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(Hansard)**

JP-56

**Standing Committee on  
Justice Policy**

Intimate partner violence

1<sup>st</sup> Session  
43<sup>rd</sup> Parliament

Wednesday 20 November 2024

**Comité permanent  
de la justice**

Violence entre  
partenaires intimes

1<sup>re</sup> session  
43<sup>e</sup> législature

Mercredi 20 novembre 2024

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Chair: Lorne Coe  
Clerk: Thushitha Kobikrishna

Président : Lorne Coe  
Greffière : Thushitha Kobikrishna

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

## STANDING COMMITTEE ON JUSTICE POLICY

Wednesday 20 November 2024

## COMITÉ PERMANENT DE LA JUSTICE

Mercredi 20 novembre 2024

*The committee met at 1301 in committee room 2.*

### INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE

**The Chair (Mr. Lorne Coe):** Good afternoon, members. I call this meeting of the Standing Committee on Justice Policy to order.

We are meeting today to begin phase 2 of the committee's study on intimate partner violence. Are there any questions, please, before we begin?

MPP Andrew, please.

**MPP Jill Andrew:** Chair, I'd like to emphasize that this entire process is a sham. It's disrespectful. We did not vote for this process to be this way. Five minutes to question a minister? Five minutes? The system is broken. You know it. Everyone in this committee knows it.

And we need Bill 173 passed immediately. You all said you would pass it in April of this year—or was it last year? I don't even remember. I've been bringing this up every year. Femicides have gone up 68% in five years. Come on, Chair.

**The Chair (Mr. Lorne Coe):** Okay. Thank you.

**MPP Jill Andrew:** Five minutes? I've got five hours for you—

**The Chair (Mr. Lorne Coe):** All right. That's a statement, not a question. Thank you.

**MPP Jill Andrew:** It's a comment.

**The Chair (Mr. Lorne Coe):** The parameters that we have for today's meetings were well established through the subcommittee of this committee, and representation was from the official opposition as well as the government. There is an agreement on the parameters. So we're going to move along that particular route, and I can proceed.

The committee has invited ministers to appear before the committee and provide their oral submissions. The ministers will have 20 minutes for their presentations, followed by 10 minutes for questions from members of the committee. The time for questions will be broken down into one round of five minutes for the government members, and one round of five minutes for the members of the official opposition.

### MINISTRY OF CHILDREN, COMMUNITY AND SOCIAL SERVICES

**The Chair (Mr. Lorne Coe):** I will now call on the Associate Minister of Women's Social and Economic Opportunity, the Honourable Charmaine Williams, to make her opening remarks.

Minister, the floor is yours. I'll let you know when you have one minute left in your presentation, so you might take the opportunity at that point to summarize what you haven't been able yet to address. Please begin, Minister. Thank you.

**Hon. Charmaine A. Williams:** Thank you, Chair, and thank you, committee, for the opportunity to lead off these important hearings into the matter of intimate partner violence. I want to thank the committee for the desire to work on this and address this very challenging societal issue. Ontarians are well-served by your in-depth look at the root causes and potential solutions to this issue.

My cabinet colleague the Minister of Children, Community and Social Services will appear before this committee next week, along with several other ministers whose departments provide programs, services and other supports for victims and survivors of violence against women. Minister Parsa and his colleagues will outline many of the support services our government has in place to reduce violence against women and support survivors. The scope of this joint effort with our community partners across the province demonstrates the challenge intimate partner violence presents to all of us.

I also want to just say that my ADM, Jacqueline Cureton, is also here with me, and she has been a major support and a huge advocate in working really hard to make sure that we're putting good policy forward to help keep women safe in Ontario and make sure there's opportunities. I just wanted to make sure I acknowledged that you're here.

You've also heard from community members, but also Indigenous partners, and I'm really happy that you all heard from the members from IWAC, the Indigenous Women's Advisory Council. In 2020, the province established the Indigenous Women's Advisory Council to address the root causes of violence against Indigenous women and children and ensure the voices of Indigenous women are heard. The council is helping us to better understand how violence and racism impact Indigenous women and girls, and advising us on ways to engage First Nations, Métis and Inuit communities in violence prevention efforts.

The council also plays a critical role in the implementation of Pathways to Safety, which is Ontario's strategy in response to the Final Report of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, having jointly developed the strategy with our government. We will continue to work in partnership with Indigenous leaders, including the Indigenous Women's Advisory Council, and collaborate with Indigenous communities and organizations

to implement Pathways to Safety, providing Ontario's current system of support in building a safer province.

Chair, violence against women crosses every social, economic and cultural boundary in our communities. I have been following the committee's work with great interest, and what has become clear in the submissions to date is that prevention and awareness are key to reducing intimate partner violence. This reinforces what I've seen in my career working in children's mental health.

While I'm on the topic, I do want to extend thanks to my PA, Jess Dixon, who has done incredible work on this committee and helped all of us to strengthen our understanding in connection.

This government has zero tolerance for violence against women, and we're backing up that position in communities across Ontario by providing supports to victims, prosecuting offenders and raising public awareness. These crimes must end, so that everyone in this province can live free from the threat, fear or experience of exploitation and violence.

At the centre of our response is Ontario-STANDS, our government's four-year action plan to end gender-based violence that we launched last December. Our government has committed to \$1.4 billion in gender-based violence services and prevention initiatives over that four-year period. This funding is complemented by an investment of \$162 million over the same period from the federal government after I signed the National Action Plan to End Gender-Based Violence, one of the first things I did after becoming a minister. Minister Parsa will have more to say on Ontario's action plan at the hearings next week.

Today, as Ontario's Minister for Women's Social and Economic Opportunity, I'd like to outline how the office is supporting the whole-of-government effort to end intimate partner violence, and then I'll finish by discussing how the issue of women's safety is closely connected to their ability to be socially and economically empowered.

The Office of Women's Social and Economic Opportunity supports a suite of programs that seek to embed prevention by changing attitudes, norms and behaviours, and our Preventing Gender-based Violence Program does exactly that. In 2024-25, the ministry is investing \$3.5 million in the program with organizations delivering prevention and awareness programs in alignment with one or more of the following themes.

The first is preventing gender-based violence across the lifespan through public awareness, training, workshops and direct interventions. These methods examine the ways gender-based violence impacts the entire human lifespan, from children, teens and adults to seniors living in households. A good example of this is the White Ribbon It Starts With You campaign—it engages male students in academic communities as allies in preventing sexual violence.

The second theme is preventing gender-based violence in Indigenous communities. Here, we're talking about culturally responsive and culturally safe public-awareness training workshops and direct interventions, delivered by and for Indigenous communities, that help prevent gender-based violence and support individuals to heal. For example, the Native Women's Resource Centre of Toronto assists women

by increasing awareness, confidence and knowledge and by establishing roles in the community to support healing. The result of these programs builds safety, confidence and healthy decision-making.

**1310**

But now, Chair, I'd like to turn to the things I'm really excited about. I'm not saying I wasn't excited about the other things—they're valuable—but it's the connection between women's economic security and their safety.

From a strictly economic point of view, women's participation in Ontario's economy is critical to their prosperity and independence. It's key to addressing the pressing labour shortages that we see in vital sectors in Ontario, and I think we can all easily understand that. But what might be less obvious, yet just as important, is that increasing a woman's economic security and independence helps to prevent gender-based violence from occurring and supports survivors in their recovery. This is the root of the issue.

Our government is working to help see women across the province thrive everywhere: at home, at work and in their communities. We are removing barriers so that more women can excel as entrepreneurs, in leadership roles, in sectors where the need is greatest and in jobs where they are under-represented, like STEM and skilled trades fields.

This includes promoting a wide range of fields and careers to women and girls, through elementary and high school curricula and our skilled trades strategy. It also is helping entrepreneurs find support and resources to foster more women-led businesses through programs like Digital Main Street, Futurpreneur Canada and the Racialized and Indigenous Support for Entrepreneurs Grant.

We have also introduced changes to make workplaces safer and more welcoming for women. This includes ensuring having at least one women's-only washroom, requiring menstrual products on larger construction sites, providing properly fitting PPE and safety equipment, and requiring that washrooms are clean and sanitary. I heard first-hand from women who have said that they have had to drive to a Tim Hortons 10 or 15 minutes away from a job site just to have access to a washroom. Now, we're making it a requirement so that women do not have to have this extra step that they are required to take.

We are investing in targeted employment and training supports to help women overcome socio-economic barriers, build skills and gain employment or start their own business so that they can be financially independent. This training is provided through our ministry's flagship programs: the Women's Economic Security Program and the Investing in Women's Futures Program.

The Women's Economic Security Program offers training to low-income women in four streams: the skilled trades, entrepreneurship, information technology and general employment. To help remove barriers to participation, the training programs also include additional supports such as providing meals throughout the training day and transportation to and from training.

Through the program, women, including those who have experienced or are at risk of gender-based violence, can also access wraparound supports, including referrals to mental

health and well-being services, counselling, housing and legal assistance. This program is designed to help low-income women gain skills, knowledge and experience, including in fields where women are under-represented.

In August, I was really pleased to announce an investment of up to \$26.7 million over three years to support 25 programs across the province through the Women's Economic Security Program. This new round of funding is supporting the continuation of 16 previously funded programs as well as nine new programs so that more women can increase their skills and get better-paying jobs.

A few examples of these unique programs are the YWCA's mobile application development program. Now, that program improves the employment skills of low-income women, immigrant and refugee women in fields of technology and communication, and provides current, industry-led certifications.

We also have Minwaashin Lodge. It is an Ottawa-based Indigenous women's support centre that specializes in helping women and children heal from domestic violence and other forms of violence, as well as the generational harm caused by the residential school system.

Canadore College's general carpenter pre-apprenticeship program—this is a great program—they provide training mostly to Indigenous women with low incomes to help them prepare for jobs in the construction industry.

Then there's Up With Women—I love Up With Women. If you don't know them, you've got to check them out. It's a bilingual program in Toronto that helps survivors of gender-based violence get access to employment readiness and wraparound supports they need to increase their participation and have child care provided for them. The big thing about it is the one-to-one support for mentors in fields that they want to access. They are coached throughout the process. I met with some women who came in from the shelter, who are working for banks and having such a complete change in how they're living their lives. That extra care that these programs are giving is transformative for these women and their families. Funding for Up With Women comes through the Investing in Women's Futures Program, and it helps women build skills, get jobs or start businesses to increase their well-being.

That brings me to the Investing in Women's Futures Program. They provide more of the job-readiness piece, the flexible services and employment-readiness supports for women facing social and economic barriers, including those experiencing gender-based violence and especially social isolation. We know financial abuse and isolation is a strategy used by an abusive partner to prevent them from getting access to support, so this program helps women who've experienced that type of abuse develop the confidence gradually, and meets them where they're at and works them through it. It's phenomenal.

Through the IWF Program, women have access to services like employment readiness, counselling, life skills, employment assistance, financial literacy, gender-based violence prevention programs and counselling supports that help them overcome barriers and transition to employment. Last year, our government announced an expansion

to the program, so now we're providing it to 11 new locations, bringing the total number of service-providing locations to 34 across Ontario. This includes newly funded organizations serving women across the province who are Indigenous, Black, racialized, newcomers, francophones and women experiencing homelessness. Some of these programs are offering virtual services, so it allows women who are not closely connected to the service site to still get access. I think about the women in the north who are now connected to programs like PARO who do virtual services.

Other locations: Roots Community Services. They primarily support the Black, African and Caribbean communities, and they provide a 12-week program, focused on social enterprise, where women can build confidence, heal from past trauma and build towards financial independence.

There's Keepers of the Circle. They use a holistic approach to build pathways for Indigenous women and girls to pursue meaningful careers. Women can learn entrepreneurship skills development, sector-specific training and culturally appropriate wraparound supports for those who are experiencing gender-based violence.

There's also the Women's Multicultural Resource and Counselling Centre of Durham. They provide specialized, trauma-informed counselling, financial empowerment, skills-based training, mentorship and self-help support. The centre helps women, including young women, experiencing homelessness. They help build them up through entrepreneurship and work co-operative development programs. There are some phenomenal things happening across Ontario.

Based on testimonials from participants in the Women's Economic Security Program, we know that women have received help to leave social assistance, pay off student loans or debts and regain their self-esteem, their confidence and independence to start their own ventures, grow their businesses and find full-time careers.

I can't stress enough the importance of entrepreneurship, especially for the women who are feeling isolated. We've had women who have been staying in their homes for fear of being seen by their abuser. Because of the virtual supports and the opportunity to build a business, some women are building businesses out of their homes, so they're still being to build their business and have economic support as they are able to stay away from their abuser, until they're able to go to a different community where they're able to feel free. Entrepreneurship is doing this for women and we're investing in these entrepreneurs.

#### 1320

A lot of women have found full-time careers in fields that they love and, ultimately, they are keeping themselves and their families safe. Many of the testimonials acknowledge the dedicated front-line staff leading this work in communities, providing tireless support and encouragement to women. I can't thank them enough—all of the organizations delivering this program. It's hard work, but they are so committed, and we thank them for that.

Chair, these two programs, the IWF and WESP, they've seen over 14,000 women get access to supports and start

the journey to healing between 2021 and 2023. And that number is higher because we've had more women access it this year alone, especially as we've expanded these programs.

In addition to supporting women's participation in the workforce, these programs are crucial to preventing gender-based violence and supporting women's economic independence. Women are safer when they're financially independent. We know this. With supports across our government, we continue to increase women's participation in the workforce, support their well-being and invest in their success.

While supporting women's participation in the workforce, we are also working with partners across government to provide broader supports for women. It's a whole-of-government approach, and that's why you have my colleagues coming in to speak to you all about what are the other things that we're doing. This includes getting more affordable and attainable housing built faster so that women can have a safe place to call home, and addressing their mental health and addiction needs as well through our Roadmap to Wellness strategy that is also providing that much-needed support.

**The Chair (Mr. Lorne Coe):** You have two minutes left in your presentation

**Hon. Charmaine A. Williams:** Chair, working together, we can continue to improve opportunities for women, empower them to pursue their dreams and help build a stronger Ontario. Even more importantly, we can help reduce the risk of intimate partner violence, a core part of our broader action plan to end gender-based violence.

I want to thank all the members for listening to me speak on the things that we're doing in my ministry here and for your attention today, and just recommit to the commitment that we have to continue to work on making sure Ontario is a safe place for women here.

**The Chair (Mr. Lorne Coe):** Thank you very much, Minister.

We're now going to start our questions with the official opposition, who have five minutes. MPP Andrew, please, when you're ready.

**MPP Jill Andrew:** Thanks to the associate minister for her presentation. I appreciate the long list of agencies that you have chosen to highlight. I know that many agencies that are working with survivors of intimate partner violence, gender-based violence, sexual assault and rape have told us that their operating budgets are grossly underfunded and have been chronically underfunded by this government. I just want to put that on the record.

Chair, I'm going to speak more than ask questions because I only have five minutes. I want you to read this: "On January 29, 2022"—this is the story of Emily—"I was raped in my home, a place that was once my safe haven. I woke up at approximately 6 a.m. to a person on top of me, his penis inside of my vagina. I still remember the feel of his itchy wool sweater against my skin, the smell of burnt disgust in the air, the deep horror that radiated through my body and the immense fear that cloaked me. As I opened my eyes, he pulled himself out of me and ejaculated on my stomach as if I was a towel meant to clean up his fluids."

Chair and Associate Minister, this is a sham of a process—on April 10, 2024, if I'm correct, this government said they would pass Bill 173. Several months later, we are still here. This government is refusing to listen to survivors. Politicians are not the experts. The survivors are the experts. The people working on the front lines, they are the experts. They're all asking for Bill 173 to be passed immediately.

They're also asking for the passage of Bill 189, Lydia's Law, which would call for a review of the efficiency of the Victim Quick Response Program+, which we know right now is pretty insufficient since this government gutted compensation to sexual assault survivors and essentially said, "Sorry. If your abuse is too old, we don't care about it. You can't get the therapies and the support that you need."

I will be writing out my questions today, and I will be requesting answers from the government, from the associate minister, from this committee, to those questions.

If you may answer with a yes or no, Associate Minister: Will you bring Bill 173, posted by the official opposition NDP to declare intimate partner violence an epidemic, back for third reading, and will you pass the bill? Yes or no?

**Hon. Charmaine A. Williams:** I thank you for the question, and I think you know—

**MPP Jill Andrew:** Yes or no, Associate Minister?

**Hon. Charmaine A. Williams:** —after what we've heard—

**MPP Jill Andrew:** Yes or no? Just yes or no.

**The Chair (Mr. Lorne Coe):** MPP Andrew, you're out of order. The minister is permitted to answer the question.

**MPP Jill Andrew:** And I'd like to reclaim my time.

**The Chair (Mr. Lorne Coe):** You're talking over the minister.

**MPP Jill Andrew:** I'd like to reclaim my time.

**The Chair (Mr. Lorne Coe):** You're out of order.

**MPP Jill Andrew:** I have five minutes. I get to reclaim my time.

**The Chair (Mr. Lorne Coe):** No. Absolutely not.

**MPP Jill Andrew:** I'd like to reclaim my time.

**The Chair (Mr. Lorne Coe):** Answer the question, please.

**Hon. Charmaine A. Williams:** Thank you. I think what is important that we're doing here is listening to the community supports, all the people who are doing the work. I know that was the first phase of the committee. You're hearing from us here.

I remember going to AMO, and this was after many—I think, about 95% of the municipalities—

**MPP Jill Andrew:** I'd like to interject, Chair. Can someone—

**The Chair (Mr. Lorne Coe):** No, you're not going to interject. The minister is trying to—

**MPP Jill Andrew:** Can the Clerk tell me if I have the right to reclaim my time?

**The Chair (Mr. Lorne Coe):** You're out of order.

**MPP Jill Andrew:** I'm asking the Clerk if I have the right to reclaim my time. Yes or no?

**The Chair (Mr. Lorne Coe):** Are you finished?

**MPP Jill Andrew:** Do I have the right to reclaim my time?

**The Chair (Mr. Lorne Coe):** No. That is my ruling.



**MPP Jill Andrew:** The Clerk seems to be telling the Chair that I have the right to reclaim my time, and the Chair is using his government power—he’s abusing it to tell me, a survivor of sexual assault, that I can’t reclaim my time.

Back to the associate minister: Will your party pass Bill 173 and make it law today, and declare intimate partner violence an epidemic?

**Mr. Will Bouma:** Point of order, Chair.

**The Chair (Mr. Lorne Coe):** Please, go ahead. Yes, MPP Bouma?

**Mr. Will Bouma:** As the member knows, that bill cannot go to third reading as it hasn’t passed second reading yet. It has been referred to this committee to do this study right now. Therefore, the question itself is out of order and must be ruled out of order.

**MPP Jill Andrew:** On April 10, 2024, your government said you were passing the bill. Why waste survivors’ time?

**The Chair (Mr. Lorne Coe):** Hold on, please. Thank you. MPP Bouma, that was not a point of order.

MPP Andrew, you’ve used your time.

To the government, please, for questions.

**MPP Jill Andrew:** Actually, no, I did not use my time.

**The Chair (Mr. Lorne Coe):** You’ve used your time.

**MPP Jill Andrew:** I did not use my time that the Clerk told you I was allowed to get. You’re changing the rules on the spot.

**The Chair (Mr. Lorne Coe):** You’re out of order. That’s the third time.

**MPP Jill Andrew:** And so are you.

**The Chair (Mr. Lorne Coe):** That’s the third time. You’re out of order.

Questions, please, from the government. When you’re ready, MPP Dixon.

**Ms. Jess Dixon:** Minister Williams, your leadership has been really instrumental in advancing the causes of so many women in the province, particularly regarding economic independence. I had the opportunity to be present at some of those announcements. I wonder if you can—obviously, without identifying anybody—share some of the examples of how these initiatives have worked on an individual level, because I know you have heard from so many people.

**Hon. Charmaine A. Williams:** Thanks for the question, MPP Dixon. These programs have really helped women at such a core, fundamental level, empowering them to see the value in themselves. I was able to go to a carpentry program and speak with some women who were living in shelters, and they said these programs have given them the confidence to get up and to try something new, but also the hope that there are opportunities after fleeing violence.

What I do like is the connection between the programs in the shelters where they’re giving women a place to live while they’re providing these supports. The YWCA is one of those locations that are helping women. While they are rebuilding their lives, they have stable housing.

I met one woman outside of Armagh House who was talking about getting in her new truck that she was able to purchase because she finally has a job, and she is finally able to not worry about rent and take care of her son, and also provide her son with an opportunity to see that there is life after trauma. These are major changes that happen

in the core of many of these women who have experienced horrific abuse, and that’s the rebuilding that we want to see.

**1330**

**Ms. Jess Dixon:** Again, from your experience in working with so many of these women, can you expand a little bit on—you used the line of, “When women succeed, Ontario succeeds.” These types of programs—how do they contribute to creating overall an even more resilient and safe community? Because we’ve heard so much at this committee about how strong communities where people feel supported are so important to being able to avoid or escape these types of abusive relationships.

**Hon. Charmaine A. Williams:** I often say that when you hurt a woman, you’re not just hurting her, but you’re hurting her children, her family and her community. Whenever we hear of a horrific loss of a woman’s life being taken at the hands of their abuser, all of us are shaken by the loss. That’s why we have a duty to invest in programs that are working to keep women safe.

After we had so many municipalities—you remember being at AMO—declaring IPV an epidemic, but then they came back and they were asking, “Well, what’s next?” We’ve encouraged many municipalities, then, to go out to the community and find out what programs are in community and make sure every single woman knows about them. That’s why I always talk about the Assaulted Women’s Helpline.

This is a non-partisan issue. I’m glad that we’re here at committee discussing this because we are actually hearing from people and then coming up with recommendations and further solutions that we can build upon Ontario-STANDS. Ontario-STANDS is a strategy that we created in Ontario, and all of this work was being done without an epidemic declaration. There’s so much work that needs to be done.

**Ms. Jess Dixon:** I know you’ve worked a lot in children’s mental health. What have you seen as far as the connection between—we’ve talked a lot about prevention and about how adverse childhood experiences can really impact this, about children who are growing up in homes with mothers that aren’t financially independent versus those who are able to attain that. What type of impact can that have on the development of a child?

**Hon. Charmaine A. Williams:** I often talk to women who have careers, and they will tell me, “I got into this career because my mom was in this career,” or “I had the example of an aunt who did A, B and C.” We often see that and hear about that legacy that’s created, which is why I often talk about the impacts that intimate partner violence has on every child when they witness it. That has an impact on how they see and move through life.

When they see their mother rebuild their lives, go back to school and change their life because of the programs that we have, you’re changing the direction and future of that child. That’s why I say it impacts the community. There are many communities who have been impacted by—

**The Chair (Mr. Lorne Coe):** Thank you, Minister. That concludes your time to present and answer questions with

us this afternoon. Thank you so much for taking that time today.

#### MINISTRY OF EDUCATION

**The Chair (Mr. Lorne Coe):** I will now call on the Honourable Jill Dunlop, Minister of Education, to come forward to the table for her opening remarks, please.

Welcome to the Standing Committee on Justice Policy. We appreciate very much that you're taking the time to be with us. You will have 20 minutes, Minister, for your presentation. I will let you know when you have two minutes left so you may take the opportunity to sum up your comments. Once you're finished with your presentation, there will be five minutes of questions from the official opposition, followed by five minutes of questions from the government.

You may begin, Minister, please. Thank you so much.

**Hon. Jill Dunlop:** Thank you very much, Chair, and thank you to all the committee members for having me here today and listening to Minister Williams speak her statement about "When you hurt a woman, you hurt her family." I think that is so very true.

I saw it first-hand when I served in that same role as Associate Minister of Women and Children's Issues, travelling across the province and meeting with some of our stakeholders and the great work that they were doing. I remember, for me, a shocking moment was going to a women's shelter and walking into one of the rooms and seeing bunk beds and a crib and thinking, "No child, no woman should be in this kind of situation." So I thank the organizations that are out there across the province supporting women and their children.

Obviously, in my capacity as Minister of Education, my focus is on young people and ensuring their safety but also educating them at a young age. When I did serve as Associate Minister of Children and Women's Issues and I'd meet with organizations, I was always excited to talk about some of the work that was being done in education at that time. The changes that had been made in the health and physical education curriculum that were new, that had never been used before—I know those were things that organizations were excited about. So that's what I'm going to highlight in my words today.

It's an honour to have the opportunity to be here to speak about the critical work our government is doing to ensure that every child in Ontario feels safe, supported and empowered in their educational journey. In my first few months as Minister of Education, I made it a priority to connect with educational partners across the province, visiting classrooms and engaging with students, their parents and educators. These visits have been incredibly inspiring, and it quickly became clear that the safety of our children is everyone's top priority. Whether we're talking about the physical security of our schools, mental health supports or creating positive and inclusive school environments, one thing is certain: Every student in Ontario deserves to learn and grow in a space where they feel safe and supported. This vision is what unites us all. While there are many

aspects to ensuring that safety, today I want to focus on a particularly critical issue, intimate partner violence, and the steps that we are taking to protect students from its harmful effects.

In Ontario, our work is focused not only on immediate protections but also on equipping students with the knowledge, the resources and emotional support they need to navigate a safe and healthy future. Protecting students means investing in a wide range of safety initiatives, from physical security measures to mental health resources to the education that will empower them to make safe choices throughout their lives. This is exactly why we have focused on curriculum updates that teach students about their rights, healthy relationships and, most importantly, consent. These offer the foundational tools that will protect them from the damaging effects of IPV and will help create a generation of young people who understand and respect personal boundaries, emotional well-being and safety in their relationships.

At the heart of our efforts is a comprehensive approach to education where we teach students about healthy relationships, respect and consent from an early age, because it's this education that can play a critical role in helping students develop the skills they need to build positive relationships throughout their lives and help prevent intimate partner violence. This is something that I care about deeply on both a professional and personal level as the Minister of Education and as a mother to three girls.

In schools across the province, we are helping ensure that children have the knowledge to identify what a safe and respectful relationship looks like, both in person and online. As we know, not all children are able to see a healthy relationship in their own homes. Our updated curriculum includes the following key components:

From kindergarten to grade 3—so starting at a young age—we teach students the importance of kindness, respect and caring for one another. Through age-appropriate lessons, students are introduced to the concepts of personal space and respectful boundaries. They are encouraged to express their feelings and emotions in healthy, constructive ways. In the primary grades, we also introduce discussions around friendships, feelings and what makes relationships strong and positive.

From grades 4 to 6, as students get older, the curriculum focuses on reinforcing the importance of setting healthy boundaries and respecting one another. In these grades, students learn about consent, what it means to say yes or no, and how to listen and respect the choices of others. We also address how to handle peer pressures and how to seek help when they feel uncomfortable.

From grade 7 to grade 12, at the secondary school level, our curriculum provides more in-depth education about healthy relationships, consent and personal autonomy. Students are taught about the signs of unhealthy or abusive relationships, and we explore issues such as dating violence, controlling behaviours and how to identify manipulation or coercion.

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Our updated curriculum also includes lessons on navigating digital spaces safely, talking about online harassment,

sexting and the digital footprints left by individuals. Throughout the secondary grades, we reinforce the importance of clear, enthusiastic consent, ensuring that students understand that no one should ever be pressured into any situation where they feel unsafe.

While these curriculum updates are crucial, they're just one piece of the puzzle. Our goal is not only to educate but also to empower students to speak up and seek help when they need it. That's why we have made significant investments in programs and resources that support students in times of need.

**The mental health and trauma supports:** We have dedicated \$118 million to support students' mental health, including services for students who may be struggling with the emotional and psychological toll of IPV. These supports are available year-round, including during the summer months, when students may be particularly vulnerable. Trauma-informed care is central to how we work with students who have experienced violence in the home. Teachers and staff are trained to identify signs of trauma, and they are equipped with the skills to respond compassionately and appropriately.

We have also invested in anti-violence education programs, such as White Ribbon, which focus on fostering healthy, respectful relationships and raising awareness about the signs of IPV. Kids Help Phone and other resources are also available to students who need immediate support, and we are continuously working to improve the reach and effectiveness of these services.

Our work on IPV extends beyond the Ministry of Education. The Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services provides critical services to support families affected by IPV, including shelters and access to specialized programs for children and youth. Through partnerships with the Ministry of Health, Ministry of the Attorney General and others, we are taking a coordinated approach to address IPV from all angles, but we can't tackle the issue of IPV alone. It requires an all-hands-on-deck effort across ministry sectors and partners. Rather, our educational initiatives complement the broader whole-of-government approach that includes efforts to prevent IPV, support survivors and strengthen legal protections for victims.

I'll speak a bit about strengthening those legal protections. For example, through the Ministry of the Attorney General, we are ensuring that survivors have access to the justice they deserve, providing Family Court support, legal protections and resources for those navigating the legal system.

**Supporting our families and communities through the Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services:** They provide emergency shelters, counselling services and child protection services to families affected by IPV. These supports are designed to help children and parents rebuild their lives and find a path to healing.

**Improving health services:** At the Ministry of Health, they are dedicated to providing trauma-informed care, mental health supports and access to counselling services to children and families impacted by IPV.

Through these combined efforts, we are creating a network of support for those affected by IPV, ensuring that no child or family is left behind without the help they need.

I could speak a bit about cyber risks and the digital age of learning, which affects all our young people. Another key area of work my ministry is undertaking, in partnership with the Ministry of Public and Business Service Delivery and Procurement, is to increase cyber security in our schools. Cyber security may not immediately come to mind when addressing IPV, but in an increasingly digital world, the connection is undeniable. Technology often plays a central role in IPV, enabling digital abuse, cyber stalking and harassment. Strengthening cyber security within Ontario's education system creates an environment where students, families and communities can feel safer and better-equipped to face those challenges.

The digital landscape is transforming how we live, how we learn and interact. This transformation has brought extraordinary benefits, but it has also introduced significant risks. For children whose lives are shaped by their interactions with technology, this is particularly crucial. Ontario's education system has recognized this.

With the rise of digital learning tools, cyber risks have also surged. Sophisticated ransomware and malware attacks on the K-12 sector have increased globally. Ransomware alone surged by 92% in 2023.

Ontario schools have not been immune to this trend, with high-profile incidents impacting major school boards. Such breaches compromise personal data, disrupt education and heighten risks of abuse. IPV perpetrators often exploit these vulnerabilities, using stolen or leaked information to exert control over victims. This underscores the importance of securing our education system as a protective shield, ensuring that personal data remains out of malicious hands.

To address these challenges, Ontario launched its K-12 Cyber Protection Strategy, a collaborative effort between the Ministry of Education and our school boards. The strategy focuses on reducing cyber risks, improving resilience and keeping Ontario's students, educators and schools safer online. This initiative aligns with broader legislation such as Bill 194, which emphasizes the importance of cyber security in the public sector. By working together, these efforts create a robust framework for protection that also addresses the unique needs of vulnerable populations, including IPV survivors.

Ontario's cyber protection strategy is built on three pillars. The first, cyber security, is safeguarding IT systems and personal data against evolving threats. The second is privacy protection: ensuring sensitive personal data, including that of minors, remains secure. And the third is cyber safety: helping students navigate the online world safely by addressing risks like harmful content, predatory behaviour and digital harassment.

This holistic approach protects against both external attacks and the internal threats that arise when technology is weaponized in abusive relationships.

The ministry has undertaken targeted actions to strengthen cyber security while promoting digital safety:

—cyber resilience standards—so, developing a framework to ensure consistent protection across our school boards;

—threat awareness, which is sharing information on emerging cyber threats to enable proactive responses;

—advanced data and response tools introducing automated systems to identify and mitigate the risks; and

—awareness campaigns, providing resources for students and educators to learn about online safety, including how to recognize and report signs of digital abuse.

By implementing these measures, Ontario is addressing both broad cyber security concerns and specific IPV-related challenges.

One of the most critical ways Ontario cyber security efforts intersect with IPV prevention is through awareness and resource-sharing. When a student or educator is targeted by a perpetrator who uses technology to harass, track or exploit them, the education system can serve as a front-line defence. For example, school staff trained to recognize cyber harassment can intervene early. Enhanced cyber security protocols can block unauthorized access to sensitive data, ensuring abusers cannot misuse school systems to harm survivors. And resources like anonymized reporting platforms provide a discreet way for victims to seek help. These interventions align with Ontario's broader efforts to raise awareness about cyberbullying, digital literacy and online safety.

Significant investments back Ontario's cyber security initiatives. Since 2021, the ministry has allocated millions to implement the K-12 Cyber Protection Strategy, supporting everything from detection tools to sector-wide training. Collaboration is key to the strategy's success. The ministry works closely with school boards, the Educational Collaborative Network of Ontario, the cyber security division and industry experts. These partnerships ensure that Ontario remains at the forefront of cyber security innovation, while addressing the needs of its most vulnerable populations.

**1350**

While progress has been significant, challenges remain, cyber threats continue to evolve and the demand for robust protections grows. Ontario is committed to expanding its strategy in 2024-25 with plans to involve more school boards and further enhance capabilities. The ultimate goal is to ensure that all students and educators and staff are equipped with the tools and knowledge to navigate the digital landscape safely.

The intersection of cyber security and IPV prevention is a reminder of how interconnected our modern challenges are. By strengthening our education system's digital resilience, Ontario is not only safeguarding its schools but also empowering its communities to combat intimate partner violence and protect survivors. The work that we are doing in Ontario reflects our deep commitment to ensuring that every child has the opportunity to grow, to learn and thrive in a safe environment. Our efforts in updating the curriculum to include consent, healthy relationships and personal safety, alongside investments in mental health and trauma, are designed to protect students from the devastating impacts of IPV.

When I was visiting women's shelters in the past and some of the organizations that support women, that was something they were very impressed to hear, because when we talk about the work that we're doing to support women at that point when they've been through abusive relationships—we got to talking about what more could we be doing earlier on and really working with children and talking, having those discussions about what a healthy relationship looks like, because we all know not everyone has role models to look up to to see that healthy relationship in their own home, but if we could be talking about that and teaching that to students, talking about consent and having young people in the classroom have respectful relationships early on, it's so important, and it will go a long way in educating them in their future.

I'm very proud when I talk about the work we're doing in cyber security. I'm also very proud of the work that has been done to ban cellphones in the classroom, which I find interesting now.

**The Chair (Mr. Lorne Coe):** Excuse me, Minister. You have two minutes left in your presentation.

**Hon. Jill Dunlop:** When I'm in classrooms visiting students and teachers and I often say to students, "Okay, tell me how it really is. You can blame me for the cell-phones," everybody agrees, even the students agree, that it's much better not having cellphones in class. But when I talk with the teachers and they explain to me there's almost a calmness in the classroom now that the cell-phones are put away—before, you'd have students who may have skipped school for the day and they're down the road at the mall, and they're texting their friend and now you're sitting in class texting, trying to figure out how you're going to skip class to go visit your friend at the mall.

But also, the bullying that was happening and through social media, which—we've also banned social media in schools in Ontario, too, so we've taken that away during school time. I think it goes a long way to supporting students in their mental health as well, so I'm proud of the work that our ministry is doing in collaboration with an all-of-government approach.

So thank you very much for having me here today and for listening.

**The Chair (Mr. Lorne Coe):** Thank you very much, Minister, for your presentation.

To the official opposition: MPP Andrew, please, when you're ready.

**MPP Jill Andrew:** Thank you, Minister, for your comments.

Here's the problem: Women, girls, students cannot participate in education, they cannot learn, they can't participate in the economy with black eyes and broken ribs and broken spirits. So when the minister talks about what can be done early, you forgot to mention the way in which your government has starved our education system, K through 12, and also has starved our post-secondary institutions and is pretty much balancing your budgets on the backs of immigrant students.

So I will read for you again, in case you didn't hear it the first time, a quote from Emily about what happened to

her in 2022: “I was raped in my” own house, “a place that was once my safe haven. I woke up at approximately 6 a.m. to a person on top of me, his penis inside of my vagina. I still remember the feel of his itchy wool sweater against my skin, the smell of burnt disgust in the air, the deep horror that radiated through my body ... the immense fear that cloaked me. As I opened my eyes, he pulled himself out of me and ejaculated on my stomach as if I was a towel meant to clean up his fluids.”

Under this government, we know that 1,326 cases of sexual assault in 2022—because people are looking confused here, it was a Conservative government—were thrown out or withdrawn or stayed in our court system because of your chronic underfunding. As I said earlier, rape crisis centres and sexual assault centres are chronically underfunded. Post-secondary as well as secondary schools are calling for more mental health supports to deal with violence.

I will ask you, Minister, through the Chair—  
*Interjection.*

**MPP Jill Andrew:** Thanks, Chair. Again, he’s trying to shut me down, but the Clerk gave him the right answer this time.

I will ask the minister again, through the Chair: Will you, as a woman minister, support Bill 173 at third reading and will you vote yes to declare intimate partner violence an epidemic? If you could give me a yes or no, that would be great. If not, I will continue with my comments.

**Hon. Jill Dunlop:** Well, I want to start by saying I find it appalling that you continue to politicize the case that you’re using and this young woman’s situation—

**MPP Jill Andrew:** Okay, so that’s not a yes or no. And just for the record, Emily has given us permission to share her story, because she’s sick and tired of the games that this government is playing.

How much more evidence do you need? According to OAITH’s femicide list last year, 62 women and children—and that’s a minimum, because we know the numbers are sometimes off—were killed by femicide in 2023. The new list will come out in a matter of days.

So we are asking: Rather than playing games, rather than using this committee as an opportunity to publicize what every ministry is so-called “doing,” why won’t you answer that question? Bill 173: Will you declare intimate partner violence an epidemic? Or Lydia’s Law: Will you put the mirror in front of your face and review the Victim Quick Response Program+ that we know has many holes and has left many survivors up a creek without a paddle? Yes or no?

**Hon. Jill Dunlop:** I think this committee has been amazing. I want to congratulate the committee and all those who have been at committee and made presentations. This is really about a deep dive into not only what government is doing, but also what all these amazing—

**MPP Jill Andrew:** So I’m going to—because that’s not a yes or no.

**The Chair (Mr. Lorne Coe):** MPP Andrew, I think we need to hear an answer.

**MPP Jill Andrew:** I am hearing the answer and I’m reclaiming my time.

**The Chair (Mr. Lorne Coe):** You’re talking over the answer.

**MPP Jill Andrew:** From what I understand, I’m allowed to use my five minutes the way I need to use my five minutes.

**The Chair (Mr. Lorne Coe):** You’re using your time up. Let’s listen.

Minister, please continue with your thoughts.

**Hon. Jill Dunlop:** I’m sorry if the member doesn’t like my answer, but I want to congratulate the committee and all those people who have been here and presented to the committee. This is really about a deep dive not only into what government is doing but what organizations across the province are doing to support—

**MPP Jill Andrew:** This is about stolen time and they’re playing politics.

**Hon. Jill Dunlop:**—victims of intimate partner violence.

**MPP Jill Andrew:** Bill 173 is on the books, and it could be passed today—

**The Chair (Mr. Lorne Coe):** Thank you very much. Your time is up.

Government members: MPP Triantafilopoulos, please, when you’re ready.

**MPP Jill Andrew:** Stop wasting time. Stop wasting sexual assault victims’ time.

**The Chair (Mr. Lorne Coe):** MPP Andrew, you’re now out of order.

**MPP Jill Andrew:** So are you, Chair. I’m a survivor and you silenced me. That will go down in history, trust me.

**The Chair (Mr. Lorne Coe):** Thank you.

All right. MPP Triantafilopoulos, please, when you’re ready.

**Ms. Effie J. Triantafilopoulos:** I’d like to thank the minister for being with us today to talk about this very, very important issue in our society and our community on intimate partner violence. I also want to applaud you in your past role as the minister on this particular issue and as your current role as education minister, where you’re seized with these issues within the classrooms.

You spoke specifically about a curriculum that you’re putting forward that you’ve developed in terms of how students can recognize healthy relationships. You mentioned in your remarks teaching students about healthy relationships, including respect and consent, at a very early age and what that might look like, because we know that some students don’t have the ability to recognize them.

Could you please tell us more about the education around consent?

**Hon. Jill Dunlop:** Thank you very much for the question. It’s so important.

And thank you to the committee for doing the incredible work you’ve been doing. I know it’s been ongoing throughout the summer. I’m sure it’s very heartbreaking and hard on the heart to hear some of the stories from survivors—but also hearing the incredible work that organizations are doing across the province to support survivors. So thank you for the question, again, and for inviting me

to speak about the critical work that the Ministry of Education is doing.

**1400**

Our top priority has been and continues to be ensuring all students feel safe, respected and included within Ontario's schools. Every student deserves to be supported and inspired to succeed in a culture of high expectations for learning.

Our government updated the curriculum in 2019 so that students learn about consent in every grade, in the context of both personal safety and human development. Learning related to consent is primarily addressed in the elementary and secondary health and physical education curriculum. This learning happens in an appropriate way, beginning with learning to listen, watching body cues and showing respect for others, in addition to learning how to use communication skills and to stand up for oneself. In the older grades, students continue to develop communication, assertiveness and refusal skills, and corresponding skills of showing respect, listening and responding to the needs of others. Specific learning about what consent looks like and expected behaviours within relationships are included as a part of the learning, such as relationship and social skills, including:

- how to identify and build healthy relationships;
- recognizing and describing exploitive behaviours;
- adaptive management and coping skills, such as demonstrating the ability to stand up for themselves and others;
- refusal skills and strategies; and
- how to take action to get help.

We are ensuring that students are safe and educated on respect, consent and healthy relationships, so they are on the right path for successful and bright futures. Thank you for that question.

**Ms. Effie J. Triantafilopoulos:** Thank you.

**The Chair (Mr. Lorne Coe):** MPP Bouma, please, when you're ready, sir.

**Mr. Will Bouma:** Time?

**The Chair (Mr. Lorne Coe):** We have one minute and 55 seconds.

**Mr. Will Bouma:** Okay. I will try to talk fast.

But I have to mention here on the record, Minister, that I recall very distinctly the day that we visited Six Nations of the Grand River territory and you heard first-hand accounts of the devastating impact of birth alerts. You were in a different role then, but I use that as a reminder to people when they say "Oh, you can't really accomplish much"—that one conversation with one person at the right time can change government policy. The fact that there are hundreds of young children who have not been immediately taken away from their mothers, because of that conversation that we had there that day and your personal commit-

ment to remove birth alerts and to follow that aspect of the Truth and Reconciliation report, is something that I'm thankful for every single day. Thank you. I wanted that on the record.

You mentioned in your response that intimate partner violence education is a part of our government's approach to improve student safety, not just in the classroom, but extending to the rest of their life. I was wondering if you could comment a little bit on that in the few seconds left.

**Hon. Jill Dunlop:** Thank you for the question, MPP Bouma, and thank you for commenting about that time at Six Nations. I think when you leave politics, there are certain things that you will remember that you were able to be part of and made changes. That, for me, will definitely be one, working together with our ministry, but also with the community in bringing that forward and recognizing that. Making those changes makes a difference across the province, so thank you for being part of that too.

One of the partners of note that we do work with is the principals' association. I was actually speaking with them yesterday. We've invested \$245,000 in the principals' association to develop resources for parents and provide professional development opportunities for principals and vice-principals on responses to incidents of cyberbullying and cyber violence. This initiative will also help students to understand the root causes of gender inequality and lead projects and research that support healthy relationships, consent and safe, inclusive school environments.

Through this funding, the principals' association has partnered with Victim Services Toronto and will continue to support and enhance work focusing on addressing cyberbullying and cyber violence through youth leader initiatives, known as TEAR, for social media consent creation. Victim Services Toronto offers TEAR in a Digital World Workshop, which is a free, interactive and engaging workshop established for youth from the ages of 12 to 18 living in the city of Toronto. The workshop equips youth with the tools, the knowledge and resources to navigate the digital world and to make informed, healthy relationship choices both online and in person—

**The Chair (Mr. Lorne Coe):** Minister, I need to interrupt you. I'm sorry. Your time is concluded for your presentation today.

We're so grateful that you did take the time to participate and put on the record the great work that you are doing and the difference that it makes in the lives of our young men and young women here in the province of Ontario. Thank you for being with us today.

Committee members, the committee is now adjourned until Thursday, November 21, 2024, at 9 a.m.

*The committee adjourned at 1405.*



## **STANDING COMMITTEE ON JUSTICE POLICY**

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Mr. Lorne Coe (Whitby PC)

### **Vice-Chair / Vice-Président**

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Mr. Brian Sauderson (Simcoe–Grey PC)

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

MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam (Toronto Centre / Toronto-Centre ND)

### **Also taking part / Autres participants et participantes**

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

### **Clerk / Greffière**

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Ms. Heather Conklin, research officer,  
Research Services