

Legislative
Assembly
of Ontario



Assemblée
législative
de l'Ontario

**Official Report
of Debates
(Hansard)**

F-68

**Journal
des débats
(Hansard)**

F-68

**Standing Committee on
Finance and Economic Affairs**

Working for Workers Five
Act, 2024

1st Session
43rd Parliament

Wednesday 9 October 2024

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

Loi de 2024 visant à oeuvrer
pour les travailleurs, cinq

1^{re} session
43^e législature

Mercredi 9 octobre 2024

Chair: Ernie Hardeman
Clerk: Vanessa Kattar

Président : Ernie Hardeman
Greffière : Vanessa Kattar

Hansard on the Internet

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

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

Index inquiries

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

Le Journal des débats sur Internet

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

Renseignements sur l'index

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

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



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

CONTENTS

Wednesday 9 October 2024

Working for Workers Five Act, 2024, Bill 190, Mr. Piccini / Loi de 2024 visant à oeuvrer pour les travailleurs, cinq, projet de loi 190, M. Piccini	F-2087
Civiconnect; Windmill Microlending; Ontario Road Builders' Association	F-2087
Mr. Nour Hage	
Mr. Oumar Dicko	
Mr. Steven Crombie	
ResCon; Workers' Action Centre; Parkdale Community Legal Services	F-2096
Mr. Andrew Pariser	
Ms. Ella Bedard	
Ms. Mary Gellatly	

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

**STANDING COMMITTEE ON
FINANCE AND ECONOMIC AFFAIRS**

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

Wednesday 9 October 2024

Mercredi 9 octobre 2024

The committee met at 0900 in room 151.

**WORKING FOR WORKERS FIVE
ACT, 2024**

**LOI DE 2024 VISANT À OEUVRER
POUR LES TRAVAILLEURS, CINQ**

Consideration of the following bill:

Bill 190, An Act to amend various statutes with respect to employment and labour and other matters / Projet de loi 190, Loi modifiant diverses lois relatives à l'emploi et au travail et à d'autres questions.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): Good morning. I call this meeting of the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs to order. We're meeting to resume public hearings on Bill 190, An Act to amend various statutes with respect to employment and labour and other matters.

I just want to point out to make sure that, as we're moving forward, please wait until you're recognized before starting to speak. As always, all comments should be made through the Chair.

As a reminder, each presenter will have seven minutes for their presentation, and after we've heard from all three presenters, the remaining 39 minutes of the time slot will be for questions from members of the committee. This time for questions will be divided into two rounds of seven and a half minutes for the government members, two rounds of seven and a half minutes for the official opposition members and two rounds of four and a half minutes for the independent member.

CIVICONNECT

**WINDMILL MICROLENDING
ONTARIO ROAD BUILDERS'
ASSOCIATION**

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): We will now introduce the first panel. The first panel is Civiconnect, Windmill Microlending and the Ontario Road Builders' Association. The second presenter is going to be virtual.

With that, as we've heard, you'll have seven minutes to make your presentation. At the end of the six minutes, I will say, "One minute." Don't stop because that's your time to get your message in. At seven minutes, it will be over.

We also ask each person speaking to make sure you introduce yourself and who you represent going forward so Hansard will be able to record the comments to the right people.

With that, we will start with Civiconnect.

Mr. Nour Hage: Thank you, Chair, and members of the committee. My name is Nour Hage and I'm the president and CEO of Civiconnect.

Civiconnect is an organization based in the Niagara region, focused on equipping young people with the skills and experience needed to navigate today's evolving job market. We operate a program called the Youth Skills Studio, which employs youth directly and immerses them in real-life projects with small businesses, where they gain practical experience while developing critical skills. Weekly training sessions with career professionals provide comprehensive guidance, ensuring participants, regardless of their prior knowledge, are fully prepared for their chosen sector. By partnering with local businesses, we foster opportunities for growth and collaboration, benefiting both the youth and the broader business community.

At Civiconnect, we understand that the most effective learning comes from hands-on, real-world experience. As Canada's workforce continues to evolve, traditional education alone cannot fully equip young people for future demands. This is why our work-integrated learning model blends mentorship with both technical and soft skills development, providing participants with a holistic experience that will serve them long after their time with us. In doing so, they gain the technical expertise required for their fields and essential skills like communication, teamwork and problem-solving—vital for success in any industry.

Our holistic approach is a proven success. Since 2021, our flagship program, the Youth Skills Studio, has provided over 900 young people with more than 400,000 hours of work-integrated learning. We are imparting valuable skills and creating pathways for these individuals to thrive, contribute to their communities and drive positive change in our region. This model is highly adaptable and can be tailored to any sector or industry, making it a versatile solution for workforce development.

To fulfill our mission of preparing young people for sustainable careers, Civiconnect must continually adapt to meet the needs of key sectors critical to our economy, specifically within the skilled trades. By doing so, we are

ensuring that youth and second-career workers are equipped with the expertise and opportunities necessary to thrive, contributing to the long-term success of our economy. This will allow us to address the widening gaps in skilled labour. Nearly one third of tradespeople are aged 55 or older, creating an impending shortage of skilled workers that could severely impact the province's ability to maintain and develop critical infrastructure. By focusing on training the next generation of skilled workers, Civiconnect is actively working to mitigate this shortage and ensure Ontario remains competitive and resilient in the face of these challenges.

However, for our training model to truly address the workforce challenges in the skilled trades, we need the backing of policies that eliminate barriers and open doors to opportunity. Bill 190 represents a vital step in ensuring that programs like Civiconnect's Youth Skills Studio can continue to grow and equip Ontario's workforce with the skills needed to thrive in today's economy.

This legislation lays the foundation for closer collaboration between post-secondary institutions and trades businesses, creating additional pathways into the trades. By removing financial, educational and social barriers, Bill 190 ensures that more participants gain access to resources, mentorship and hands-on experience needed for success. This expanded access goes beyond simply opening doors. It's about equipping individuals with the skills and confidence to thrive. As the Conference Board of Canada has warned, if Ontario's skills gap remains unaddressed, we risk leaving 560,000 jobs unfilled by 2030, resulting in a loss of up to \$24 billion in economic opportunity and \$3.7 billion in provincial revenue annually. The only way to bridge this gap is to attract new communities and groups to the skilled trades—individuals who may have been barred due to high barriers of entry.

Bill 190's provision for employers to hire mature apprentices starting at age 21 aligns with Civiconnect's focus on supporting individuals ages 18 to 29, including younger workers and those seeking second careers. This flexibility enables us to reskill mature workers whose prior experience offers valuable insights and adaptability to the workforce.

Bill 190 plays a key role in reducing barriers for individuals entering the field by allowing employers to retain control over their hiring decisions. Striking this balance is critical to fostering an effective apprenticeship system, enabling employers to make informed choices while broadening access to a wider talent pool.

To ensure the long-term success of this workforce, it is equally essential that the system is built on a solid foundation that prioritizes workers' protection, safety and well-being. At Civiconnect we understand the unique challenges young people face as they begin their careers. It can be overwhelming to figure out workplace expectations, balance work and life and grasp the rights as employees.

One critical issue that's often overlooked during this time is workplace safety. Research shows us that new workers, regardless of their age, are four times more likely to be injured in their first month than at any other point in

their employment. Without a clear understanding of safety protocols and their rights under the Occupational Health and Safety Act, these risks can increase dramatically.

Bill 190's focus on making workplace safety information more visible and accessible is crucial in addressing ongoing concerns. New workers, especially those entering their first jobs, need clear, straightforward information about their rights and protections under the Occupational Health and Safety Act. Ensuring that safety measures are easy to understand and readily available is essential to keeping them informed and safe as they navigate the complexities of their new roles. That's why we fully support the government's efforts to ensure workplace safety regulations are more visible and accessible to everyone.

Additionally, Bill 190's expanded protections against workplace harassment, including in virtual settings, are a timely and necessary response to today's evolving work environments. With the rise of hybrid work, many workers struggle to maintain healthy boundaries between personal and professional life, often without sufficient employer support. The bill's updated definitions of workplace and sexual harassment, now covering virtual activities, directly address these challenges.

Expanding these protections to cover remote workers is a critical step in ensuring the safety and well-being of all employees. At Civiconnect, we see first-hand how these issues impact our participants. The updates introduced under Bill 190 are crucial for safeguarding workers in all settings, ensuring safer environments where everyone, regardless of their role or location, is protected from unnecessary risk.

Civiconnect is proud to support this type of forward-thinking initiative, which strengthens the workforce and helps build a more prosperous province for all. On behalf of myself and Civiconnect, I extend my sincere thanks for the opportunity to speak today. We look forward to working together to bring meaningful change to Ontario's youth and its workforce. I'm happy to answer any questions. Thank you.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): Thank you very much for the presentation.

We now will go on to Windmill Microlending.

Mr. Oumar Dicko: Good morning, and I apologize for the technical difficulties. My name is Oumar Dicko and I'm the national director of stakeholder relations at Windmill Microlending. I would first like to thank the Chair, the members of the committee and the staff for inviting us today to speak in support of this important legislation. We'll confine our comments on Bill 190 to schedule 3, fair access to regulated professions. I'll start my remarks by giving you a brief background on the work of our organization, and then we'll get into why we're supportive of Bill 190, particularly schedule 3.

Each year, Ontario welcomes over 120,000 immigrants and refugees; many of them are highly skilled and educated with valuable work experience in regulated professions and trades. But as we all know, too often, their credentials and experience are not recognized, and without access to credit, they are unable to afford the cost of reaccreditation.

This leads to long-term underemployment and poverty among newcomers, and Ontario loses valuable talents in professions where they're critically needed. There is an abundance of evidence documenting labour shortages in Ontario in regulated professions and trades, and a wealth of data that shows that immigrant talent is going to waste and they can help address the labour shortages issue.

Windmill was founded in 2005, and we provide an innovative solution to the issue of underemployment and unemployment of skilled immigrants and refugees across Canada and in Ontario. Our charity provides affordable loans and support to skilled immigrants and refugees working to restart their careers in Canada, who lack access to affordable credit.

Since 2014, when we began operating in Ontario, we supported over 5,400 immigrants and refugees in the province. Our clients are able to increase their income, find jobs as a result of our financial literacy training, the mentorship that we provide and the low-interest, client-centred loans that we provide them. Our repayment rate is also above 95% and unemployment among our clients drops by 75% once their loans are repaid. It's important to note as well that over 50% of our clients are employed or intend to work in the health care sector where they are critically, critically needed.

0910

Employers in Ontario face acute labour shortages and skill shortages that threaten competitiveness, economic growth and prosperity. Facilitating the licensing and reaccreditation of internationally trained immigrants in regulated professions and trades and employing them at a level that is commensurate to their skills and experience will help alleviate this issue.

That is why we're in support of Bill 190, particularly schedule 3. We think this legislation will continue the work Ontario started to help reduce regulatory licensing barriers for skilled immigrants and refugees in Canada and in Ontario. By making the process of licensing more transparent and fair, our skilled immigrants will be employable quicker in Ontario and fully contribute to our community.

We think that while the work of immigrant-sector organizations like ours is critical to facilitate the professional integration of newcomers, there remain significant barriers. Bill 190, particularly schedule 3, would ensure that there's more clarity and transparency on the documents that are required in the licensing and accreditation process for all workers in regulated professions, but particularly for immigrants, people who are coming from different countries and may have a different set of documentation. Having listed very clearly by the regulator what alternative documents will be required will ensure that there's transparency in the process, and then they better understand—there's also clarity in the process and those skilled immigrants better understand what is required and what they need to provide to be able to continue with licensing and reaccreditation.

We think this is a step forward in addressing the issue of underemployment of skilled immigrants in Ontario. And as we all know, the reality is talent is in short supply

globally. With declining birthrates and aging populations in the western world, competition for international talent is only going to continue to increase. Jurisdictions like Ontario that are working to facilitate equitable, efficient and affordable processes for integrating internationally trained individuals will prosper and continue to flourish. It is time that we all do more to support innovative solutions such as the ones proposed in Bill 190 to ensure that all workers, including immigrants and refugees, can put their talents to work where they're critically needed.

We appreciate all the work that the members of this committee and the members of the Legislature are doing to address labour shortages and facilitate the integration of skilled newcomers in the labour market.

I'm happy to answer any questions you may have.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): Thank you very much for that presentation. We will now go to the Ontario Road Builders' Association.

Mr. Steven Crombie: Good morning, Chair and members of the committee. My name is Steven Crombie. I'm here representing the Ontario Road Builders' Association. I'm here to provide comments on Bill 190, Working for Workers Five Act, particularly within the context of Ontario's long-term, \$190-billion transportation infrastructure plan.

Ontario is embarking on a \$190-billion plan over the next decade to upgrade and expand transportation infrastructure. This includes projects such as highway expansion, bridge construction and road maintenance, all of which are critical to supporting economic growth, improving public safety and enhancing mobility across the province. With such significant investment, the need for a skilled, accessible workforce in the road building and heavy construction sectors has never been greater.

Bill 190 represents a significant step forward to addressing challenges in Ontario's workforce, particularly expanding access to the skilled trades. One key provision is the introduction of alternative pathways into the trades, especially through amendments to the Building Opportunities in the Skilled Trades Act. These changes will make it easier for individuals with professional experience to enter the trades, bypassing strict academic requirements. This is critical for addressing labour shortages and ensuring Ontario's infrastructure projects are not delayed.

The Focused Apprenticeship Skills Training program, FAST, is also an important step. By connecting high school students with apprenticeship training, we're fostering interest in essential careers and building the workforce needed to deliver Ontario's infrastructure commitments.

As construction companies adopt more digital tools and remote work options, whether for management or administrative roles, the amendments to include virtual interactions in harassment definitions is timely. Ensuring remote workers are protected under the same safety standards as their on-site colleagues is vital as the industry continues to modernize.

Additionally, the requirements to provide menstrual products on construction sites is a progressive step, making the construction industry more inclusive. While

historically male dominated, the construction sector is seeking more women entering the field by ensuring basic needs, like menstrual products, are available.

Bill 190 promotes a supportive environment for all workers. The new requirements for clean and sanitary washroom facilities are another simple but crucial step towards attracting and retaining new workers. A clean, well-maintained work site reflects a modern industry that values worker dignity and comfort, helping to create a more welcoming and inclusive environment, especially for women and newcomers.

Another critical concern for safety of roadside workers ORBA has long advocated for is “slow down, move over” laws to better protect these workers, who face significant risk from passing traffic. By working with stakeholders and government partners, we are committed to implementing measures that reduce risks and ensure safer working conditions for roadside workers.

Bill 190 also introduces stricter penalties for violations of the Employment Standards Act and expands transparency on recruitment practices. Requiring employers to disclose whether a job posting is for an actual vacancy and whether an applicant has been interviewed increases accountability. However, we do encourage that the government ensure these new obligations are communicated effectively, especially to smaller employers, to minimize any undue burden.

In closing, Bill 190 addresses several critical challenges facing Ontario’s road-building sector, from labour shortages to evolving workplace safety concerns. As the province embarks on its ambitious \$190-billion transportation infrastructure plan, ensuring a skilled and protected workforce is essential for delivering the roads, highways and bridges that will drive Ontario’s economic growth and improve public safety.

The road-building industry is central to the success of the infrastructure plan. By addressing worker protections and streamlining pathways into the skilled trades, Bill 190 will help ensure Ontario has the workforce needed to meet its infrastructure needs. We encourage ongoing dialogue with the government and industry stakeholders to ensure successful implementation of these measure in a way that benefits both workers and employers.

Thank you for your time. I’m happy to answer any questions.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): Thank you very much for your presentation. That concludes the presentations, and we’ll start the first round of questions with MPP Kernaghan.

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: Thank you to all our presenters here today.

I’d like to begin with Civiconnect—with yourself, Nour. I want to thank you for the concentration on hands-on, real-world experience. I think it’s important for this committee to hear about how to bridge that theoretical to experiential divide. You had also mentioned the really vast number of vacancies within the skilled trades, and I think the number you used was that one third of tradespeople are

55 years of age and older. With this tremendous gap, how can we make sure that youth are filling that gap?

Mr. Nour Hage: Yes, I do believe that there are multiple avenues to tackle that shortage. It really starts all the way in elementary school and upwards. The work that Civiconnect is doing is targeting the group of youth that potentially haven’t finished high school diplomas and might need an avenue to employment, instead of falling into illicit activities or unemployment, and that’s critical. The way you do that is you attract—there’s word of mouth. There’s strong community involvement at the ground level. We’ve found a lot of success with just being grassroots.

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: Absolutely. I remember back when I was in elementary school myself—I’m an elementary educator—that there used to be trades classes within elementary schools. It’s such a shame that those were torn out, because that early exposure is key and critical to building that proficiency and that comfort with the trades.

Also, what would you like to see meaningfully addressed in this bill to encourage more young women to enter the trades?

Mr. Nour Hage: Well, in the bill, as the other guest speaker here mentioned, there are the mandatory menstrual products on site. I think that’s very helpful. I’m not an expert on attracting young women into the skilled trades. However, I can say that seeing others like them participating in jobs is always helpful. Being mentored by other women leaders, reaching out to those employers who are women to actually participate in things like this, where they get to talk and advocate on behalf of legislation—that would encourage young women to come out.

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: Excellent. Are there any recommendations that you could make? How would you like to see this bill go further?

Mr. Nour Hage: I don’t know if I would make any specific recommendations about it going any further. The important thing is to strike the right balance between what we’re able to do in worker health and safety and then not being too arduous with demands on employers as well.

0920

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: Thank you very much.

I’d now like to turn over to the Ontario Road Builders’ Association and Steven. Thank you for your presentation, Steven. I wanted to focus in on proactive workplace inspections. I believe between 2018 and 2019, there were 2,345 proactive workplace inspections. But by 2022-23, that number had dropped significantly to only 788. Why are proactive workplace inspections effective and necessary?

Mr. Steven Crombie: I think that the ministry is doing a fantastic job of identifying potential workplace risks. Like every sector of the economy, Ministry of Labour inspectors are also burdened and facing their own challenges. Oftentimes, being required to be reactive rather than proactive is certainly a challenge that the ministry inspectors face, and that could be one possible explanation for that reduction in that figure.

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: Understood. It's always important to stop the risk before it happens and to stop injury before it happens.

I also wanted to think next about critical injuries. They've been at stable levels for the past five years, always hovering around about 2,200 critical injuries, with over 400 of those in the construction industry. Since your association represents Ontario's road builders, what do you think would need to be in a workers' bill in order to address or to reduce these numbers of critical injuries?

Mr. Steven Crombie: So much of health and safety is organizationally cultural. Both from an association level and from government messaging, we firmly believe that education is critical—education around workers' risks. The government did a fantastic job last year about raising the risk of heat stress in the workplace. These are factors that could contribute potentially to workers' risks on a construction site. I just think continuing to deliver the message about potential risks on construction sites, both through industry channels but official government channels as well, is critical to helping reduce potential risks on construction sites.

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: Thank you. How much time do I have, Chair?

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): You have 2.1.

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: I have 2.1? Thank you.

Next, I'm going to turn over to Windmill Microlending and Oumar. Oumar, thank you for joining us virtually today. I think you had mentioned that there are 120,000 skilled professionals, and I want to thank you for extending them that credit to help them get started. I think your metric of 95% repayment is quite significant and really speaks to the value of the programming that you provide. What barriers do skilled immigrants and refugees face that you would like to see addressed in this workers' bill?

Mr. Oumar Dicko: We certainly think that there continue to be barriers, especially in the reaccreditation and licensing process. First of them, from our perspective and the clients that we talk to, is the cost of reaccreditation. It is very costly for some professions, especially in the health care sector. So we need to make sure we're working together to address that issue. We think this bill is a step forward in addressing the issue and removing some of the barriers.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): One minute.

Mr. Oumar Dicko: But as the province, stakeholders, immigrant-serving organizations and regulators particularly, I think we need to continue to have a concerted effort to think about each of those single barriers and a way to address them.

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: Thank you. Have you tracked the disparity between the licensing testing for domestically trained people such as dentists as opposed to the tests that are administered for foreign-trained professionals?

Mr. Oumar Dicko: I think there is a disparity in the success rate of those that are trained domestically and those that are trained internationally, clearly. But I think we could do better in order to address that in making sure that those new immigrants, as they're coming to Canada,

understand the process—there is clarity and transparency around the process—and also they have the tools and resources to support them to be able to succeed at those exams, because we need them back to work as soon as possible, especially in—

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): Thank you very much. That concludes the time for that question.

We will now go to MPP Hazell.

MPP Andrea Hazell: Good morning to the presenters, and thank you for coming in and presenting to us today. My question is going to be for Nour for Civiconnect.

I love to support young people. They are our future leaders. Your organization is working with young people. I think you bridge the gap between education and employment, and you gave some numbers of how many young people that you have supported so far through your program. But can you walk me through your program?

Mr. Nour Hage: Sure. The concept is, as I was saying, that we believe that everybody learns better by doing, rather than by getting lectured at, which I think is true for most people. We actually employ young people directly. They're with us for 15-week placements where they get paid to learn, essentially, but the learning that they're doing is all working on real-world projects for local small businesses. While they're doing that, they're getting managed by industry experts.

As an easy example, in the past, we've done a lot of web development work. If there's a local small business that needs a new website, we have a web development manager that's our trainer. We'll bring in a young person. They'll build that website, and as part of building that website, they're going to learn how to code. They get paid, it builds up their résumé, it builds up their portfolio. Then, we layer on a whole bunch of critical skills that are important for the workplace, the types of things that employers are always complaining about: communication, workplace professionalism, work ethic, showing up on time, shaking hands—those types of things that seem redundant but are extremely important for success in the workplace.

MPP Andrea Hazell: Can you give me some specific examples of youths coming into your organization, finding jobs, getting ahead, getting great pay and just being very successful? Do you have any success stories to share with us today?

Mr. Nour Hage: I have lots of success stories. I don't have any right in front of me.

MPP Andrea Hazell: Pick your best one.

Mr. Nour Hage: We had a young person that started with us in the summer of 2021. She trained with us as a back-end software developer coming from a non-technical degree that had nothing to do with this. She ended up leaving Civiconnect to apply for a job using our interview prep and résumé work that she did with us. She ended up becoming a senior software developer at BDO, which is a gigantic company. And as of last year, she's then moved on to take on a senior business accounts manager at AWS, which is Amazon.

MPP Andrea Hazell: I just love to hear the stories because it tells us that your organization is making a difference with youth—so thank you so much.

Do I have time for a second? Can you give me the time?

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): One minute.

MPP Andrea Hazell: Okay, great.

My next question is for Steven Crombie, Ontario Road Builders' Association. I'm going to be very quick; we have one minute. Can you tell me how you are protecting the roadside workers? Because sometimes I see them right onto the road, and we have to be very careful as drivers not to even hit them. That scares the hell out of me. So what control do you have in those scenarios?

Mr. Steven Crombie: Very quickly—two things: I think public education is paramount, and motorist awareness that this is somebody's workplace. This isn't simply just a right-of-way, and folks shouldn't be speeding through. ORBA has done a lot of work to raise awareness that people do work here. People's parents and loved ones share this workspace, and the broader public needs to be more respectful of that.

In addition to that, we hope that at some point we may see legislative action that would compel drivers to change driving behaviours when approaching roadside construction workers.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): Thank you very much. That concludes the time.

MPP Saunderson.

Mr. Brian Saunderson: I want to thank all our presenters this morning for your comments and input on this important piece of legislation.

Skills training has been a huge focus for this government, understanding some of the statistics you brought forward today about the amount of our workforce that are facing retirement and the youth that are looking to be equipped through training for the jobs of the future. It's very personal for me. My oldest son, who is 30, has gone back to school to become a precision machinist, and I'm told that the average age of people going into the trades is about 29, 30, so he seems to be right on that metric.

My question is for you, Nour, just on the great work that you're doing. I was very impressed to see that you put over 900 youth through your program with—I think you said 400,000 hours of training. I imagine there are many success stories like the one you told MPP Hazell.

0930

So my question to you is really two parts. You did a great job in your presentation, but I'm wondering if you can just delve a little deeper into how you see this legislation impacting and assisting you in helping to train youth, and then maybe give us your thoughts if there are any areas that we can improve moving forward.

Mr. Nour Hage: Yes, for sure. So one of the things that my organization does is we work extensively with very small local employers in the Niagara region. And one of the things that we constantly hear from them is that, especially when they're dealing with the post-secondary institutions, it's very difficult for them to actually explain to the post-secondary institutions that the skills that

they're training young people on aren't necessarily perfectly applicable to the workplaces that they're entering afterwards. At great cost to those employers, they have to either retrain or re-skill or simply upskill those employees to be ready for the world of work. And sometimes, those employers, when faced with the decision to hire somebody or not hire somebody, they'll choose not to hire them and keep them out of their workplace simply because they don't want to incur the cost of all the additional training. Lots of employers would simply prefer being able to select somebody young that's eager, that's hungry to learn, and train them and mentor them directly in the workplace. This bill does that, and that would help us as a training organization as well.

Mr. Brian Saunderson: Great. And if I could, just as a supplementary: Are there ways that we can scale up the types of programs that you're offering? I know you're focused in the Niagara region, but do you have presences in other areas of the province?

Mr. Nour Hage: We'd always love to do more work. Our program is a very high-impact program. It's very deep on the quality level, but it also means it's very expensive to run. Each one of the youths that participates with us ends up paid. They're on payroll, which means there are some expensive costs that go into that. As always, more structural training dollars provided by the government to organizations like ours and others that are doing great work across the province will always help.

Mr. Brian Saunderson: Okay.

I'll yield my time. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): MPP Smith.

Mr. Dave Smith: Can I get a time check, too, please?

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): Four minutes.

Mr. Dave Smith: I'm going to start with Steven, if that's okay. First off, I want to compliment you on your tartan tie. I'm wearing a Black Watch myself. I love it when someone's wearing tartan here at Queen's Park. We don't do it enough. I would wear my kilt every day if it was socially acceptable.

On that completely irrelevant conversation, though: You talked a little bit about the harassment policy for online harassment and how that continues. It's something that we all recognize in the workplace when it happens in front of you. But the online harassment is something that has really become much more prevalent. It is a newer phenomenon. Do you see a difference, then, with the age of your workers and who is more susceptible to the online harassment versus who is not as susceptible to it?

Mr. Steven Crombie: Yes. I think as industries evolve, so too must our definitions of harassment. But to your point, I think we are an industry, like every other industry, that's facing the silver tsunami: a wave of retirees just on the horizon over the next decade. So we need to encourage more young people to not only come into our industry but feel comfortable working in our industry. Sometimes, the historical dynamics of those of different age cohorts is creating challenges and barriers for newcomers into our industry. So we're quite happy that this bill reflects that

harassment doesn't necessarily only take place in a physical workplace but in a virtual workplace as well.

Mr. Dave Smith: That's a perfect segue; that's what I was actually hoping you were going to come up with. We are facing that silver tsunami, or grey tsunami, depending on who you're talking to about it. The average age of someone entering an apprenticeship right now is almost 29. We need to find different ways to be attracting a younger demographic into it, whether that be a male or a female. Would you say that some of the changes that we've made in this actually will help with the attraction of younger individuals to get into the skilled trades?

Mr. Steven Crombie: Yes, tremendously. I think both the requirements of menstrual products on a construction site in washrooms and sanitation requirements is ultimately a signal to prospective entrants that construction is a safe, clean and inclusive place to work. In 2021, women in construction represented 4% of the workforce. We're already seeing that number climb to 8%. These types of signals are having a direct impact on registration numbers and, more broadly, women in construction.

Mr. Dave Smith: Thank you. I appreciate that.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): One minute.

Mr. Dave Smith: I'm going to switch over to the gentleman from Windmill Microlending. I didn't say your name because I know I will butcher it. You mentioned the reduction in red tape to recognize foreign credentials. We have some challenges with bringing in foreign workers, based on what the federal government allows us to do. How do you see this actually making a change for us to make it easier to bring somebody in with those foreign credentials and get them recognized?

Mr. Oumar Dicko: Yes, I think Canada needs to continue to maintain our good reputation when it comes to attracting global talent. The way we do that is to ensure that once they get to Canada, their credentials could be recognized very quickly. I'll tell you that, on average, our clients come to us after being in Canada between four to six years. In those years, they've been stuck in a survival job cycle. Those are doctors, those are surgeons, those are engineers that we need.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): Thank you very much. We'll have to take that answer in the next round.

We'll now go to the opposition. MPP West.

MPP Jamie West: Before I start, I want to thank MPP Barnes and legislative counsel. Yesterday, it said that the menstrual products weren't in the bill, because I did a keyword search. They explained to me it's going to be updated in the regulations, so I appreciate that.

I'm going to start with Steven Crombie from the Ontario Road Builders' Association. You were getting to the tail end of this for the "slow down, move over," when MPP Hazell was asking the questions on it. You said something about legislative action. What would that legislative action look like?

Mr. Steven Crombie: I think there are other jurisdictional models across the country where roadside workers are protected under certain legislation, the same way that those rights are extended to first responders and tow

trucks, where drivers are compelled to reduce speeds and change lanes if possible. We've seen in other jurisdictions this model work, that those provisions could be extended potentially to roadside workers.

MPP Jamie West: Just related to health and safety, yesterday, I asked one of the presenters about health and safety in high school, and they suggested maybe in grade 7 and 8 because people are working in high school. Does that make sense, that health and safety training at a young age?

Mr. Steven Crombie: Absolutely. I think there's always greater opportunity to increase awareness about occupational health and safety. Folks are entering the workforce at the age of 16. Having that opportunity while still in the context of an educational institution is absolutely worth having.

MPP Jamie West: And then, in terms of the skilled workers for your industry, what are you looking for? I have some ideas in my head, but I find often, as an MPP, I know about 10% of what any organization does. What sort of trades or skills are you looking for?

Mr. Steven Crombie: Primarily, the two biggest trades that our members employ are general labourers and excavator operators. Really, what that requires is a great work ethic and a good attitude, for the most part. These are voluntary trades. They don't require compulsory certification. What's fantastic about that is, to the point of folks finding their second career, is that you could find yourself on a road crew at the age of 29 or 30 and, frankly, be making around \$100,000 a year. It really is a ticket to the middle class with very few barriers to entry.

MPP Jamie West: It really is. My colleagues from the Conservative side, we've all said it. It's a missed opportunity for a lot of people. They're really well-paying jobs and people get steered away from them.

I'm going to go over to you, Oumar from Windmill Microlending. In one part of your presentation, you talked about predatory licensing. Can you just expand on that? What's happening to immigrants as they're coming in looking for licences?

Mr. Oumar Dicko: Thank you for your question. The process is long and costly and sometimes lacks transparency. That's why we're so supportive of Bill 190 or previous versions of the Working for Workers bills that are working to remove this red tape, to make the process more transparent, less costly and more clear for newcomers to understand so we can get them back to work, especially in professions where they're desperately needed in the health care sector.

0940

MPP Jamie West: Okay. I was wondering about the licensing, just with the opportunity—because of the experience that you have in your organization. Do you know if there's any common documents or tests that are being used in other countries that we can adopt here that would be sort of a shortcut to help us get further ahead down the road?

Mr. Oumar Dicko: Well, I wouldn't know necessarily specifically documents or tests that are done in other

countries. But what I would say though—and I know with previous version of these bills, some of the stuff that was removed is the language requirements, which was a duplication from the immigration process in general, or the requirement for Canadian work experience, which is almost like the chicken-and-the-egg stuff where you need work experience to get licensed, but you can't get licensed if you don't have work experience. So it's very, very important that those were removed, and then now, making sure that the documents required are very clear and listed by the regulator—it's very important for newcomers as they come to the country with different sets of documents. What kind of alternative do they have to provide those documents as soon as possible so that they can get licensed or reaccredited?

MPP Jamie West: Okay. I appreciate that.

I'm just trying to get to all the presenters, so I'm going to move on to Nour. Some of the questions were already answered, but one of the things I was curious about is: You have youth coming from a variety of different backgrounds and to a variety of different workplaces. When I go to high schools and I talk to people, one of the things I often say to the students is, "Who knows what they want to be?" and I'm lucky if 50% of the students know. How do you pair people? How do you figure out, or is it a trial-and-error-type thing?

Mr. Nour Hage: Well, I mean, it's a great point. It's exactly that, that most people don't know what career they're going to be most successful in. And there's lots of data out there that demonstrates that, really, the people that job hop multiple times until they're 30 are likely to end up becoming more successful by the age of 45 than the people that just stayed in one career straight out of high school. And the reason for that is because it's product match fit, right? So yes, it's about increasing exposure. Come to the workplace, try it out, get your hands dirty, so to speak, on work-integrated learning and then see if that's good for you.

MPP Jamie West: And then what kind of relationship do you have with the employers? My son, for example, had a co-op placement and basically did the same thing every day. After the third day, you kind of know how to photocopy. What kind of relationship do you have so that they're getting a sort of a fulsome experience of the workplace?

Mr. Nour Hage: Our model is not that. That's actually one of the issues with the co-op model across the province. A lot of young people end up at, let's say, gigantic firms, and they join those firms and they're put into the middle of a project that's 24 months long. They haven't seen the start of it, and they won't see the end of it before the end of their co-op. They end up doing things like your son did. And so we do things differently.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): One minute.

Mr. Nour Hage: The employer works with us to identify a specific project with a set of goals that can be achieved in a 15-week time period. The students will work on that from the beginning. They'll get to see how that project has launched all the way to the project completion,

and they'll get to do novel things in executing that project all the way through.

MPP Jamie West: Okay. And then I probably don't have time, but I was just going to ask about other barriers that we could be removing to make things easier.

Mr. Nour Hage: Honestly, it's about, I think, increasing structural—like, training dollars in the province. We have a productivity crisis looming, and we need more employers to participate in training programs.

MPP Jamie West: Thank you, Chair.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): Thank you.

MPP Hazell.

MPP Andrea Hazell: My round of questions is going to be for Oumar Dicko. Congratulations, first of all, for the sustainability of your organization from, I think, 2005. I know micro-lending, in this industry, is very tough, and so for you to have repayments up to 95%—I don't know how you're doing it, but hats off to you.

I want to spend some time on the refugees that come to your door for support. And so how do you support them? Because many of them come through the doors with not having stable housing. And again, they've got credentials that haven't got approved. So can you walk me through your process?

Mr. Oumar Dicko: Yes. One of the reasons why our programs are so successful, I would say, is because we don't only provide financial support. Yes, we do provide our loans for credential recognition, career change or professional development, but we also support those individuals throughout the journey of integrating in the labour market.

We have specific career coaches that are working with our clients and providing them with advice on the credential recognition process but also on things that they would need to become successful. So for those refugees who may need housing, who may need other supports, we work with other organizations in the sector, and we're capable of referring them to those organizations to provide them with that support since we don't deal with that. But we want to make sure we identify all the gaps and everything that those clients may need, and then we're able to refer them to those organizations as well.

We also provide our clients with financial literacy training, because before anybody takes a loan, we need to make sure they understand the financial system in Canada. And we have a mentorship program where we match these clients with clients in the same professional field or with the same background to help them navigate the labour market or navigate life in Canada in general.

MPP Andrea Hazell: How do you follow up to know that your program—especially now, we're going through major challenging times. How do you follow up now? Because things are different from 2005 to 2024. Do you have a follow-up mechanism to know that what you're doing now is successful?

Mr. Oumar Dicko: Absolutely. We have a follow-up mechanism where we follow up with our clients three months after receiving our services, six months after re-

ceiving our services and 12 months up to two years after receiving our services.

And one of the reasons, also, that our program is successful: We have a loan management team. We don't send our clients to collections if they're unable to repay. We call them, we identify the issue that they may have in terms of repaying, finding a job, and we ensure that we can provide them with more resources or refer them to organizations that may support them. So if we have a client, for example, who is struggling to repay their loan, who is struggling to find a job, we may help them get better support terms of résumé-writing, in terms of participating in interviews, in terms of even providing them with a mentor in the same field that's going to help them get the connections that they need, because we know so much about finding employment in Canada is about the connections that you—

MPP Andrea Hazell: I want to put in this last question very quickly: What is your funding model?

Mr. Oumar Dicko: Our operating funding is supported by government, and then the loan capital that we provide is supported by the private sector. So we have wealthy individuals that are providing foundations and—

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): One minute.

Mr. Oumar Dicko: —[inaudible] individuals.

MPP Andrea Hazell: Very good that you have the private sector because you always have to have that backup. So kudos for you.

I know some organizations that I have seen do charge interest at a certain time on those microloans, the private loans especially. Is there an interest payment on the private portion?

Mr. Oumar Dicko: There is interest on our loans, but the interest on our loans is very low. Right now, we are at prime plus 0.25%—

MPP Andrea Hazell: Sorry; prime plus—

Mr. Oumar Dicko: —plus 0.25%. So we make sure we keep the interest very low. And the revenues that we get from the interest really cover the cost of accessing that loan capital from the private sector.

MPP Andrea Hazell: Thank you for detailing all of that.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): We'll now go to the government. MPP Triantafilopoulos.

Ms. Effie J. Triantafilopoulos: Good morning, Chair; thank you. Thank you to all the presenters who are with us today.

My first question is for Civiconnect, to Nour. I have to commend the great work that you do as an organization, particularly with young people, in order to prepare them for the future in terms of skilled trades.

Now, Bill 190, among other objectives, sets out to increase transparency for job seekers in two major ways, first, through proposing to amend the Employment Standards Act, requiring employers to disclose in publicly advertised job postings whether a vacancy currently exists, and secondly, it would require employers to respond to interviewees for publicly advertised job postings, because we believe applicants deserve to know whether they got the job or not.

Could you give us some understanding—when young people are applying for these jobs, can you speak to the impact these amendments would make in their job search?

Mr. Nour Hage: Yes. So as we all know, if anyone has had any interaction with the job market recently, the number of job postings is rapidly increasing, but the number of job hires stays relatively stable at a steady increase, which tells us that employers are doing this thing where they're testing out the market to see who is going to apply. It's a very arduous and annoying process for the job applicant to submit hundreds of applications sometimes to get one or two responses. This bill is going to dramatically reduce that, we hope, because it will mean that applicants know immediately if that position is even available to them, and they'll just decide not to apply to that if it's not.

0950

Ms. Effie J. Triantafilopoulos: Thank you.

I have a question as well for Oumar. You mentioned earlier in your introductory comments that the bill is a step forward to removing barriers for immigrants. Are there any other specific ways, additional changes, that you would like to see here in this bill? Are there any missed opportunities that we haven't gathered?

You talked about the global talent that is coming. I was quite disappointed to hear that it takes four to six years for people who are stuck in, basically, survival jobs. Can you speak a little bit more specifically to what needs to be done to address that?

Mr. Oumar Dicko: I think this bill is a step in the right direction, certainly, to remove some of those barriers. But this bill also builds on the previous successes of the previous versions of this bill, and I think this government is doing a great job in terms of helping reduce the red tape for immigrants.

But there are still significant barriers, and one of them is cost. The cost of reaccreditation is extremely costly. Our organization provides microloans that are covering some of that cost, but not all of the cost. I think we should do something about thinking about working to reduce the cost that is associated with credential recognition or supporting more organizations that are helping immigrants with reducing that cost.

Ms. Effie J. Triantafilopoulos: Thank you.

I'll cede my time to one of my colleagues.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): MPP Babikian.

Mr. Aris Babikian: Good morning, Chair. Good morning to everyone and thank you for your presentations.

I would like to follow up with Oumar on the issue of accreditation, because I personally have been involved in this issue for over 35 years in different capacities, and the issue of accreditation has been on the table in every discussion. We are facing difficulties not because the governments are not willing to work to make it easier, but because the colleges are making it more difficult. I am proud to say that our government, since we formed government in 2018, was successful in negotiating with between 18 to 20 colleges—maybe I am wrong, but some of my colleagues can correct me—to make it easier for

newcomers. But there are some of them that are still stubbornly refusing to collaborate.

Can you comment on that aspect of this, making it easier for newcomers to get accreditation and start working in good-paying jobs?

Mr. Oumar Dicko: I think you're totally right. A lot of immigrant-serving organizations like ours are taking action to ensure that we can support newcomers, but we can't change the system. We can support them and provide them with the resources, but there needs to be work to change the system. That's why it's very, very important to bring the regulators on board and to make them understand that we're at a critical juncture where we need to change the system and we need to ensure that the process of reaccreditation, first of all, is transparent and clear for newcomers. Thanks to the job of this government of bringing some of those regulators on board.

Mr. Aris Babikian: How much time?

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): Two minutes.

Mr. Aris Babikian: I will pass my time to my colleague MPP Hamid.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): MPP Hamid.

MPP Zee Hamid: Thank you to the delegation. Thank you for the presentation. It was very educational, at least for me, being new in this domain.

I have some questions about the microloans as well. It's a fascinating area. I'm a big fan and have always been. You mentioned your interest rates—prime plus 0.5%, so fairly low. In terms of your cost, what happens with the interest? Do they get reinvested and go to lend out more to future borrowers? Do they go to pay the cost of running the program? Can you help me understand how that works?

Mr. Oumar Dicko: Our interest is kept low. The interest revenue that we get is essentially covering the cost of acquiring the capital that we use. We are a very innovative organization, and five years ago we launched social impact bonds, where we have individuals that are investing with the organization at a very, very low interest and then a bigger social impact. So the revenue that we get from the interest that we charge is essentially paying back the interest on those social bonds. If not, it's very, very difficult for us to raise the loan capital needed.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): One minute.

MPP Zee Hamid: That's brilliant. What's your average or median loan to an individual?

Mr. Oumar Dicko: Right now, it's \$12,000.

MPP Zee Hamid: That's incredible. You're talking about not a huge sum of money in the greater scheme of things, but it's still life-changing for them. And you said \$4,000 is about average, right? So what would the range be? Is it generally around \$4,000 or does it vary hugely?

Mr. Oumar Dicko: The average loan size is \$12,000, and then the maximum that we provide our clients is \$15,000. As you say, it is transformative for many of these people that cannot access credit from traditional banks because banks don't deal in the business of giving loans for credential recognition.

MPP Zee Hamid: Considering you're—95%, you said, right?

Mr. Oumar Dicko: Yes.

MPP Zee Hamid: Banks should get into it. But thank you. I just got curious about the microloans. I'm always fascinated.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): Thank you very much. That concludes the time, and that also concludes the time for this panel. We thank all the participants for all the time you took to prepare the presentation and to so ably present it to us this morning. Thank you very much.

RESCON

WORKERS' ACTION CENTRE

PARKDALE COMMUNITY LEGAL SERVICES

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): We'll ask the next table to come forward: ResCon, Workers' Action Centre, and Parkdale Community Legal Services. As with previous delegations, you will have seven minutes to make your presentation. At six minutes, I will say, "One minute." Don't stop for that. It's the next one, when I say "Thank you," that's it.

We also ask each presenter to start with your name and position for Hansard, to make sure it's properly recorded. With that, we will start with ResCon.

Mr. Andrew Pariser: Good morning, everyone. Good morning to the Chair—I grew up in Ingersoll; it's always good to see somebody from Oxford county—as well as the members of the standing committee.

My name is Andrew Pariser. I'm the vice-president of ResCon. I've been here before, and I always enjoy coming back to speak to important bills like this one today. I'm here to provide feedback on Bill 190, which is here to amend various statutes with respect to employment, labour and other matters.

As a quick background on ResCon, ResCon represents over 200 builders and what we focus on is new-build residential, so low-rise, mid-rise, high-rise. We work in co-operation with government and related stakeholders to offer realistic solutions to a variety of challenges affecting residential construction, and we have six core focuses, which include health and safety, including mental health and addictions; training and apprenticeship; government relations; labour relations; building science and innovation; and regulatory reform and technical standards. So as you can see, we're quite busy.

Some of the things that we're working on specifically on the health and safety side: ResCon sits on three IHSA—so that's the Infrastructure, Health and Safety Association—committees, two WSIB committees, and is an active participant in all MLITSD health and safety consultations. The ResCon health and safety committee essentially has eyes and ears throughout the province and on residential construction job sites. We come together to share information, best practices and implementation plans regarding the on-site and in-office safety, and then we share that with

the broader industry and hopefully today with the province.

Another one of our ongoing efforts is to create more opportunities for those who would like to enter the trades, including but not limited to young people, women, under-represented groups and immigrants. This work is done through our training and education committee, and it, again, has boots on the ground.

An overview for Bill 190: We view this holistically. Bill 190, Working for Workers, is about making Ontario a jurisdiction that is welcoming to top talent: so workers, immigrants, everybody. We've heard throughout the last day and a half that, within the next decade, approximately 100,000 construction workers will have to be hired, trained and retained, and that's because we do have a large number of workers who are going to be retiring. We find that this legislation—we support it, and we find that it moves us in the right direction, and we'll make sure that Ontario is a jurisdiction that respects and leads when it comes to workers' rights, but also in attracting talent.

When we look at new-build residential construction, it's a sector that meets and almost always exceeds minimum standards, from pay to on-site sanitation to safety to benefits. We like to drive and promote our best practices.

1000

A bit of a shameless plug: For any worker out there who's watching, if your employer doesn't respect or has a problem meeting the minimum requirements that are in the legislation now or in this bill, please consider a career in new build residential.

Instead of getting into the specific schedules, I'd like to offer a couple of comments about the themes included. And so the themes that we've picked out for today are the need for regular amendments to ensure that legislation and regulations fit real-world experience, the second theme is the removal of barriers for new Canadians and those seeking to enter the workforce and the third theme is related to safety and sanitation.

Labour legislation is both complex and intimidating. And while I'm not a lawyer, I started my career way back with the Ministry of Labour before it had all of the other names to go with it, and I work specifically with different forms of employment legislation. Under the leadership of Minister Piccini and Premier Ford—I think they need to be applauded for their constant focus on updating acts with surgical precision. Employment and labour legislation is incredibly specific, and it's nuanced, and the last thing that we would ever want to see is a blanket approach because that brings unintended consequences. So if you see an issue, you need to address it, but you need to be very specific in how you address it, because the last thing you want to do is have an unintended consequence in another area. So we very much applaud the focus and the detail that's put into this and we would encourage that to continue going forward. We think it's so important that I want to make a very specific point about that.

When it comes to removing barriers for new Canadians, there is still red tape, there are still barriers that are keeping people from entering the trades. I think this government is

a skilled trades government. I think, if you look at where the stigma was before they came into power versus where it is now, there has been significant progress made in addressing the stigma. I think there are a lot of people that want to get into the skilled trades, and I think part of the job is to continue to remove those barriers, because a lot of good work has been done on addressing the stigma. I believe there's a lot of people that want to get into the trades, and so we just need to help them do that.

And then finally, when it comes to safety and sanitation—this is job number one. When someone goes to work, they need to come home from work, and it's no more complicated than that. So our focus at ResCon always starts with safety and I think, when you look at this bill, it has meaningful improvements to safety, but the other thing that it does is it keeps safety in the conversation. And so, whether it's products for women, whether it's on-site sanitation, it drives a larger conversation on how do we make sure that people are safe on construction sites, and how are women welcome to construction sites, specifically before they get there? If employers are waiting for a woman to show up on-site, it's already too late. We need to make sure sites are ready and welcoming to women before they get there.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): One minute.

Mr. Andrew Pariser: And with that, I'll finish my remarks. Thank you to everyone for having me here.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): Thank you very much.

Our next presenter is Workers' Action Centre.

Ms. Ella Bedard: Thank you very much. My name is Ella Bedard. I'm here with the Workers' Action Centre. We are a membership-based organization where workers come together to fight for decent work. I think we appeared before—I think maybe on the same panel; nice to see you again.

I want to speak specifically to the committee about schedule 2, which deals with the Employment Standards Act, and specifically, I want to explain why increasing the maximum fine for individuals who violate the ESA will not address the massive problem of wage theft that exists in Ontario.

So riffing on the words of a popular Nigerian song, one of our members described the problem that workers in Ontario face as a fire burning on a mountain that everyone can see, but no one is running. And that problem, that fire—that's the problem of wage theft that we see in our work every day. I want you to consider that the next time you're on your street and you see a landscaping crew doing work, you're opening a hummus that you bought at the grocery store or you're in your office late at night and the cleaner comes around to get the garbage, it's very likely that the person doing that labour actually isn't getting paid properly. And that's a significant problem.

When I talk about wage theft, what I'm talking about is a bundle of different issues. It's not getting paid your regular hours of work, but it's also getting paid less than minimum wage. It's not getting overtime premium pay or public holiday pay or vacation pay that you're entitled to.

It's being treated as an independent contractor when, in fact, you are an employee, or having illegal deductions made from your pay.

We say that there is an epidemic of wage theft in Ontario right now. At the Workers' Action Centre last year, we helped workers recover \$150,000 in unpaid wages, and we're on track to do the same again this year.

The Ministry of Labour assessed, as owing to workers last fiscal year, over \$22 million in unpaid wages. That's truly just a drop in the bucket because that's only representative of workers who were able to jump language barriers, literacy issues and also the fear of retaliation that comes from making those kinds of complaints. So it's not representative of the full scope of the problem, but it's still a pretty drastic number.

From the experiences of our members, we know that wage theft has devastating consequences. One or two paycheques, especially in this economic climate where the cost of living is so high, can mean the difference between being able to pay your rent or not. For a lot of workers we see, we're helping them file ESA complaints, and I have to go through these devastating text messages where they're pleading with their employers, asking them to get paid because they need to send money home to their families; they have to pay for their children's food and medication.

It's isolating to experience it when you're the worker who's going through it. It's disheartening. That's why we often bring workers together in workshops so that they can see they're not alone. It's not a "me" problem; it's actually a systemic issue.

One of the main reasons that we understand wage theft to be so rampant is that, basically, employers know, especially in low-wage industries, that they can get away with it. That is because the Ministry of Labour allows discriminatory practices and some substandard employment conditions to become the norm through neglect and a lack of enforcement of the Employment Standards Act.

I want to emphasize four things that we think the Ministry of Labour could be doing better to put in context why the increase of the maximum fine is not sufficient. First off, the ministry needs to actually use the enforcement tools it already has at its disposal. Technically, any violation of the Employment Standards Act is an offence that's subject to a fine, but nearly 90% of all violations do not attract any sort of penalty or fine.

This past fiscal year, only five times was the part III prosecution used. The year before that, it was only seven times. That's the type of prosecution that needs to be initiated for this maximum fine to be levied. The maximum fine, to my knowledge, based on publicly available information, has only been levied in one very high-profile case. That's the \$50,000 fine. It's not being used, and so the increase to \$100,000 isn't really going to do much unless that's actually being used.

Similarly, when workers have been awarded money by the Ministry of Labour through an ESA complaint process, that order is often not enforced. A Toronto Star analysis showed that, between 2020 and 2022, only 40% of the

money that was found to be owing to workers actually made it back to them in their pockets. That lack of enforcement is emboldening employers because they know, even if they get an order against them, it really might not lead to anything.

The next thing is that—and this is, I think, the key point—the ministry needs to take a proactive as opposed to a reactive approach to employment standards enforcement. Right now, it's a complaint-based system; that's the main way that it's enforced. When Premier Ford's government took power in 2018, they temporarily told staff not to initiate any new proactive investigations—

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): One minute.

Ms. Ella Bedard: Thank you.

Now, we'd just like to contrast the approach taken to the ESA to the approach taken to the Ontario health and safety act. That act—there were over 59,000 proactive enforcements done last year. There were just over 1,000 done on the Employment Standards Act. These are both minimum standards. They're deeply important protective pieces of legislation. It doesn't make sense that they're being enforced so differently.

1010

And then, finally, in a complaint-based system, workers need to be adequately protected before they can stand up for their rights. We think that means giving them wrongful dismissal protection so that they can't be fired for just bringing up the issue of their unpaid wages. Also, they need protection when they individually and collectively with their co-workers try to come forward to their employer and stand up for their rights. Because right now, there's barely any protection for them when they do that.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): Thank you very much. That concludes the time.

We now go to the Parkdale Community Legal Services.

Ms. Mary Gellatly: Good morning, everybody. My name is Mary Gellatly, and I'm a community legal worker at Parkdale Community Legal Services. We provide legal support as well as other supports for people in low-wage and precarious work and a lot of migrant workers as well.

Ella focused on wage theft and enforcement. You have a joint submission in front of you from the two organizations. I'm going to focus on sick notes and sick leave. As you know, Bill 190 would reinstate a prohibition on employers requiring medical notes. We're really happy to see that the government recognized its mistake that it made in 2018 when it repealed the prohibition on employers from requiring medical notes from doctors when their employees take up to three days of unpaid leave. We feel it's also unfortunate that they didn't extend to its other mistakes of repealing two paid sick days and eight unpaid and personal emergency leave days.

But we do support the reinstating of the employer prohibition, particularly because it's not only just bad for workers, but it's bad for public health. This has long been widely known. We have seen for years the Ontario Medical Association, Canadian Medical Association, Canadian Association of Emergency Physicians all opposing medical notes, not because it's an administrative burden,

but because it's a real risk to public health by forcing sick workers into doctors' offices, into hospitals, which exposes vulnerable patients and public to infection. The requirement of medical notes is a barrier to workers staying home when sick, one of the key health care strategies to fight infectious disease. Some 82% of Canadians reported that they were more likely to go to work sick if they had to get a doctor's note.

So all these good public health reasons, but when this measure was introduced by health minister Sylvia Jones, she explained that it really had nothing to do with the health protection of workers and the community. Rather, it was about making family doctors happy by reducing their administrative work. There was no mention of the health benefits. There was no mention of how employers unfairly target workers. Particularly low-wage workers are by and large the ones that get asked for medical notes. You and I, in our jobs, probably don't get asked for medical notes that much, but low-wage workers do, and it costs them. They've got to go get it, they've got to pay the admin fee, they lose wages, and they spend their time doing that. So it's unfortunate that's not the motivation for it, but nonetheless we accept it, or we're happy to see the prohibition come in.

There is another concern. The proposed amendment to the ESA would allow employers to require workers that take unpaid sick days to provide reasonable notice—sorry, not reasonable notice; that's another issue—reasonable evidence about why they need to take a job-protected unpaid sick day, but there's no definition of what that means, so it's totally going to be left up to employers to figure out what is reasonable. There's no regulatory provision to define it, so it looks like that's ready to go as is.

I can tell you, in working with people in low-wage and precarious work, all too many of them are fired or disciplined when they try to take sick days. Employers don't believe that they're sick. I think this wide-open scope is going to cause real problems—maybe unintended problems but problems nonetheless—and so we recommend that—I think it's subsection 50(6) that allows employers to require reasonable evidence should be repealed and should be removed from the bill before it goes forward.

I think, just on a more general point, if the government really does want to work for workers, then it should go all the way in correcting the mistakes it made around paid sick days in 2018 and really heed the advice of the medical community. During COVID, the science advisory table called for paid sick days, as did the chief public officer of health, and this is because employer-paid sick days have been proven to be essential to protect employees and community health. It's also something that workers want. The government says it's working with workers and trying to give workers what they need; 79% of people support 10 paid sick days paid by the employer, but here we are in a situation where 58% of Canadian workers don't have paid sick days, and if you don't have paid sick days, you can't afford to stay home when you're sick. In terms of who is particularly affected by not having paid sick days, it's low-

wage workers, so 70% of people in low-wage work don't have paid sick days.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): One minute.

Ms. Mary Gellatly: So we recommend that the government bring in 10 employer-paid sick days.

And just an additional point: We know the government is currently in consultations around providing job-protected leave to bring the ESA in line with the Employment Insurance Act. We're glad that that consultation is happening, but we'd like to encourage that that moves ahead and that there are no prohibitive restrictions on accessing that leave as well. Thank you.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): Thank you very much.

We'll now start with our question rounds, and we'll start with the independent. MPP Hazell.

MPP Andrea Hazell: Good morning. Thank you for coming in and thank you for your well-detailed presentation.

For my first go-around, I will go to Workers' Action Centre, Ella. What you're saying today is not new to me, and I'm pretty sure it's not new to anyone that is sitting around this table, but thank you for coming, and thank you for being a strong advocate for those workers. We need those workers, so thank you for representing them.

You also stated that you recovered \$150,000 of monies back to those workers. So can you tell me how you went about doing that? Also, you mentioned over \$2 million in wages. Is it still outstanding?

Ms. Ella Bedard: That's \$22 million was assessed by the Ministry of Labour as owing to workers in the last fiscal year.

MPP Andrea Hazell: Thank you for correcting that and thank you for putting that on the record. But can you tell me how you were able to recoup \$150,000?

Ms. Ella Bedard: Sure, yes. Thank you. We work with workers to try to stand up for their own rights. We start by educating folks and helping them know their rights, and then also to strategize with them about what makes sense for them to try to get their unpaid wages back. Sometimes that means supporting them and speaking to their employer directly to try to negotiate for their unpaid wages, and sometimes it means filing Ministry of Labour complaints.

I think we file far more complaints than we see the amounts recovered. I don't have a calculation for how much money we have helped workers—the decisions that go unpaid, I guess I should say. But \$150,000 is what we've been able to support workers in recovering. And that's not—termination pay and severance pay, that stuff sort of adds up. Those amounts can be bigger, but most of the amounts that we're talking about are just straight unpaid wages, minimum wage that's gone unpaid and unpaid overtime.

MPP Andrea Hazell: Thank you. I'm going to put in another quick question: You were saying, what's the use of increasing the max if we're not using the max that we have right now? Very well said, and I take your point, but what do you think are the missed opportunities in this bill?

1020

Ms. Ella Bedard: Well, on this front, I think that a lot of what I've talked about is administrative action, actually. It's stuff that doesn't have to pass through the Legislature that can be more easily implemented, actually. But some of the missed opportunities in this bill I think are the last point I made about enabling workers to stand up for their own rights on the job, so giving workers the right to protect themselves when they collaborate.

Let me just give you an example: We worked with a group of workers last year who weren't getting paid for several months. They were sort of getting part cheques, part cheques, part cheques. They talked to each other and said, "What should we do about this?" and they were going to speak to their employer together about it. They were all fired. And that is—

MPP Andrea Hazell: Did you say they were all fired?

Ms. Ella Bedard: They were all fired, and that is not illegal because those workers do not have a protection under the law to be able to collaborate. If they were in a union, that would be a different story, but I'm talking about non-unionized workers. So that should be something that's—it's called protected concerted activity: the ability to collaborate with your co-workers to stand up for your rights.

Theoretically, individual workers have protection from reprisal if they ask their employer about their rights under the ESA or try to enforce their rights under the ESA. But it's very hard for workers to actually rely on that right, because what that means is: You ask your employer to be paid properly according to the ESA, they fire you, you file an ESA claim. Maybe nine months later, you get some money, or the Ministry of Labour says, "Oh, they were wrong to do so." But you've lost your job, right? That's gone.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): Thank you very much—

MPP Andrea Hazell: Thanks for putting that on the record.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): That concludes the time.

We'll now go to the government. MPP Hamid.

MPP Zee Hamid: Thank you for the presentation and thank you for the answers. I have the same question to you as well, along the same line. Your presentation got cut off. Is there anything you wanted to say that got cut off that you want to finish?

Ms. Ella Bedard: No. I guess I would refer to you our written submissions, which provide our points in more detail and provide also some of the statistics that I've mentioned and relied on.

Also, I think we refer to in those submissions what Mary also referred to, which are our submissions on the long-term critical illness leave. That's a point which I think Mary was just mentioning at the end, which is that the government is currently considering extending sick leave—unpaid job-protected leave—for workers. That's a very important thing, because right now, you could take your EI sickness benefits up to 26 weeks but still lose your

job for taking those benefits because there's no equivalent job-protected leave. So it's really important that, same as maternity leave and parental leave, the ESA job protection has to match what the EI entitlement is or else workers won't be able to actually effectively use their EI entitlement.

MPP Zee Hamid: You also mentioned enabling workers for standing up for their rights. An example you used was them potentially getting fired. What else can we do to protect workers? Because wage theft makes me generally angry. I mentioned yesterday that both my parents were minimum-wage workers growing up, and so I totally understand how important every dollar is at that level. If you miss one paycheque, you're not paying bills. It's tough. So thanks for sharing that, but also, what else can we do to protect the workers?

Ms. Ella Bedard: So the thing I mentioned, proactive enforcement of the ESA, I think is a really huge thing. Right now, there's sort of a contradiction, which is that the Employment Standards Act fundamentally recognizes that there's a power imbalance in the workplace and that the employer holds more power than the employee. But then the enforcement model totally flips that because it actually relies on workers, who we see as being on the lower side of that power imbalance, to do the enforcement work. They are the ones policing their own rights, and they have to make complaints.

So a proactive enforcement model would mean that workers don't have to face the risk that it takes to enforce their own rights because the government is doing what it does on the occupational health and safety side, which is to take a yearly look and say, "What's happening? What are the trends this year? Where do we need to put more effort? Where should we be doing targeted, proactive blitz campaigns where we're doing surprise investigations?" Those surprise investigations do not happen on the ESA side. If there is an investigation done, usually the employer is given forewarning. You're not going to get a true picture of what's going on in that workplace if they know that you're coming a week in advance, right?

The other thing I would say on that point is, if the Ministry of Labour finds that I'm owed \$30,000 in unpaid wages—which is not an uncommon sum, even though it sounds like so much money—there's no interest earned on that amount of money. So the employer, in some ways, actually financially benefits from withholding those wages, even if, nine months down the road, they end up having to pay the worker through an order to pay through the Ministry of Labour. They've held on to that money, whereas the worker has lost on that opportunity and the value of that money—that probably wouldn't have been in their bank account; it probably would have been going to their rent. But there's significant value lost. You probably know better than I do how interest works at the banks, but there needs to be more financial consequence for employers who violate workers' rights.

MPP Zee Hamid: That's really good feedback. Thank you for that.

Just real quick—the workers that you represent, that you work with, you fought for: What’s the success rate of them actually getting paid—at the end, them getting the money?

Ms. Ella Bedard: I don’t have a sound statistic, but I think it’s somewhat parallel to the statistics that I mentioned around the Toronto Star, around 40% to 50% of the orders to pay actually get collected on.

An additional problem there is that when we’re talking about cleaners or some construction work—a lot of construction work, actually, and workers, they’re working down the chain, right? They’re working for a subcontractor or who’s working for a subcontractor, or they’re working for a franchise, and the person who holds the purse strings is high up the line. It’s probably a brand name that you recognize, but they’re not financially liable for what’s happening down the line. It’s a small, small employer who can sort of abandon that numbered corporation or move on, and so it’s hard to get the money from that person.

So, another place that we say there needs to be change is that we need to have mechanisms for joint and several liability up those subcontracting chains, up the franchise chains, so that there can be liability with those who actually have the money and are setting the terms of the contracts that lead to the pressure down the line that does cause wage theft.

MPP Zee Hamid: That’s really helpful. Thank you.

And just real quick—last question. It’s for you—Mary, right? Sorry, I’m really bad with names. I was going to cheat, but I couldn’t find the right paper.

Ms. Mary Gellatly: That’s all right.

MPP Zee Hamid: I’m glad I got that right.

So, sick leaves—and this is a dumb question. Do you see similar potential issues around sick leaves? If we prevent employers from requiring a sick note, the kind of employers who don’t pay wages, do you see them requiring a sick note anyway and saying, “Bring proof or you’re fired?”

Ms. Mary Gellatly: Yes. We did continue to see that when there was a prohibition that was in place before it was removed.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): One minute.

Ms. Mary Gellatly: Employers are incredibly confident in being able to demand things and violate the law by just firing people if they’re sick and the employer feels that they’re not.

MPP Zee Hamid: Thank you for that.

Thanks, Mr. Chair.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): Thank you very much. No more?

MPP West.

MPP Jamie West: I’m going to start with Ella. This is a really interesting conversation today. You had mentioned earlier that it’s not uncommon for an employee to be owed \$30,000, and that would be interest-free.

Yesterday, from the Waterloo Region Community Legal Services, Joanna Mullen was here talking about Dutchie’s that—I’m going by memory because I don’t want to scroll up my notes—owes workers about \$500,000.

And I had made the comment that, basically, this is a way to fund a new Nice Guy’s Grocery Store or whatever if Dutchie’s ever gets closed down.

This is our fifth Working for Workers bill, so why is it that workers can be ripped off for \$30,000 at a time, that a collective of workers on multiple complaints can be ripped off for \$500,000? If there’s been five Working for Workers bills, how come we’re not seeing an end to this?

1030

Ms. Ella Bedard: I think that’s a good question. Some of this, as I mentioned, is administrative action. It doesn’t even need legislation to be changed. But I think that we have found that much of the Working for Workers acts, respectfully, sort of tinker around the edge without making substantive changes to the Employment Standards Act where we say the most focus needs to be.

Increasing the fines, like I said, will not do more unless those fines are actually levied. Having the orders to pay outstanding, in the case of Dutchie’s, will not matter unless the ministry is effectively enforcing those orders. And workers need to have the protections like wrongful dismissal protection, concerted activity protection and what I was mentioning before, this joint liability piece where those up the chain are being held economically responsible for what’s happening under their watch.

MPP Jamie West: Yes. What I’m thinking about—you talked about increasing the maximum fine. I was surprised you could find anyone who was given the maximum fine. The closest I got was about \$30,000.

Yesterday, I had said I think this is a paper tiger. You can go around and tell workers, “We’re standing up and we got your back” but, actually, you’re not applying the maximum fine. So you have a system where, for wage theft, the worst-case scenario is you have to give the money back. So why pay the workers in the first place? Because the government is not going to hold you to account. Then, meanwhile, the Minister of Labour from the Conservative government is saying, “Oh, we’re going to double the fines. There’s going to be massive fines.” But no one is being held accountable, and very few people are being penalized in the first place. Do I have this right?

Ms. Ella Bedard: That’s correct. The other thing about the complaint-based system is that you could have one individual in a workplace make a complaint; you could have five or 10, and that doesn’t necessarily trigger a broader inspection into that workplace. That’s something we’ve actually seen a lot. We’ve seen multiple workers come from the same temp agency or working in the same workplace, and there’s no broader consequence for that employer. They maybe settle those individual claims, or they pay them out, or they don’t, and they continue to operate with impunity.

MPP Jamie West: The Workers’ Action Centre does a lot of great work and is fairly significant in Ontario. Considering this is the fifth Working for Workers bill, how many times have they consulted with you about what would help workers in the province of Ontario?

Ms. Ella Bedard: Never. But we would be happy to consult.

MPP Jamie West: It's interesting, because I was speaking with the president of the OFL, and she said that they've never been consulted as well. They represent the majority of the unionized workers; you represent the majority of the non-unionized workers. It feels odd to me that a government that prides themselves on working for workers isn't speaking to organizations that actually represent the workers. Does this seem like a gap to you?

Ms. Ella Bedard: Yes, we would say it's a gap. We have a lot of experience, and our experience comes from our members and the workers that we see every year who are living day to day with the consequences of unenforced minimum standards legislation.

MPP Jamie West: Right. It really seems like there's a gap.

Mary, I just want to move to you because I'm going to run out of time. I think you illustrated really importantly the sick notes. This, again, is another one of these things where the Conservative government now is saying, "We're standing up for workers. You don't need a sick note anymore." But it's a cake-and-eat-it-too situation because, basically, what they've said is, "You don't need a sick note, but you have to provide some kind of proof." So, I don't know—do you bring a bag of something that you weren't able to keep down? How do you prove that? Do you show your Tylenol package with a couple of pills missing? It really is a loophole that makes it look like the Conservative government is doing something, but it's actually not helping a lot.

Ms. Mary Gellatly: Yes, I agree. And it's also for three unpaid sick days. Not a lot of sick days are provided for under the ESA; they're unpaid. There's a real cost on workers to have to take a day off to stay home when sick. Then, particularly for low-wage workers, when they're going to have to engage in this kind of "he said, she said" battle with the employer that has the power, it undermines the whole purpose. So, really, if you want to do the public health measure prohibiting the requirement for evidence and sick notes, then I would say get rid of the second part.

MPP Jamie West: And getting back to the theme of the Conservative government talking about working for workers: When they reduced the PEL days from 10 to three, in that same bill, they also froze minimum wage. So you have fewer personal emergency leave days for you or your family if your kids are sick, you don't have paid sick days—

Interruption.

MPP Jamie West: Lookit, the people outside are already protesting. I can hear them chanting. That's fine.

Getting back to it, the Conservatives come out, they're talking about working for workers, but their first labour bill really was about removing the personal emergency leave unpaid days, freezing minimum wage.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): One minute.

MPP Jamie West: And for six years now, they refused to bring forward paid sick days, even though we went through a pandemic and even though every expert has been recommending this. I'm talking about the Ontario

Medical Association. There are business communities that have recommended this. There are studies in New York.

Does any of this make sense to you? Does this sound like a government that's working for workers?

Ms. Mary Gellatly: I honestly cannot fathom how the government has not adopted paid sick days, given what we went through with the pandemic and the incredible evidence that has been brought forward by the medical community about it being an essential public health strategy. It makes no sense to me. It makes no sense to me also because the people that don't have employer-paid sick days are people that are doing the front-line work. They're PSWs. They're in retail, TTC, etc.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): Thank you very much. That concludes the time.

We will now go to the independent. MPP Hazell.

MPP Andrea Hazell: My question is going to be for ResCon. Andrew, you're not going to get away with this so easily. Thank you for coming in and presenting to us.

ResCon has been around since 1986, so a very long, historic period in moving workers forward, but today, we see that there is a gap with minorities and then especially women. And I'm thinking, if organizations like ResCon are very challenged with this, I can't see how the smaller skilled trades organizations are going to make this go away or make it okay.

The moving of the needle for women in trades is very minute. So what is ResCon doing right now to bridge that gap?

Mr. Andrew Pariser: Both on women and people of diverse backgrounds—our roots go back to collective agreements that essentially started in the 1960s. When you look at the history of residential construction, it's a history of immigration, whether it's Irish, Italian—essentially every group that immigrated to Canada has found their way into residential construction and maybe one of the subsectors there.

I think it's a perfect time for your question. I can't remember if it's the 21st or the 23rd—I think it's the 21st of October that we are hosting our next annual Women in Construction webinar, and the theme there is on allyship. We're looking at how do we continue to retain more women in the trades and how, as a male-dominated industry, do we focus on things like allyship, because there's work that needs to be done by everybody and we still need to make construction sites more welcoming for women. Part of that is focusing on and introducing and really embracing some of the core concepts of allyship.

I will say, we work very closely with Skilled Trades Ontario, which is a new group that came out of the old OCOT. When you look at some of the statistics they've put out, I think there was a 30% increase in female apprenticeship; that was the last number I saw. I think that's positive. A lot of those people are getting into residential construction, but I think, as we heard earlier, the number is still at about 5%. So 30% growth is a great number; 5% is a terrible number.

When we have these conferences, we try to really figure out where we're at. We're very honest about that. We try

to figure out themes and ways to help move the needle because that's important. And then, we have a big focus on barriers. The barriers that we hear are on-site conditions. There are still issues related to child care. It's up for people like me to listen to the people who are in the field and then see what we can do to help move the needle. We represent large builders who are unionized. My experience would be different than some of the experiences that we've heard there. I think most of the employers in Ontario are good employers. They value their people. The workers are the best and biggest asset that any company has, and so I have no idea why the employers that are being discussed today would act like that. One, it's disgusting to me, but two, it's bad business.

1040

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): One minute.

Mr. Andrew Pariser: We want to empower our members but also all of the companies that work for our members to do better. We want to create best practices, we want to share those, and we want to make residential construction the greatest industry in Ontario.

MPP Andrea Hazell: Inside of ResCon, do you have an organization that deals with all of this?

Mr. Andrew Pariser: We have a training and education committee, and then through that, we have a committee that looks at women in construction. Every October, we literally do a webinar, so that one's coming up.

MPP Andrea Hazell: So you have a follow-up process?

Mr. Andrew Pariser: Absolutely.

MPP Andrea Hazell: Thank you.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): We'll go to the government. MPP Barnes.

Ms. Patrice Barnes: I have a question for you, Andrew. You have been involved in labour for a long time, so you understand the intricacies of balancing both employment for the employees—and what you say, really, to your employees that way is leading that business.

You've talked a lot about information about getting people, especially, into the skilled trades and residential construction. What are some of the pieces that you've seen in this bill that assist your company in doing that? And what are some of the other things that you'd like to see that we go about?

Mr. Andrew Pariser: I like the fact that we're on Working for Workers Five because I think it keeps it on the agenda and it keeps it as a focus. I spoke that there needs to be a surgical approach to legislation, but I also think—and hopefully my colleagues here would agree—there needs to be a surgical approach to enforcement, but then also to removing barriers and getting people into the trades.

If I may, I'd like to promote some of the groups that we work with that do excellent work because they're the ones that are going to remove barriers, and they're the ones that are going to get more people into the trades.

Off the top of my head, I think everybody's heard of Skills Ontario. This government has, and I think all governments have, been very supportive. They're literally the

best group. They bring together tons and tons of events throughout the year, and they have their showcase event every year at the Toronto Congress Centre, where it's their big skills competition. Ontario youth come and they compete, and it's a great showcase for the trades.

Another group is Honour the Work. This is run by Angela Coldwell. She creates lesson plans and ships them to teachers for as young as into elementary schools so that teachers who may not have skilled trades experience are able to have a skilled trades lesson plan, and it's tied to their specific curriculum.

There's a program in the Toronto District School Board called STEP to Construction that's run by Elvy Moro. High school students get credits to job shadow tradespeople on residential and ICI sites. They get out there for a semester and it's anywhere from two to 12 trades. They get to see it, and it's kind of what I'd call "try a trade or learn." So they job-shadow, and they get exposure to what the trades are.

The last one—and thank you for letting me eat up so much time—would be BOLT; so it's Building Opportunities for Life Today. That's a charity that was founded by Tridel, and what they do is they provide scholarships, but more importantly, social supports for anybody who wants to get into construction. We're talking on the trades, we're talking college programs, we're talking university programs. And so, BOLT supports a large number of, essentially, students, and helps them fund their education, gives them social supports, but then also tries to help connect them to jobs, and their success rate is tremendous.

Groups like that, those four groups—that's the way we solve the problems: expanding them, giving them more profile, and helping them do the good work they're already doing.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): MPP Saunderson.

Mr. Brian Saunderson: Thank you to all our presenters this afternoon.

I want to start off just by first acknowledging the comments about wage theft. That's certainly extremely disheartening and disturbing. I know my colleague MPP Hamid asked a number of questions about that, and that's something that we certainly need to be very mindful of in terms of enforcement moving forward.

My question this time around is to you, Andrew, about ResCon. There's been some discussion about minimum-wage levels in Ontario. In fact, last week, they went up to \$17.20, which was a cost-of-living adjustment. We're one of the few provinces that has that, and I think we're second only behind BC in terms of our minimum wage, so this is certainly an issue that this government takes very seriously.

We've heard, certainly, about some very bad actors in the sector. Andrew, I'm wondering if you can just talk about from your perspective—and I know that you actually worked in the Ministry of Labour for a while—on the good actors, and how this legislation is working with the good actors in the sector to promote better working conditions for our workers in Ontario.

Mr. Andrew Pariser: Yes. So, specifically on the minimum wage, that's not something that impacts my members because, as I think everybody knows, new-build residential is a really well-paid area and so nobody's close to minimum wage. I think the closest we get is we have a very successful education program with George Brown College. Those students come out for a semester, and we make sure that they're paid, essentially, as they're in school, and we make sure they're paid more than minimum wage, because we're not here to do an unpaid internship kind of thing. So that's the closest we'd get.

But again, when you look at it, this bill, and I'd say, maybe the evolution of it—so I think this is number five. In the public consultations, in Ontario's Regulatory Registry, they're always identifying issues that are popping up in employment. To me, that's never going to change and so that's the proper approach.

And so, the fact that we've done it five times and the fact that there's, I think, generally, about at least six schedules each time—I like it, because it takes a surgical approach. It says, “Okay, where are we at in Ontario? Employment and labour legislation is incredibly complicated. Are we having problems in service? Are we having problems in retail?” It certainly sounds like there's some areas that need some more focus. And so maybe we need a surgical approach when it comes to enforcement under the ESA and say, “How did we get to \$22 million? Where are these people being impacted?”

I don't want to put words in anyone's mouth, but certainly there needs to be, from what I'm hearing today, a focus in low-wage sectors on wage theft. Well, that is a very surgical thing. And so, I'm sure people could figure out exactly where a large percentage of wage theft is going on, and you could figure out what sector it's in and you could put together a tailored plan around that.

That surgical approach should be taken for regulation, legislation, but also enforcement. I think one thing that this bill starts to do and past bills have done is look at trusted employer models. So the vast majority of employers are here to follow the rules. They value their employees. They view their employees as family.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): One minute.

Mr. Andrew Pariser: If we can figure out who the good employers are—and I'm not saying they don't need to be regulated. I'm not saying they don't need to be inspected. But if we can shift resources to employers who are not following the rules, that have showed they're not interested in following the rules—my understanding would be that it's a small percentage of employers in Ontario—then, all of a sudden, maybe we can get better compliance with the ESA. Those are just my thoughts.

Mr. Brian Saunderson: Yes. I appreciate that and I appreciate your comments about it being an iterative process. There really is no finish line in this sector.

I know we have very little time left, but I just would like to get your comment. We've heard about the movement in getting employment equity for women across the board. We heard from a prior deputant that in the road construction sector, they move from about 4% to 8%.

You've talked about 5%. Again, doubling, but those numbers—there's a lot to be done there to get to where we should be. Do you have any thoughts on how we might increase those efforts moving forward?

Mr. Andrew Pariser: I think it's just continuing the good work that's being done in certain—

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): Thank you very much. I would like to hear it too, but the time is up.

We'll now go to the official opposition. MPP Kernaghan.

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: Thank you to our presenters here today. I'd like to begin with the Workers' Action Centre.

Ella, I think it's jarring for this committee to hear that there's \$22 million owed to workers in the last fiscal year. If I consider your comments, you mentioned that the main reason that employers get away with this is because there's that neglect and lack of enforcement from the Ministry of Labour itself. I would certainly add to that: It's almost as though the Ministry of Labour is endorsing and supporting this by their inaction.

I wanted to ask, in terms of proactive inspections, in terms of those proactive workplace or ESA inspections, how do they make more sense in terms of process and procedure?

Ms. Ella Bedard: In terms of the process for those proactive inspections? I drew the parallel to the Occupational Health and Safety Act before and I think that's appropriate. That is the surgical approach, I guess: There's a review done every year with stakeholders and its database, based on what they've seen in the past year, and then they come up with initiatives and campaigns for target areas, looking at which sectors have had the most fatalities, what are the particular issues and then they conduct proactive investigations—like I said, over 50,000 of them. I think, actually, that number is probably a decrease.

They also do reactive inspections, which is, when a complaint is made in a workplace, an inspector will go and look at the entire workplace. That's obviously not the approach taken with the ESA. You can't make a complaint about a workplace to say, “Hey, I know everyone here is not getting overtime,” and they'll go look at the factory. That's not an option; you can only make an individual complaint.

1050

Like I said, the inspections that are being done right now, the authority exists in the ESA for those to be surprise inspections. However, that's not the practice, currently. There's forewarning, and the employer is asked to do a sort of a self-audit, which if I was asked to do, I wouldn't be extremely honest about—my self-perceptions may be off. So that approach, we say, is not really cutting it.

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: I would say that, with forewarning, that inspection would lack legitimacy. It would lack authenticity. It would not be in touch with reality whatsoever.

Ms. Ella Bedard: Yes, and I would make the point that I think this is actually bad for the economy at large. There are millions of dollars that are not going back into the

economy because they're not going to workers' pockets. That's tax revenue. That's EI and CPP contributions that are being lost, and this government recognized that.

I think the employers in the recruitment and temp agency sector, they recognize that, because when wage theft is allowed to run rampant like this, it creates a race to the bottom where, in order to remain competitive as a business, you have to cut the same corners as your competitor. That was what was happening, and it continues to happen in the temp agency and recruitment sector, and that's why employers recognized, in the same way that advocates for workers did, that there needed to be greater regulation and licensing for those recruiters and temp agencies, because they don't want to compete with people who are breaking the law. That same approach should be taken for the entire workforce.

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: Absolutely—and level the playing field.

I did want to also ask, how do these proactive ESA inspections—how do those work for workers?

Ms. Ella Bedard: It takes the burden off workers to police their own rights. It would mean that, instead of having to put your neck out there and risk losing your job and your income to support your family, efforts are being made to ensure that employers are in compliance with the law.

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: Thank you.

I'd like to move over to Mary now. Mary, in the policy paper in collaboration with the Workers' Action Centre, it speaks about the need for 10 employer-paid sick days. Can you speak about the importance of having those 10 employer-paid sick days, especially when this bill is meant to encourage more women to participate in the skilled trades?

Ms. Mary Gellatly: Yes. Actually, it's a really good point about getting women into the skilled trades, because we know women still bear the brunt of much of the child care. On average, women need—I think it's nine sick days per year. Some of those are looking after the kids. Whereas for men, it's about five, I think, if I'm recalling the stats correctly.

But if, again, women were able to, in the construction sector, avail themselves of the paid sick days, it would make it much easier to ensure they could take off when they are sick and protect other workers in the company from infectious disease.

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: Thank you. I think some key take-aways this committee can adopt would be that there be provisions for protected concerted activity as well as wrongful dismissal protections. But as well, I think your indication that complaints don't trigger broader consequences or enforcement under the ESA is deeply concerning.

I wanted to turn over to you, Andrew. Would you like to see something along those lines happen, that the com-

plaints under the ESA would trigger consequences for those bad actors within certain sectors?

Mr. Andrew Pariser: Yes. I represent largely unionized builders and so we're governed, obviously, by the ESA, but also by a collective agreement, which outlines the terms and conditions. We do lots of what I would call labor relations webinars. It is not legal to fire someone or do any of this stuff. I think what you guys are saying is there's a difference between what the law says and what your clients are practically experiencing. That, at least, is probably my understanding, because I don't think it's fair to say that an employer in Ontario can legally fire someone because they were sick or because they didn't or any of those things.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): One minute.

Mr. Andrew Pariser: Now, I'm not saying it doesn't happen, and I think we need to figure out ways to solve it, but I think that gets back into enforcement, and I think that gets back to, for at least me, a trusted employer model. My members are bound—so I think my members are good members, but in addition to that, they're also bound to a union, so that would trigger grievances. Certainly, that is an added protection in the unionized sector.

You can look at things like trusted employer models—those are things that we can explore—but again, it frees up resources to go after the bad actors, which I would say, representing employers, I would think is a very small percentage, because most employers that I talk to, the core of their businesses are their workers. If you're going to build a good house, a good home, a good condo, a good townhouse, you don't want to be paying the lowest rate. You're not looking to save money there. You want good, dedicated workers that are skilled, that want to come to work, that want to do a good job, and certainly, we offer benefits, protections in all of those different things—

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): Thank you very much. That concludes the time for this presentation, and it concludes the time for this panel. We want to thank the participants immensely for the time they took to prepare your presentation and the time you took to come and present it to us. I'm sure it will be quite helpful as we deliberate on this bill.

With that, I just wanted to remind that the deadline for written submission is 7 p.m. on Thursday, October 10, 2024. You mentioned written presentations in one of the comments, and just because you were here presenting doesn't mean you can't put in written submissions, and the deadline is Thursday, October 10, 2024.

The deadline for filing amendments to the bill is 5 p.m. on Thursday, October 17.

The committee is now adjourned until 9 a.m. on Tuesday, October 22, 2024, when we will begin clause-by-clause consideration of Bill 190. With that, the committee is adjourned.

The committee adjourned at 1057.

STANDING COMMITTEE ON FINANCE AND ECONOMIC AFFAIRS

Chair / Président

Mr. Ernie Hardeman (Oxford PC)

Vice-Chair / Vice-Présidente

Ms. Catherine Fife (Waterloo ND)

Mr. Deepak Anand (Mississauga–Malton PC)

Ms. Patrice Barnes (Ajax PC)

Hon. Stephen Crawford (Oakville PC)

Ms. Catherine Fife (Waterloo ND)

Mr. Ernie Hardeman (Oxford PC)

Hon. Mike Harris (Kitchener–Conestoga PC)

MPP Andrea Hazell (Scarborough–Guildwood L)

Ms. Christine Hogarth (Etobicoke–Lakeshore PC)

Mr. Terence Kernaghan (London North Centre / London-Centre-Nord ND)

Ms. Effie J. Triantafilopoulos (Oakville North–Burlington / Oakville-Nord–Burlington PC)

Substitutions / Membres remplaçants

Mr. Aris Babikian (Scarborough–Agincourt PC)

MPP Zee Hamid (Milton PC)

Mr. Brian Saunderson (Simcoe–Grey PC)

Mr. Dave Smith (Peterborough–Kawartha PC)

MPP Jamie West (Sudbury ND)

Clerk / Greffière

Ms. Vanessa Kattar

Staff / Personnel

Mr. Michael Vidoni, research officer,
Research Services