centre, you will be paid way less than if you work in another care setting—and when they come to me, it's always, "We don't have the budget, France, to do that."

Hon. Michael Parsa: If you don't mind, ADM Morris, I'll just start off.

Two things: One of them is, as I mentioned to you, through the investment that we made, which is an annual investment of \$45 million additional funding—it was part of an announcement of \$330 million for pediatric care support in our province; of that, \$45 million specifically is earmarked through our ministry to provide those supports. You're absolutely right; we want to make sure that those supports are there in the communities, and we certainly are mindful of rural and northern communities. That's one of the reasons that, as I mentioned to you, through budget 2024, we increased those base fundings so that, specifically to your point, some of these organizations that you're referring to have the supports to be able to deal with some of the pressures and to hire more people to provide those supports. That came through budget 2024.

But if anything specific to northern—ADM Morris, would you please add?

Ms. Jennifer Morris: Thank you, Minister Parsa.

The one thing I would add to the minister's remarks is, we are investing in workforce capacity through the Ontario Autism Program and heavily investing in the north. The focus of that program is to invest in clinical capacity in the north. In the last two rounds of funding for our workforce capacity fund, 130 clinician jobs were supported in the north, exactly in the areas you've described—in speech-language pathology, in occupational therapy, in applied behaviour analysis. So we are investing. We know that health human resources is challenging in the north, and competing across sectors is also challenging, so we are trying to target our investments accordingly.

M^{me} France Gélinas: In communities that I serve that are too small to have—they do not have those clinicians on, but there are children with autism throughout all of the communities that I serve.

Can you see that the program that you have where you give money to the parents to go buy something that does

not exist in the community is not functioning in northern Ontario? Would you be open to what we had before? We had not-for-profit agencies that would put a treatment plan together, that would move into Biscotasing, that would go into Ivanhoe Lake, that would set up things and train people locally and then link them up. The private sector has no interest in doing this. It takes eight hours to drive from Sudbury to Foleyet or Ivanhoe for one client. Nobody wants that, and I don't blame them. But those kids still need equitable access—it's not because you live in northern Ontario that you should not gain access to basic care.

Hon. Michael Parsa: You're 100% right—which is exactly what ADM Morris was referring to when we talked about the workforce capacity fund. She mentioned the two rounds, but we have continued that investment, and with a specific lens on northern Ontario and rural communities across the province. That's exactly what we're doing through that—and that's just one area, the workforce capacity fund.

ADM Morris, if you don't mind, can you expand specifically on what, through this workforce capacity fund—because we have northern Ontario, rural communities, francophone communities, and want to make sure that there are supports across the province. I think that would be of interest to MPP Gélinas.

Ms. Jennifer Morris: Thanks, Minister.

In this third round of our workforce capacity fund—and it's over \$20 million a year that's invested in service provision—17 of the projects are in the north, and that totals about \$3.6 million this coming year, again, intended on exactly what you've described: building the clinical capacity, increasing the quality of care through training—mental health training, Indigenous cultural competency training—but primarily to build the workforce in the north that we need to deliver services to children.

Also, just in response to your question—I know children's treatment centres have tried to implement other approaches. Virtual care is not appropriate for all kids for all things, but it is appropriate for some, and it allows children's treatment centres to reach into some of the small communities you've described more successfully.

We've also funded dedicated-capacity programs through child and community resources in Sudbury and Hands community health, as well as One Kids Place. They are all building either technology approaches or virtual approaches to service delivery. They're creating satellite sites to serve, again, children who are harder to reach because they're farther away.

So we're trying to develop and implement a number of different approaches to reach those families who may be in more remote regions.

M^{me} France Gélinas: But can you see how the for-profit “buy services” do not work in northern Ontario, when the communities are too small to support a provider? You're never going to have a therapist set up shop in Gogama, in Ivanhoe, in Biscotasing, in Shining Tree, in all of the communities that I serve, because they are just too small. They would never be able to make a business—and

the next community is four hours' drive away. It doesn't make sense.

The thing that did make sense was when we had not-for-profit agencies that were responsible for the territory and would send, would invest—yes, it costs more to service the people I'm representing, but they deserve equitable access, and right now they do not get that, and families suffer. And kids who will never reach their full potential suffer, because although they may qualify for \$10,000 through the autism—there is nothing they can do with it but hop in their car, drive for four hours to get one, two, three days of therapy and then drive back. That's not how you help a child on the autism spectrum. We all know that. We're not clinicians, but we know that this is not going to work. But that's all that's available to the people I serve.

1520

You have to look at other models than what you have. Would you be willing to do that?

Hon. Michael Parsa: MPP Gélinas, I'll reiterate what I said earlier: We will do everything we can, and we'll always look at ways to make sure that we improve the system, depending on the area within the province. This is why I mentioned to you the investments that we're making. They're much-needed investments. We're also looking at seeing how these investments relate to different parts of the province—to your point, in northern Ontario. Yes, we'll take it back, and we'll always look at what else we could do to make sure that the services that are being provided are the best possible for people who are relying on these services.

Some of the examples that I just made of the investments that we're making are just part of the picture. This is a more holistic view—us working with the Ministry of Health—

M^{me} France Gélinas: But it is so disconnected to my reality, Minister.

Sudbury Action Centre for Youth just closed. They had been in our community for decades. They closed because they're not getting funding from your ministry anymore.

The Sudbury chapter of the learning disability association—they have been in my community for 21 years. They closed on Friday, just before the weekend, because they're not getting any funding from your ministry anymore.

There's a disconnect. You're telling me that you're investing in the north, you see that we have different ways of servicing the people of the north, but yet agencies that have been there for decades, that have received funds from your ministry for decades, are now closing. SACY, Sudbury Action Centre for Youth, has helped thousands and thousands of youth—same thing with the learning disability association, and now zero money comes from your ministry, and they are closed. They're not closing; they're closed, as of Friday.

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

Hon. Michael Parsa: Thanks very much for the feedback.

I will just tell you, I have travelled to the north on multiple occasions, meeting with many of our partners. Again, depending on where you are in the province, the services that you're describing, there are different needs, which is why we always have an approach where it's not a one-size-fits-all. There are different solutions depending on where you are in the province. That's why these conversations with our partners are ongoing. This is why, when I travel and speak to some of these service providers to get that feedback, to say, "What's working here? What else can we do to improve the system?"—that's the feedback that I get when I travel, that direct feedback from those service providers. In the north, specifically, whether it was in Thunder Bay or whether it was in Kitchenuhmaykoosib Inninuwug or any of the northern communities—I travelled to Thunder Bay four times to be able to talk to some of our partners directly on the ground. Yes, I do meet them. Yes, we talk through email and telephone, but—

The Chair (Mr. Steve Clark): Minister, thank you very much. That ends this round for the official opposition.

We'll now go to the 10-minute round for the independent member. MPP Clancy.

Ms. Aislinn Clancy: I'm going to do my little rant to start off, and then I'll get to my question; I apologize.

I do want to bring up housing again. I hope that both of you honourable ministers are able to meet with our Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing, because I do believe that some of the pressures that your ministries see have a lot to do with gaps in the investments in affordable housing and the protection of affordable housing that exists in our community—as quoted by a housing expert at the University of Waterloo, who said that for every affordable unit we build, my region of Waterloo, with three Conservative members, loses 39 units of affordable housing; for every one we build, we lose 39.

I've worked with women experiencing intimate partner violence, as a school social worker, who stay with their abusive partner, not only because they continue to wait on the wait-list—my wait-list has not moved. There are 9,000 people in Waterloo region—200,000 across the province. She sits in that abusive relationship because she has nowhere to go. And I think we see that because the shelter costs are a fraction of the cost of apartments, OW and ODSP go nowhere to addressing homelessness in our community. That's why we see 1,400 encampments, and those are just the ones that we know about—but we know encampments are far greater than that.

My question is about the children's aid society. I asked one of my former colleagues to tell me her impression—because we've seen a 180 due to the deficits and the gaps in our communities. On one hand, we see children's aid societies facing budget constraints, and we also see—I, as a social worker, left my field because I was cleaning up systemic messes. I can't do my job if there's nowhere for someone to go. I can't address the stress of a single mother who is facing homelessness and eviction that has exploded in our province, and I'm faced with that reality.

This was the quote: "The pendulum has swung way too far. Kids are at risk and not getting supports or services. Family and children services used to be a support. They used to be able to get access to some of this help, but they're not funded for that any longer." I think the FAO said there's a gap of \$63 million.

Can you tell me about those funding gaps? I'd like to see the five-year data on those gaps, because we know inflation is real. We could talk about the increase in funding, but if inflation has gone up, we know those costs have gone up. So can you speak about the funding gaps for children's aid societies, please, over the last five years?

Hon. Michael Parsa: We definitely can go back and provide you with some more information.

But I will tell you, when it comes to providing children and youth who are in care, the support to societies—the investment has increased to \$1.7 billion this year—

Ms. Aislinn Clancy: I want to know about the gaps, though.

Hon. Michael Parsa: Yes. I want to provide you with some context because it's important, when you look at the overall funding. When you increase the funding of the program by substantial investments—because we will never waver from our commitment: making sure that children and youth are served and protected and have an opportunity to succeed and thrive. That needs to be backed by investments. And we have done that.

We're now investing \$1.7 billion in 50 children's aid societies, 13 of which are Indigenous children's aid societies.

The investments that I want to reference before I just ask ADM Chihab to add some information to it are an increase of \$14 million this year for child protection services; \$41.7 million exactly towards the budget 2024, that we increased the societies' funding by; a \$76.3-million increase to societies in funding last year that we provided, all while—care has gone down by 29% over the last 10 years.

ADM Chihab, if you don't mind, I'm going to ask if you can provide some more context to some of the figures that I just shared with MPP Clancy.

Ms. Linda Chihab: Certainly. Over the past five years, we've provided an additional \$55.1 million to societies that have had deficits. So last year, \$15.6 million—completely cleared our deficit. In 2022-23, \$10.4 million was provided; in 2021-22, \$2.1 million. In 2020—\$21.0 million; and then in 2019-20, \$6 million. So that totals \$55 million—

Ms. Aislinn Clancy: And that was, kind of, emergency funding to fight the fire?

Ms. Linda Chihab: That is any deficit that a society has had.

As Minister Parsa says, when we look at the investigations—investigations 10 years ago was, there were 81,000 investigations; in today's context, there are 64. Protection cases was 27,000, almost 28,000—in today's context, this year, there's 14,000. So the reduction in numbers has been significant, not just from a perspective of decrease by

29%—but actually, there’s a decrease of 64% of children in extended care and 49% in open protection cases.

Ms. Aislinn Clancy: I know I’ve heard—and this is anecdotal, but I do think the investigations are less. There are things that I used to get an investigation for that, shockingly, I don’t anymore. So that’s my lived experience as somebody who has been calling, for 11 years, to notice a very different reality, and I think some of that has to do with shifts to make budget cuts.

Is there a possibility to get that data—between the funded amount and the deficit amount?

The Chair (Mr. Steve Clark): Deputy?

Ms. Aislinn Clancy: Thank you for that. I do appreciate you fighting the fire, but it is a stressful circumstance for societies.

Ms. Denise Cole: I’d like to understand better the gaps that are being referred to. There is a funding formula that we use to fund the children’s aid societies, and it’s not only about investigation; it’s kinship care, access to education and so forth—prevention. Are you talking about the gaps between their allocated amount and the deficit amount?

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Ms. Aislinn Clancy: Yes, there’s a variety of things. I think that there’s some burnout, maybe due to systemic issues like systemic racism and overrepresentation. I know there’s a gap, or stress that families receive much less than a foster care in terms of the funding—a tenth of the amount goes to kin care versus foster care. The quote I had was \$63 million—gap.

I talked to our children’s aid society—they said it’s a 10-year low and a crisis that they’re feeling.

Let me get my quote for the \$63 million—I thought that was from the FAO.

Ms. Denise Cole: Because you mentioned the overrepresentation and so forth—we’ve annualized the \$800,000 in funding to support One Vision One Voice, which is to support the delivery of culturally appropriate services and address the systemic racism and outcome disparities that are experienced by African Canadian and Black children, youth and families in the child welfare system. We do have annualized funding for a number of areas. We’re providing \$1.5 million to support the development of sector-wide initiatives to improve outcomes for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, two-spirit and queer children, youth and families in the system.

If the question is, “Why are we seeing children’s aid societies with deficits?”—it’s a question the ministry also has. That’s one of the reasons that we are currently doing some work, at the request of the minister, to better understand why we are seeing the deficits that we are, not in all children’s aid societies, but in some children’s aid societies. There are some children’s aid societies where we continually see deficits year over year over year, and despite government, each year, addressing those, it continues. So we want to have a better understanding of those societies—

The Chair (Mr. Steve Clark): There’s one minute left in this round.

Ms. Denise Cole:—that we’re seeing the systemic issues.

Ms. Aislinn Clancy: I’m looking at the research I’ve done about Windsor-Essex, Waterloo region etc. It’s a crisis across the whole province. Again, that was quoted from my local—I’m not sure why the difference, but I think it’s important.

I agree that the complexity—and maybe that’s where we dig with the Ministry of Education, because I think the complex needs of students in schools, the gap there, and the complex needs of students in care are based in the same root cause.

I do hope you could respond to the housing—but maybe I’ll leave it for next time.

Can you acknowledge that a lot of women stay in abusive relationships because of the lack of affordable housing in our communities, Honourable Williams?

Hon. Michael Parsa: If you don’t mind, maybe just before Minister Williams answers, I will tell you that, through an investment of \$18.5 million in transitional housing support, we are providing that for women who are fleeing—

The Chair (Mr. Steve Clark): Minister, I’m so sorry. We’ve completed this round.

We’ll now go to the government for their 20-minute round. MPP Grewal.

Mr. Hardeep Singh Grewal: It’s great to be here. It’s good to see you, Minister Parsa and Associate Minister Williams.

My question today is going to be around affordability. As Ontario continues to face an affordability crisis, the ministry—we wanted to know, what kind of measures have they put in place since 2018 to make life more affordable for Ontarians?

I wanted to talk specifically about the social assistance rate increase. As we continue to face this affordability crisis, many people are struggling to keep up with the rising costs. What is your ministry doing to help people on social assistance so they can better support themselves and their family during these challenging times—and if you can highlight some of the things the ministry has done overall since 2018 to help make life more affordable for Ontarians.

Hon. Michael Parsa: Thanks very much for the question. It’s a very important question, especially now, as you know, as I mentioned, with those who are affected by high rates of inflation, elevated interest rates and just financial uncertainty. That’s really a global issue right now, but it has an impact on everyone, and it has an impact on the most vulnerable the most. And I will tell you, those who are feeling the pinch—we wanted to make sure that we provide those supports.

I’ll talk to you about the Ontario Disability Support Program that I briefly referenced earlier. It’s this government that has made the largest increases to ODSP rates in decades in this province. And we went a step further: We indexed rates to inflation so they can continue to keep up with the rise of the cost of living in our province. Right now, almost 17% is what rates of ODSP have increased in the last two years, since the last election—and it’s more than that. Those who are able to

work—there was an income threshold that was set at \$200. That's how much they could work. We increased that to \$1,000. So those who are on ODSP who are able to work can now work—up to \$1,000, before it impacts their benefits. That's a substantial change that we made. Right now, an individual in Ontario with ODSP can receive up to \$1,368, plus that additional funding—as I mentioned, to up to \$1,000. We also increased the rates of children with severe disabilities on that program, by also increasing that by 4.5% as of this July, and, again, indexed that to inflation—so that rate and that increase to families has now gone up to \$646 a month.

When it comes to providing social assistance—and, as you know, part of that involves partnership with municipalities when it comes to Ontario Works, in particular. As I mentioned earlier, at AMO, to our partners, I announced that we are increasing their funding for them to be able to provide more support to clients who need assistance.

MPP Grewal, there are thousands of good-paying jobs in our province thanks to the great work that the Minister of Economic Development, Job Creation and Trade is doing. And of course, under the leadership of Premier Ford, there are good-paying jobs coming to our province. There are thousands of jobs that are not being filled. We want to make sure we connect people with those good-paying jobs. We want to make sure that they have the supports they need to become ready for those jobs if need be. That required us making some changes.

For example, when it comes to social assistance programs, now they can apply online, saving them a ton of time, rather than having to walk into an office, fill out the paperwork and wait for a decision. All of that is done, and they save hours, depending on where they are and depending on what MPP Gélinas was talking about—some of the challenges in northern and rural communities, for example. Now caseworkers on the ground can spend time to help people to become job-ready, depending on whatever support they need, whether it's employment, résumés, housing. All of that support can now be provided because now they have the time to be able to spend on clients on the ground as opposed to filling out paperwork and sending it. We have now streamlined all of that process so that the province will take that on and municipalities and caseworkers on the ground will be able to provide that person-to-person support that they need to be able to connect them with those opportunities. That's a decision that we made—and, again, these are thousands of jobs that are not being filled in our province, which we could.

I'll also talk about one other initiative—and you talk about affordability. Outside of all the other initiatives—which is, as you know, the LIFT tax credit, which either reduces or removes 1.7 million Ontarians off of the Ontario income tax bracket. It's a tax benefit through our government—the LIFT tax credit; the CARE tax credit that's provided to Ontarians.

When I became minister of this ministry, we started looking at some of the programs.

There's a program that's being offered through our schools called the Student Nutrition Program. The Student Nutrition Program is a partnership between us and lead agencies, community partners, municipalities—many partners are involved in this initiative. They provide breakfasts, lunches and snacks to kids in school. The federal government made an announcement about providing some supports towards this program.

Last year, we looked at this program and I asked our team to approve funding of \$5 million and then \$1.15 million—so an additional \$6.15 million—to the Student Nutrition Program and the First Nations Student Nutrition Program, to be able to provide support to these lead agencies that are providing this program across our province, which is many elementary schools etc. who are receiving these supports. Once we provided that, we went a step further. Minister Lecce, who was the Minister of Education at that time—and a great minister, if you recall—joined me at an announcement. I went to some of our partners and said, “We are putting these supports toward providing more support to the Student Nutrition Program,” and the partners stepped up as well. Towards a combined campaign, we put a program together that provided more supports to the program from these partners, which were several partners who had been always involved in this program. So not only did we increase the funding of the Student Nutrition Program and the First Nations Student Nutrition Program by \$6.15 million, but partners stepped up as well and provided an additional \$7 million towards this program. The province of Ontario's commitment was over \$38 million of support towards these two programs.

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You heard when I was mentioning to MPP Clancy as clearly as I can be that when it comes to this ministry and our government, we're open to any idea, any suggestion that will make life more affordable for Ontarians, because we get it. Our government has not raised a penny of taxes, as you know. In fact, we're reducing costs for Ontarians across the board, whether it's removing tolls; whether it's, as I mentioned to you, removing people off the Ontario income tax bracket; whether it's saving \$1,600 a year for someone who uses transit, annually—that's a huge investment—10.7 cents a litre of reduction when you go and pump gasoline in your car. These are initiatives that have been made by our government, but specific to our ministry, when it comes to providing support to those who are on ODSP, we did that. And because we tied that rate to inflation, they will continue seeing that every year, depending on the economy.

We're also looking at working with the federal government. As I mentioned, I was part of the FPT last week with the minister responsible, and we were very clear that we're open to any and all suggestions that make life more affordable for Ontarians. We want to make sure the process is not onerous. We want to make sure that any initiative doesn't come with unintended consequences and make it more challenging and difficult for those expecting this support.

Those are the decisions that we've made to make life more affordable for Ontarians through our ministry.

Mr. Hardeep Singh Grewal: I want to thank you for the great work that you do and the leadership that you've been providing us in this particular ministry, for children and community services, and especially thank you for meeting with so many stakeholders. It's not easy to be travelling back and forth across the province. I thank you for your passion that you have for connecting with the local communities and making sure that the programs you're introducing are also connecting with them at a grassroots level. Thank you for all of that.

Thank you, Associate Minister Williams, as well.

I'd like to share the rest of my time with my colleague MPP Laura Smith.

Ms. Laura Smith: Thank you.

Through you, Chair: I wanted to talk about something that is of specific interest to me. I used to work under the child protection act, specifically within the court system, and I know first-hand what happens when children and families don't receive the financial support they're entitled to. It's absolutely critical for a family that they have a maintained level of support.

What steps is the government taking to improve the collection and management of the child support to better support families in need?

Hon. Michael Parsa: It's a very important question. Thanks for that.

As you know, the Family Responsibility Office really plays a very important role in ensuring the financial security of families who count on this court-ordered support, and we're always looking through the offices to simplify the operation to help the families who depend on this support. Certainly, as the world becomes more connected, MPP Smith, it's important that we also work with other governments around the world to make sure that there's collaboration for people who are relying on these services, and really to avoid costly legal proceedings, whether it's in Ontario or elsewhere.

A major area for us in this was when we implemented the Hague convention here in the province of Ontario on the international recovery of child support and other forms of family maintenance. That convention, the treaty, came in on February 1 of this year. It's going to help us strengthen our ability to be able to enforce and collect support payments from over 55 countries now—growing as more countries sign on to the Hague convention—to be able to provide them with the supports through the Family Responsibility Office.

I'm just going to ask the deputy to provide you with a bit more information on the impact that this decision has on families who rely on these court-ordered supports and what it was like before, and how streamlined it would be now that we have more opportunities to be able to help them and support them as more and more countries sign on to this.

Ms. Denise Cole: Thanks very much, Minister Parsa.

The ministry, actually, was quite excited—there are not many things that we get too excited about, but this was one

of them—when the Hague convention came into effect, because we had been working on it for about 10 years. As the minister indicated, it strengthens our ability to enforce and collect support payments from over 55 countries across four continents. This is increasing as other countries join the convention.

We do know that most parents act responsibly and pay their child and spousal support, but the treaty has made it harder for the non-paying minority to escape their responsibility. It's now easier to obtain, change and enforce support orders across borders, and this critical step ensures that payers, no matter where they are, fulfill their obligations.

For families with complex cross-border cases, this treaty offers some hope. Even if a support payer is on the other side of the world, Ontario families can now access the support they need quickly and easily. This global reach provides not only financial relief but also peace of mind for families—knowing that there is a robust system in place to help better protect their financial stability.

The treaty helps to reduce the strain on our court resources and speeds up the process of collecting support payments. It also ensures that families receive the financial assistance they deserve without unnecessary delays.

The Family Responsibility Office also continues to advance its digital transformation efforts to better serve Ontario's families. An upgraded FRO online portal is a key component of this transformation, offering a more streamlined, user-friendly experience for families. The portal provides clients with secure 24/7 access to their case information. They can now submit documents electronically, download statements of account, and connect to their caseworker with ease. The transition from a paper-based process to a digital one has significantly reduced the time and hassle associated with managing child support cases. Since the launch of this feature, over 9,500 digital form submissions have been made, eliminating lost papers and mail delays.

The new digital features of FRO online have dramatically improved service delivery, including the option to submit eight high-use forms electronically. The forms allow for faster processing times, reduced errors and a more reliable system for families to receive their support payments. The streamlined process also reduces the wait times from weeks to days, so families receive their support payments much sooner.

Additionally, FRO has made strides in enhancing internal processes, now issuing, updating or withdrawing writs electronically within 24 to 48 hours. That was a paper-based system before. If someone falls behind in making support payments, FRO can now quickly and easily file a writ. This affects the support payer's ability to sell or refinance property. Issuing writs used to be a manual process that took up to three months. The electronic writs initiative reduced the time and effort spent when issuing writs to assist with the enforcement and collection of child and spousal support, so we've taken three months down to 24 to 48 hours.

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As Minister Parsa noted, these are just some of our ongoing efforts to support families more effectively and provide them with the resources they need to achieve financial stability. The ministry is focused on creating a support system that is both responsive and reliable. We understand the vital role that timely child support plays in maintaining the financial stability of families, and we're committed to providing the resources and designing innovative solutions to meet these needs. We will keep improving our services, ensuring that families and children receive the support they're rightfully owed with greater ease and efficiency.

With more digital advances on the horizon, we will continue to make life easier and more accessible for Ontario families.

Ms. Laura Smith: In my previous life, I dealt specifically in legals that saw these changes happening—and expanding the scope of countries can really make a huge difference. I was just going to say thank you—because it was paper-based and it did take several months to sometimes get through things. I watched people go into devastating situations. This does make things incredibly better for the community, and so I was just going to say this is very positive.

One of the things that I wanted to talk about, as well, was that in my previous life I dealt with matters that also dealt with children who were aging into a new era. They were in care and they were moving into adulthood. I just wanted to ask what our government is doing to help these kids—because when they're 18, they're still kids, in my mind—to succeed after leaving care. What is the government doing to help ensure that these children and youth receive the services and supports they need before they exit the care?

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

Hon. Michael Parsa: I'll try my best, Chair. Thank you very much.

If you're referring to the Ready, Set, Go program—thanks very much for that. It's a very important program. As I mentioned earlier, MPP Smith, this is a program that, first of all, is backed by a \$170-million investment, and it provides support to children and youth as young as 13, all the way up to their 23rd birthday. They receive support as high as \$1,800, \$1,500, \$1,000—an additional \$500 if they pursue post-secondary or the trades towards employment. They can work up to 40 hours a week in the province at minimum wage levels to be able to keep their benefits.

When you're looking at some of the supports that are provided, I referenced some of the life skills, some of the training that they receive—

The Chair (Mr. Steve Clark): Thank you, Minister. Unfortunately, that ends the time for the government.

We have one final round of questions for the official opposition, with about seven minutes and 45 seconds. Go ahead, MPP Taylor.

Miss Monique Taylor: I want to touch on victim services. The FAO expects that the budget for supports for

victims-of-violence programs through your ministry will only grow by 2.1% over the next five years, which is well below inflation, and it will flatten their budgets. The FAO says that program spending by your ministry will effectively be in a deficit of billions of dollars.

We are currently studying intimate partner violence here in the Legislature, and you would think that the investments going into these programs would be there to ensure that we're helping women and men when they're involved in intimate partner violence. We're literally talking about—the default province-wide is as much as \$4.1 billion, so 20% remitted as the victim surcharge would be \$800 million. That's a lot of money that areas and municipalities have not been able to get at. For instance, I believe there were concerns in Caledon-Dufferin, Kingston, London, York region and Hamilton, where that funding was not being collected and being lost in timelines. Could you comment on that?

Hon. Michael Parsa: I'll ask ADM Cureton to add a bit more, but I will tell you that funding for victim services, MPP Taylor, increased through budget 2024—

Miss Monique Taylor: By 2.1% over five years—is that correct?

Hon. Michael Parsa: This is on top of the additional supports that we've already provided.

As I mentioned to you, when it comes to violence-against-women initiatives, we're providing \$1.4 billion in support over the four years of Ontario-STANDS, which is our action plan. That's further supported by \$162 million of additional investment through the work of Minister Williams and I with the federal government. That augments the \$1.4 billion that we're supporting in this area provincially—and there was an increase, as well, that you're referring to, in addition to all the supports that are being provided because of exactly what I mentioned earlier. With the rising cost of living, we wanted to make sure that partners have the resources to be able to provide those supports.

Miss Monique Taylor: What about the victim services surcharges that are not being collected? Isn't it your responsibility to ensure that those surcharges are collected on behalf of victims?

Hon. Michael Parsa: I'm pretty sure it's the Ministry of the Attorney General that you probably will need to ask that question to, but—

Miss Monique Taylor: But it's your ministry that would benefit from those. So are you not forcing that at the table? As the minister, you should be advocating for those funds to—

Hon. Michael Parsa: As ministers who are leading this area to be able to provide the supports, we have been there to provide the funding. As I mentioned to you, \$1.4 billion for Ontario-STANDS over the next four years, an increase of \$162 million towards the national action plan, which will augment the \$1.4 billion—more added support through budget 2024 was added to our victim services.

ADM Cureton, if you don't mind, if you can add—there was a particular support that we added through budget

2024, through victim services. If you could highlight that for MPP Taylor, that would be great, please.

Ms. Jacqueline Cureton: Thank you, Minister.

My name is Jacqueline Cureton. I'm the ADM for the Office of Women's Social and Economic Opportunity and the interim ADM for community supports as well—community services division.

The government provides a wide range of supports. The minister referenced an increase in investment specifically for eight victim services programs. That was over \$55 million. Recent increases include, in 2022, \$4.2 million over five years to the Family Court Support Worker Program through additional funding from Justice Canada; \$2 million annually for the Victim Crisis Assistance Ontario program, including \$1 million for Toronto's Exit Route program to support victims and survivors of human trafficking—

Miss Monique Taylor: Thank you. I appreciate what you're saying, but I'm just curious: Where are the dollars allocated? Where is the line that shows us that the surplus funds that are sitting out there, uncollected—do you have that line in front of you or no?

Ms. Jacqueline Cureton: No, I do not.

Miss Monique Taylor: Okay, that's fine.

Minister, I would like to have that in writing, please, if you can, to understand how much of surplus dollars that are uncollected from victims-of-violence programs—

Hon. Michael Parsa: MPP Taylor—sorry; I'll just reiterate one more time: It isn't our ministry. It is the Ministry of the Attorney General that you probably would have to ask, and I would imagine the Clerk will help you process that.

Miss Monique Taylor: Thank you.

I just want to wrap up by trying to wrap up what we've been able to somewhat talk about today, the shortfalls that people across this province face under your ministry—developmental services; people looking for homes, needing homes; aging parents with aging adults in their home, with no idea what's going to happen to their kids, their grown adult children who have been completely—they need support. With 10,000 people on wait-lists—under your government, the wait-list has gone from 18,000 to 28,000. The FAO actually shows an \$11-million cut under that portion of the industry.

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People on Ontario Works, ODSP—you talk about services and applications being put online. The lack of relationships that I hear from workers—and what that does to not support people in our community who actually need those relationships so that the worker has the ability to see when there's a need to be able to support that.

Miss Monique Taylor: We are seeing more and more people living in tents across this province. It is completely unacceptable. The rates that you have—

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

Miss Monique Taylor: —legislated people into poverty, and refused to accept responsibility time and time again, as you've been asked today, is a problem, Minister.

Clawbacks for being in a relationship—a person is not allowed to be in a relationship with somebody else without their income being clawed back. That's not okay.

Kids being housed in unlicensed facilities that are dangerous—children in motel rooms, hotel rooms, Airbnbs, children's aid offices—not acceptable. The 354 deaths in the last three years is completely unacceptable. And to not hear a plan come out of you today for an investment—a true investment—in children is, quite frankly, disturbing, Minister.

I thank the ADMs who have joined us today. I sincerely respect the work that you do. But I know that you're all handcuffed by a financial stability—

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

Thanks, everyone. This concludes the committee's consideration of the estimates for the Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services.

Standing order 69 requires that I, as Chair, put, without any further amendment or debate, every question necessary to dispose of the estimates. Are members ready to vote?

M^{me} France Gélinas: Recorded vote.

The Chair (Mr. Steve Clark): Shall vote 701, ministry administration program, carry?

Ayes

Bouma, Grewal, Pang, Pierre, Sarrazin, Laura Smith.

Nays

Clancy, Gélinas, Taylor.

The Chair (Mr. Steve Clark): I declare the motion carried.

Shall vote 702, children and adult services program, carry?

M^{me} France Gélinas: Recorded vote.

Ayes

Bouma, Grewal, Pang, Pierre, Sarrazin, Laura Smith.

Nays

Clancy, Gélinas, Taylor.

The Chair (Mr. Steve Clark): I declare the motion carried.

Shall vote 704, children, community and social services capital program, carry?

Ayes

Bouma, Grewal, Pang, Pierre, Sarrazin, Laura Smith.

Nays

Clancy, Gélinas, Taylor.

The Chair (Mr. Steve Clark): I declare the motion carried.

Shall the 2024-25 estimates of the Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services carry?

M^{me} France Gélinas: Recorded vote.

Ayes

Bouma, Grewal, Pang, Pierre, Sarrazin, Laura Smith.

Nays

Clancy, Gélinas, Taylor.

The Chair (Mr. Steve Clark): I declare the motion carried.

Shall the Chair report the 2024-25 estimates of the Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services to the House?

Ayes

Bouma, Grewal, Pang, Pierre, Sarrazin, Laura Smith.

Nays

Clancy, Gélinas, Taylor.

The Chair (Mr. Steve Clark): I declare the motion carried.

I'd like to take this opportunity to thank Minister Parsa, Minister Williams, Deputy Minister Cole, all of the staff, both here in committee room 2 and also online, for participating today in the estimates for the Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services. Thank you all.

We wish you, Deputy, all the best in your new endeavours as well.

Ms. Denise Cole: Thank you.

COMMITTEE BUSINESS

The Chair (Mr. Steve Clark): As the ministry staff are leaving—we have another meeting, pursuant to standing order 120, to consider the text of a non-amendable motion. A copy of the motion has been distributed to committee members on the agenda.

Who would like to move the motion? MPP Pierre.

Ms. Natalie Pierre: I move that the Standing Committee on Social Policy meet immediately for the purpose of considering committee business respecting Bill 121, An Act to enact the Improving Dementia Care in Ontario Act, 2023.

The Chair (Mr. Steve Clark): MPP Pierre has moved a motion. Pursuant to standing order 120(c), 30 minutes shall be allotted to debate the motion, at the end of which I will put the question. I propose to allot 12 minutes to the government members, 12 minutes to the official opposition, and six minutes to the independent member.

Is there any debate on the motion by MPP Pierre? Seeing no debate, are members ready to vote? All those in favour? I declare the motion carried.

We'll now begin consideration of committee business respecting Bill 121, An Act to enact the Improving Dementia Care in Ontario Act. Are there any motions? MPP Pierre.

Ms. Natalie Pierre: I move that the committee enter closed session for the purpose of organizing committee business.

The Chair (Mr. Steve Clark): MPP Pierre has moved that we move into closed session.

MPP Gélinas?

M^{me} France Gélinas: Can I comment on that motion?

The Chair (Mr. Steve Clark): Yes.

M^{me} France Gélinas: There is no need to go in camera. This is something that we already know everybody supports. This is something that we want to see move forward. We could organize things in an open forum. We don't have to go in camera to say how many hours of debate and when the debate will take place and all of this. There's no reason for this. We should use in camera when there's a purpose of going in camera, but right now, there is no purpose for going in camera.

Read whatever you have; if it's reasonable, we'll vote on it, and we'll be out of here.

The Chair (Mr. Steve Clark): Any further debate? Are members ready to vote?

M^{me} France Gélinas: Recorded vote.

The Chair (Mr. Steve Clark): Recorded vote.

Ayes

Bouma, Grewal, Pang, Pierre, Sarrazin, Laura Smith.

Nays

Clancy, Gélinas, Taylor.

The Chair (Mr. Steve Clark): I declare the motion carried.

We're going to move into closed session. So we'll briefly recess until we've cleared the room, and we'll resume the meeting in closed session.

The committee recessed at 1607 and later continued in closed session.

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