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Lundi
22 avril 2024

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
OF ONTARIO

Monday 22 April 2024

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE
DE L'ONTARIO

Lundi 22 avril 2024

The House met at 1015.

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

Prayers.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

WHEATLEY ARBORETUM AND
LEARNING TRAIL

Mr. Trevor Jones: On Saturday, April 20, I was so proud to join well over 100 volunteers, community members and sponsors to officially mark the opening of the Wheatley Arboretum and Learning Trail. The Wheatley Horticultural Society, led by my friends Donna Matier and Sophie Jefferson, in partnership with Chatham Kent Trails and supported by dozens of local sponsors, succeeded in crafting this vision. It includes a beautiful 1.3-kilometre trail and outdoor recreation and learning space.

Located strategically near our baseball fields and our local public school, the grounds feature hundreds of newly planted trees and plants native to the Carolinian forest, including the Kentucky coffee tree, hackberry, pawpaw, tulip tree and American sycamore. These precious tree species are complemented by manicured grounds and locally crafted metal park benches to relax and reflect, as well as outdoor, four-season fitness equipment for all ages to enjoy.

This project is another fine demonstration of a community's resolve and resilience. Wheatley continues to work together to overcome adversity and care for one another. This beautiful outdoor activity and educational space symbolizes both healthy living and fellowship by reconnecting the community to one another and to nature.

Congratulations, and thank you to everyone involved for their hard work and dedication to bring this project from idea to reality. Thank you for being Wheatley strong.

EDUCATION FUNDING

Ms. Jessica Bell: School boards in Toronto are facing a funding shortfall because of this government's failure to properly fund education in Ontario. The Toronto District School Board is short \$27 million. Parents often contact me about how this underfunding is affecting their kids' education.

I think of Adhi. His son is in a developmentally delayed class at Clinton school. His son has been attacked twice by another child. He has been scarred physically. The school

knows they need another skilled educator in the room to keep kids safe, but they don't have the staffing allocation.

I think of Janice and Christine at Kensington. They've just learned they will have a grade 4/5/6 class for this coming year. That means a teacher will have to explain three different classes all day, every day. That's a very difficult task. It means that older kids will sit there in the class and be bored, and it means younger kids will sit in the class and feel completely overwhelmed.

Stories like this come into my office every single week. Every school is having to do more with less, year in and year out.

1020

The TDSB has asked the ministry to fund schools properly and to account for the extra costs they must shoulder because of provincial and federal directives, because of COVID, because of inflation. How does this ministry respond? How does the minister respond? They look the other way.

I want schools to be properly funded. I want our kids to have an excellent public school education. The TDSB is asking for a new funding deal, and I support these requests, and I hope the ministry and the government support these requests as well.

TOM THOMSON ART GALLERY

Mr. Rick Byers: Colleagues, last Sunday, I had the pleasure of attending the arts, culture and volunteer awards which took place at the Tom Thomson Art Gallery in Owen Sound. It was a wonderful event that recognized many talented artists and community volunteers in our wonderful Grey-Bruce community. I was inspired by the amazing talents and energy of all who were nominated.

While Tom Thomson was born in Claremont, Ontario, he was raised in Leith, a lovely community just east of Owen Sound. He developed his distinctive craft after working with the artists who would eventually form the Group of Seven and also after visiting Algonquin Park. He spent much time at the park, and his outstanding work consists almost entirely of landscapes, including trees, skies, lakes and rivers. Some of his notable works include Northern River, Spring Ice, The West Wind and of course The Jack Pine.

Tom Thomson passed away at the early age of 39 on Canoe Lake in Algonquin Park. While he died before the formal establishment of the Group of Seven, he is often considered an unofficial member. His beautiful resting place is at the Leith United Church Cemetery.

Thank you, Tom Thomson, for your amazing talent and for your link to our great Grey-Bruce community. And thank you to the great team at the Tom Thomson Art Gallery—the excellent staff, board and volunteers for making the gallery an inspiring place that honours an inspiring icon, Tom Thomson.

SERVICES EN FRANÇAIS DANS LE NORD

M. Guy Bourgouin: J'ai écrit une lettre ouverte publiée la semaine dernière que j'aimerais partager aujourd'hui. Je vous en lis un extrait : « Près de 2,3 millions d'Ontariens sont sans médecins de famille. On estime qu'en 2026, c'est le quart des Ontariens qui n'en n'auront pas. »

Entre en jeu le premier fardeau : habiter dans le nord de la province. Je pense à la ville de Hearst, une ville du secteur forestier où habitent un peu plus de 5 000 habitants, dont 4 000 habitants sont sans médecins de famille.

Entre le deuxième fardeau : vivre en français en Ontario. Environ la moitié des francophones disent parler en anglais avec leur médecin de famille.

Dans le budget, la seule mention d'une somme pour l'amélioration de l'accès aux services en français dans l'ensemble de l'Ontario est de 10 millions de dollars sur trois ans, soit un peu plus de 3 millions de dollars par année.

Entre les entrepreneurs francophones, les nombreux conseils dans le système français qui demandent du financement pour le transport scolaire et les hôpitaux qui veulent régler une crise de dotation de médecins francophones, qui va gagner? De ceux-là, combien de ces 3 millions de dollars par année va aller dans le sud de la province ou dans l'est, plutôt qu'au Nord? C'est ça, la réalité du fait français en Ontario. Choisis : habite dans le Sud ou parle anglais.

COMMUNITY TABLE

Ms. Goldie Ghamari: Mr. Speaker, when people step up to help those who are struggling in the community, their passion to make a difference is often contagious. In the suburb of Riverside South, in the Carleton riding, a group of people has stepped up to create the Community Table, a new volunteer-run food bank. Statistics Canada reports that more than 600 households in that affluent community live below the poverty line.

Members of the Gathering, a Christian church in Riverside South, realized that families in Riverside South were using the food banks in the adjacent suburb of Barrhaven and in other communities. They launched an organic project and created the Community Table, which will open its doors on Monday, May 6.

Jeff Brierley, owner of the Your Independent Grocer store in Riverside South, where I often get my groceries, has generously provided a space inside his store until a permanent location for the Community Table can be

found. He's also assisting with the collection of food donations.

As the MPP for Carleton, I could not be more proud of the volunteers in Riverside South who have turned a need in the community into a reality.

More often than not, we are oblivious to the poverty and hunger that's all around us. Our lives are measured by the impact we have on others. The Community Table will have an immediate impact on hundreds of people in our community, and before long, I know it will impact thousands.

GASOLINE PRICES

M^{me} France Gélinas: We all know that gas prices jumped an average of 14 cents per litre across the GTA last week. Premier Ford immediately raised the concern of disgusting price gouging by Ontario gas stations. I applaud the Premier's statement and rise to offer him a solution.

Residents of Nickel Belt in northern Ontario have been dealing with price gouging at the pump for years. Fuel companies set the price per litre according to what the market can bear. Apparently, in the north, we can bear a lot.

Thousands of people have signed my petition to regulate the price of gas. We regulate the price of energy when it comes to natural gas, when it comes to electricity; what is stopping us from regulating the price of a litre of gas? Five provinces and many US states already have gas price regulation, and it works.

I ask that the Premier finally consider regulating the cost of gasoline here in Ontario so that none of us have to be gouged when we go and fill up. This is a moment when this Premier can actually get it done. You have recognized that Ontarians are being gouged by fuel retailers across the province. Let's end price gouging at the pump now. We can do this.

TOWNSHIP OF NORWICH CHAMBER OF COMMERCE ANNUAL AWARDS

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: The Norwich Chamber of Commerce recently handed out its annual awards of excellence. These awards honour outstanding local businesses and residents who contribute to the growth and success of the community. I'd like to congratulate this year's winners:

—Brandwood Farms and the Duizer family, winners of the farm family of the year award, north township;

—the Wikkerink family, winners of the farm family of the year, south township;

—Speedy Electric, recipient of the small business of the year award—congratulations on 50 years in business;

—Joe's Carpentry, named the large business of the year—thanks for the work you did on my house;

—Paige, winner of the agricultural bursary essay contest and a cheque for her future education;

—Jared, winner of the high school scholarship essay contest and a cheque to be used for his post-secondary education;

—Everett McInnis, a member of the Norwich Upper Deck team and recipient of the youth citizen of the year;

—Lynne DePlancke, winner of the citizen of the year award for her community-minded involvement and volunteer work;

—Jacqueline Body, recipient of the Judy Cayley memorial award for her extensive volunteer service to the people of Norwich;

—and finally, Tom Hamulecki, who was presented the special achievement award for his significant fundraising and auctioneering contributions.

Mr. Speaker, these winners and their hard work, innovation and dedicated service are invaluable to the community of Oxford. Congratulations to all the winners.

LANGTON SIX PACK TOURNAMENT

Ms. Bobbi Ann Brady: Last weekend, over 260 hockey players converged on the Langton Arena, a beautiful building spanning five decades of rich culture and tradition. Those players were there for a tournament also rich in tradition, the Langton Oldtimers Six Pack.

This is a tournament that has been attracting and boasting hockey talent for over 28 years. It's called the Six Pack because you have five players and a goalie—no subs. Competition is stiff in the carded division as junior and a handful of OHL players face off. The 35, 45 and 55 games showcase many of those who at one time could really light things up.

For the second time in the tournament's history, a women's division hit the ice. One of the five teams was the Underhill Brady Barnburners. Underhill's Farm Supply and yours truly teamed up to sponsor both my son's carded team as well as our ladies' team. My teammates, who included goalie Ciera Bartik, Briar Barker, Brooke Cope, Courtney Dennis, Meg Sebok and Rachel Van Es, skated to the championship game but came up short against some talented girls from the Stratford area.

In the timekeeper's box for many of the games was arena fixture Roger Demeester, who recorded his 8,660th game during the tournament—absolutely incredible.

The tournament has the little town of Langton buzzing from Wednesday to Sunday, with games running every half-hour. The Langton Oldtimers have this event down to a science, and they are the ones responsible for the great hockey, camaraderie and for bringing the community together.

1030

Thank you to all who had a hand in another successful year. See you at the rink in 2025.

HOUSING

Mr. Mike Harris: I'm happy to say that Kitchener is getting it done when it comes to building housing. Premier Ford recently joined me at Kitchener city hall to congratulate them on a job well done. For meeting their housing goals, Kitchener received \$14 million from our government as part of the Building Faster Fund. The fund

is a three-year, \$1.2-billion program that encourages municipalities to address the housing supply crisis here in the province. The plan allows municipalities to receive funding for making significant progress against their targets by providing money for infrastructure to build more homes.

Kitchener broke ground on a total of 3,579 new housing units in 2023. That's 139% of their targeted goal. They knocked it out of the park. Kitchener Mayor Berry Vrbanovic and the rest of his council have done a phenomenal job. Berry knows that addressing the housing crisis is a team effort.

The mayor went on to say, "Tackling this challenge will take an all-of-community approach with all orders of government and the private and not-for-profit sectors working together to ensure every Ontario resident has both a roof over their head, and any supports they may need, in order to live a great life." I can wholeheartedly support that sentiment.

Thank you very much to Kitchener for getting it done.

VOLUNTEERS

Ms. Christine Hogarth: Last week was volunteer appreciation week, and it's my absolute privilege to rise in the House today to celebrate the remarkable volunteers from Etobicoke–Lakeshore who have received this year's volunteer service award. My colleague Minister Ford and the member from Eglinton–Lawrence and I were at the ROM last week to hands out these awards.

Volunteers are the backbone of our communities. Their work is indispensable, but it's also sometimes invisible. On behalf of my constituents, I want to recognize these incredible community champions:

—Patricia Coyle for five years at Women's College Hospital;

—Marlene DaCosta: five-year award for St. John Ambulance Toronto region dog therapy program;

—Simon Donato-Woodger: five-year award for Kensington Health;

—Joanne Van der Burgt for five years of volunteering at the St. John Ambulance Toronto region dog therapy program;

—Michiko Abe-Kozlowski for 10 years with the Japanese cultural centre—I have to go check that out;

—Sharon Kawabata for 10 years with the Harbourfront Centre;

—Giovanni for 10 years with the St. John Ambulance Toronto region dog therapy program;

—Susan Miller: 10 years with the St. John Ambulance dog therapy program;

—David and Hope Finnimore, both 15 years with the Toronto International Film Festival;

—Semra Salkok for 25 years with the Toronto International Film Festival; and

—Ken Fukushima: 30 years with the Japanese Canadian Cultural Centre.

Each award recipient has a story of generosity, perseverance and kindness. Thank you to our volunteers.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): We have with us in the west public gallery today seven teachers from across the province participating in the Legislative Assembly of Ontario Teachers' Forum. Please join me in warmly welcoming some of our province's educators to the legislature today.

Mr. Mike Harris: It is an absolute pleasure to be able to introduce my mother, Janet Harris, and my brother, Jeff Harris, over in the gallery, here to see their grandson and nephew at work this morning.

Miss Monique Taylor: On behalf of myself as well as the member from Parkdale–High Park, who was the host of this morning's press conference, and New Democrats of course, I would like to welcome a group who are here for the Basic Income Pilot program. We have Jessie Golem, who was a participant of universal basic income in Hamilton; Sheila Regehr, who is the founding member of the Basic Income Canada Network; Stephen Moreau, a partner at Cavalluzzo LLP and lead counsel for the 4,001 class action lawsuits for the early cancellation of basic income; Kaley Duff; Henry Goddard Rebstein; Christina Shiwsankar; Leandra Louis; Angela Waz; and Braman Thillainathan. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Hon. Todd J. McCarthy: I wish to welcome to the House today a new member of my constituency staff, visiting Queen's Park in that regard for the first time: Lauren Azzopardi.

Mr. Joel Harden: I want to thank the Ontario Medical Students Association for a terrific meeting this morning, and I think they will be filtering into the House soon.

I also want to shout out Geordie MacLaren, who is here from the great town of Vankleek Hill, who I grew up with, from the beef farmers. Good to see you, Geordie. Welcome to the people's House.

Hon. Jill Dunlop: I would like to introduce two of my guests who are here visiting from Simcoe North: Robert McGarrity and his daughter, Akira McGarrity. Welcome to Queen's Park. I hope you enjoy your day here.

Ms. Marit Stiles: I'm very proud to be able to announce and welcome to this chamber a bunch of leaders from First Nations communities across the province, including Grand Chief Alvin Fiddler of Nishnawbe Aski Nation, Deputy Grand Chief Anna Betty Achneepineskum from Nishnawbe Aski Nation, Grand Council Chief Reg Niganobe of Anishinabek Nation, Chief Chris Moonias of Neskantaga First Nation and Chief Lefty Kamenawatamin from Bearskin Lake First Nation, as well as family members of a number of people who have lost their lives in the last few years: Vincent Ostberg, father of the late Jenna Ostberg; Vanessa Sakanee, mother of the late Mackenzie Moonias; Donna Belesky, sister of the late Corey Belesky; Colleen Belesky, mother of the late Corey Belesky; and Julian Falconer, who is working with First Nations.

I want to welcome them to the Legislature, welcome them here to the precinct and thank them very much for being here with us today.

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: Good morning, everyone. I would like to introduce you all to Mother Earth and wish you a happy Earth Day.

Hon. Lisa M. Thompson: I'd like to welcome to the House the Beef Farmers of Ontario, particularly Chair Craig McLaughlin. And I'd be remiss if I didn't give two beef farmers from my riding a specific shout-out: Mike Jeffries from Belmore and Jairus Maus from Cargill. Thank you very much.

M^{me} France Gélinas: It gives me great pleasure to introduce to this House the Traditional Ecological Knowledge Elders of the Robinson-Huron Treaty territory: Mrs. Jo Boyer, Mrs. Jodi Koberinski and Mrs. Caroline Recollet from Wahnapiatae in my riding. Welcome to Queen's Park, ladies.

Ms. Laurie Scott: I'm happy to introduce two constituents from the riding of Haliburton–Kawartha Lakes–Brock: Former mayor Ric McGee and his wife Caroline. They're joining us today as they're in the city celebrating their 35th wedding anniversary.

Mr. Wayne Gates: I want to welcome Afshin Keyvani. He's a teacher at the Greater Fort Erie Secondary School. He's a big fan of the Fort Erie Junior B Meteors, who are in the final. I want to say to him, welcome to Queen's Park.

Mr. Brian Riddell: I would like to introduce my legislative page, Brayden Vermet from St. Brigid Catholic School in Ayr. Joining us in the House today is his mom, Lisa; his dad, Brian; and sister Olivia. Welcome to your House.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Unless there's an objection, I'd like to continue with the introduction of visitors.

1040

M^{me} France Gélinas: I also would like to introduce Mr. Patrick Porzuczek from Save the Minden ER. He is here with his family, that is, himself, Patrick, Laura, Jozef, Ewelina and Kinsley Porzuczek. Welcome to Queen's Park. Welcome to your House.

QUESTION PERIOD

POLICE OVERSIGHT

Ms. Marit Stiles: This question is for the Premier. Today, the Moonias, Belesky, and Ostberg families are with us. They're here because they have been left without credible investigations into the deaths of their loved ones by the Thunder Bay Police Service.

Ontario and the Thunder Bay police administration have failed these families again and again and again. Despite studies and reviews, inquests, documentaries, panels, podcasts and far too many promises, people have not seen change. So my question to the Premier is, what does this government have to say to those families who are here today, looking for accountability in the deaths of their loved ones?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): To reply for the government, the Solicitor General.

Hon. Michael S. Kerzner: Any loss of a family member is a tragedy. The loss to a family is absolutely something that we can't measure.

We take this very seriously. We've listened carefully to the survivors. We've listened to the Indigenous leaders. We've listened to community organizations, and the loved ones of the families themselves have participated in the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls.

Any loss is one too many. We will always do everything we can to support them and to keep Ontario safe.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Supplementary? The member for Kiiwetinoong.

Mr. Sol Mamakwa: Nothing has changed for First Nations people that live in Thunder Bay. There is an ongoing failure to investigate the deaths of First Nations people in Thunder Bay. The Ontario government has let Thunder Bay Police Service become a cold case factory for Indigenous deaths. There are now more than 20 cold cases due to incompetent death investigations. Why hasn't Ontario put resources into making sure these investigations don't become cold cases?

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Members will please take their seats.

The Solicitor General.

Hon. Michael S. Kerzner: Again, any loss of a family member is a tragedy, and the loss to those families is completely immeasurable. We understand this.

But, Mr. Speaker, there's a new chief and there's a new police service board in Thunder Bay with good intentions to keep their community safe. We have to give the new police service board and command leadership an opportunity to work with all community stakeholders so that members of the community feel served and protected.

We will continue to take the concerns of Indigenous communities very seriously.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The final supplementary.

Mr. Sol Mamakwa: Speaker, you cannot simply change the driver of the machine that is not working. The Moonias, Belesky and Ostberg families need support to get the investigations out of the hands of the Thunder Bay Police Service and into the hands of a service that can do a credible investigation. The families are calling for a complete reform of the Thunder Bay Police Service after multiple instances of corruption have rendered the existing force unfixable.

Today, I spent some time with the families and the leaders in the north. Families and leaders are asking again to disband the Thunder Bay Police Service. When will Ontario do this?

Hon. Michael S. Kerzner: I thank the member for the question. Again I'll repeat it: Our thoughts are always with the families who lost loved ones, on this immeasurable loss. But 140,000 people in Thunder Bay have a right—

have an equal right, just as we do here in southern Ontario—to feel safe in their own communities.

I have seen the front-line officers that work hard, with passion and commitment. These are people that love their community.

I'll repeat it again: There is a new police service board. There is a new chief with good intentions to serve their community and to make sure that everyone has that right of accountability in their communities to feel safe.

Mr. Speaker, I will continue to do whatever I can to make sure our message of public safety is upheld all across Ontario.

LAND USE PLANNING

Ms. Marit Stiles: This question is for the Premier. This weekend, I was in Wilmot, speaking to farmers, and they are mad. Back in March, they were told that the region of Waterloo plans to purchase 770 acres of their land. If they refuse, they have been told their land will be expropriated without their consent. Farmers are given the choice of no choice.

They've asked me to come to the House and ask the government directly: Will the Premier provide some answers for the people of Wilmot today about why they are losing their land and not being given a choice about their livelihood?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Minister of Economic Development, Job Creation and Trade.

Hon. Victor Fedeli: The members opposite have opposed economic development in our province at virtually every opportunity they get. We have tens of billions of prospects, new job-creating investments in our pipeline. In fact, we now have more prospects than we have land readily available. That is why the Premier put out a call. He put out a call to municipalities all across the province to get shovel-ready sites assembled so these companies can set up shop and create those good-paying jobs in their own communities.

Speaker, we are decades behind our biggest competitor, south of the border, when it comes to having shovel-ready sites. For that reason, we have now a dedicated team at our ministry and at Invest Ontario who are vetting lands sent by our municipal partners. Companies from across the globe know there is no better place to do business than right here in Ontario.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The supplementary question.

Ms. Marit Stiles: I'll tell you, Speaker, farmers are workers, and farms are businesses too. Actually, they're an extraordinarily important part of our economy.

When I went to Wilmot on Friday, I've got to tell you, Speaker, we were expecting about 100 people to show up at the community town hall; over 400 people came to raise their voices. Here's what I heard from them: I heard they're feeling left behind. They feel like they've been taken for granted by this government, undervalued, sidelined. They know that something doesn't smell right here, and it isn't just the manure. Everyone is worried that it can

happen to farmers in Wilmot and farmers on the greenbelt. If it can happen there, then it can happen to them too.

So my question to the Premier is, we've seen this government hide information from Ontarians with the greenbelt grab. What are they trying to hide from farmers this time?

Hon. Victor Fedeli: Speaker, let's look south of the 401 at what happened in St. Thomas: 1,500 acres of land was assembled with no expropriation. That allowed Volkswagen to announce their gigafactory—3,000 direct jobs, 30,000 indirect jobs. They're already hiring today. To do so, to help facilitate that, we introduced Bill 63 to change the borders of Central Elgin and St. Thomas. That bill was supported by the members opposite to help assemble that land.

The last thing we're going to do is to now listen to the NDP and Liberals, whose high-tax policy saw business and workers flee our province in droves—300,000 manufacturing and other workers left our province under the Liberals. We are creating the conditions for job growth in every industry and in every region.

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Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Member for Hamilton Mountain and the member for Waterloo will please come to order.

Supplementary.

Ms. Marit Stiles: Speaker, I will remind the minister that the farming sector contributes \$48 billion to our economy.

Earlier this month, the Premier confirmed it was him who gave the directive to expropriate Wilmot farmland, but he provided no further information about what's going to happen to the property or the farmers. More than 30,000 people have signed the petition to stop the expropriation of Wilmot farmland. Let me tell you, they are sick of this government's lack of transparency. The federation of agriculture agrees there must be more transparency, more fairness for these farmers.

Maybe the next answer to this question come could from the Premier, who is sitting right here, and they could actually mention farmers for a change. Is the Premier ignoring farmers so he can make another backroom deal with developers to carve up our farmland?

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Members will please take their seats. The member for Brampton North will come to order.

Minister of Economic Development, Job Creation and Trade.

Hon. Victor Fedeli: In order for all of these communities in Ontario to get in on the pipeline of tens of billions of dollars, the Premier's instructions to municipalities were, "Get your shovel-ready sites assembled."

Look at what happened in St. Thomas: 1,500 acres, no expropriation. Let's go down to Windsor and look at the NextStar plant. Here we have a community of Windsor that assembled their land: 2,500 direct jobs, tens of thousands of indirect jobs all happening in the Windsor

area. We've already been back down in Windsor twice now to announce other companies who are part of that NextStar. DS, Bobaek: These are companies who are now hiring hundreds and thousands of people because they assembled their land in Windsor, because they assembled their lands at Volkswagen in St. Thomas, with no expropriation.

This is what's happening. This is what's happening all across Ontario. We have tens of billions of dollars of investment that want to come here to create jobs.

POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION

Ms. Peggy Sattler: My question is to the Premier. The committee reviewing Bill 166 has heard repeated concerns about the alarming overreach of the bill in empowering the minister to unilaterally dictate the contents of post-secondary policies on student mental health and racism and hate on campus. So it was quite a relief last week to hear the Premier say that he agreed Bill 166 went too far, because universities are legislated to govern themselves.

Unfortunately, the Premier issued a statement a few hours later announcing his support for the bill after all. Speaker, can the Premier tell us what happened to make him change his mind?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): To reply, the Minister of Colleges and Universities.

Hon. Jill Dunlop: Thank you to the member for that question, and I want to thank all members of this House for unanimously passing second reading of Bill 166.

I assume we all agree on ensuring that students are safe on campus, and we stand committed to ensuring that students are safe and supported on campuses across Ontario—free from intimidation, from discrimination.

Unfortunately, we have seen horrific instances of hate on campuses across Ontario, which is why our government is taking the necessary steps to support students and their education from the time they walk on a campus until the time they graduate, which means delivering a safe and supportive environment that is conducive to learning. It is my expectation that schools step up for students. And when it comes to the safety and well-being of students, providing anything but the best falls short.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Supplementary question.

Ms. Peggy Sattler: We're going to try to fix the bill tomorrow, but I can tell the minister that it's not lack of policy; it's lack of resources that it is leaving post-secondary students without support.

Not only does Bill 166 permit unprecedented political interference in the autonomy of universities, putting the government in conflict with each of Ontario's universities acts, but it could also conflict with the Ontario Human Rights Code. This government already lost in court once over its attempt to use ministerial directives to dictate university policies on student fees.

Instead of spending public dollars on a lost-cause court challenge, why won't this government invest in the mental

health and anti-racism support that post-secondary students need?

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Members will please take their seats.

Minister of Colleges and Universities.

Hon. Jill Dunlop: We are committed to fighting hate on campuses. We have many young people in our crowd here today. We are committed to ensuring that campuses in Ontario are safe and free from discrimination and intimidation. All students in this province deserve a right to a safe learning environment.

I'd like to read a quote from Michael Levitt, the president and CEO from Friends of Simon Wiesenthal: "Given the surge in hatred and discriminatory behaviour on campus in recent months, particularly against Jewish students and faculty, it's essential all colleges in Ontario and universities have specific policies in place to combat all forms of bigotry. We welcome the Strengthening Accountability and Student Supports Act and applaud this timely action by the Ontario government."

I want to thank all members for unanimously passing second reading and I would appreciate your support on third reading and ensuring that students in this province have a safe learning environment, which they have the right to.

TAXATION

Mr. Sam Oosterhoff: I have a question for the Minister of Energy. Families in Ontario and in Niagara West are struggling to keep up with the soaring cost for essentials like fuel, food and heating, directly linked to the 23% increase in the carbon tax that came into effect under the Liberal government from Ottawa.

We know that when I go door-knocking in Niagara West, I hear from these hard-working families and job creators in my riding about the increased cost directly linked to the carbon tax. I know that the Liberal and NDP members in this chamber, when they knock on doors in their communities, hear the exact same stories from people who are having to choose about the essentials because of the cost that is driven by the federal Liberal carbon tax.

To this date, though, we see that the other parties in this chamber refuse to join our government in condemning the Trudeau Liberal carbon tax increases, which is shameful when we look at the hard-working families of our province.

I'm wondering, could this minister tell this House why it's so important that we scrap the carbon tax and put more money back into the pockets of hard-working Ontarians?

Hon. Todd Smith: Thanks to the great member from Niagara for the question this morning on the federal carbon tax, supported by Ontario's Liberal leader, the queen of the carbon tax, Bonnie Crombie, which is driving up the price of everything.

We know very well, because we've been talking about it for months, Mr. Speaker—and we have a plan here in Ontario. Just last week, as part of our Powering Ontario's Growth plan, I was down in Niagara Falls, the member's

own riding, at the Sir Adam Beck facility, where we announced the refurbishment of 1.7 gigawatts of hydro-electric power at the Niagara facilities. Just this morning, I was at a great conference down at the Sheraton, where they are having the First Nations Major Projects conference. It was a huge conference where First Nations from right across the province are powering Ontario's growth by partnering with us on our power projects like battery storage projects and other non-emitting generators.

Mr. Speaker, we're proving that you don't need a punitive carbon tax. It's time to scrap that tax.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Supplementary question.

Mr. Sam Oosterhoff: My thanks to the minister for his response. Speaker, it's undeniable that the Liberal carbon tax is having a negative impact on so many lives here in the province of Ontario, making life more and more unaffordable across this nation. In fact, we've heard both the Parliamentary Budget Officer and the governor of the Bank of Canada say that the carbon tax is inflationary. We know that the people of Ontario are struggling because of the Liberal tax increases from the federal government, and we know that no one should be forced to make gut-wrenching decisions about whether to put food on the table or heat their home.

I know that this government, under the leadership of our Premier Ford, will continue to hold the federal Liberals accountable when it comes to this terrible tax, but we are the only ones in this Legislature, it seems, who are willing to stand up for the hard-working folks in our ridings and demand accountability from the federal Liberals.

Speaker, could the minister please explain once again to this chamber what our government is doing to fight this job-killing tax and support the people of our province?

Hon. Todd Smith: Speaker, we continue to fight the federal carbon tax, which is driving up the price of everything in our province, fully supported by the Ontario Liberal leader, the queen of the carbon tax, Bonnie Crombie.

Now we have the Powering Ontario's Growth plan, which we released last summer, and the proof is in the pudding. Last week, I was at a great announcement in Cambridge at BWXT—I know Premier Ford was there, as well, later in the day—an \$80-million expansion at the BWXT plant, creating over 200 jobs.

It's all part of our clean, non-emitting nuclear investments that we're making in the small modular reactors at Darlington and the refurbishment of the large reactors at Bruce and at Pickering and at Darlington, and don't forget about the new 4.8 gigawatts that we're investing in large nuclear at Bruce. That's a huge announcement that is going to ensure we have clean, non-emitting, reliable and affordable energy for decades to come.

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We don't need this punitive carbon tax in Ontario—

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The next question.

MUNICIPAL RESTRUCTURING

Ms. Catherine Fife: This question is for the Premier. When the government takes one step forward and two steps back, it's the rest of us who have to bear the consequences. This government has wasted hours in this House pushing through unfair and undemocratic legislation only to spend hours reversing those decisions because of public pressure. Now we're learning, despite the reversal of the decision to break up Peel region, the provincially appointed board is costing taxpayers \$1.5 million.

Why are Peel taxpayers stuck with a bill for \$1.5 million over this government's flip-flops?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): To respond, the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing.

Hon. Paul Calandra: Actually, just the opposite: What we're doing, of course—the parliamentary assistant is leading a regional governance review across our fastest-growing regions. The goal of not only the Peel transition but the regional governance review is to ensure that we can build the infrastructure that is needed to get shovels in the ground. That is what we're hearing from our partners across municipalities, not only in Peel and in the fastest-growing regions of the province but all over the province.

That is precisely why the Minister of Infrastructure, supported by this caucus and the Minister of Finance, brought forward a groundbreaking, frankly—no pun intended—\$1.8 billion program to build infrastructure. The work of the transition committee is to help us unleash that even further not only in Peel but in other areas of the province.

I look forward to the work they're doing, but, more importantly, we look forward to the opportunities to continue to build infrastructure so that we get more homes built across the province of Ontario.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The supplementary question.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Municipal leaders are so fed up. The uncertainty is costing taxpayers millions of dollars, and the region is no better off than they were months ago. All this government has done is create instability and line the pockets of the transition board hand-picked by this Premier.

The board charged taxpayers \$858,000 for six months' work between July and December of last year, and then they charged \$635,000 for work for three months between January and March 5. This is good work, I guess, if you can get it. It is unclear who is getting paid, for what, and how much.

Can the Premier clarify what the people are paying \$1.5 million for?

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Members will please take their seats.

Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing.

Hon. Paul Calandra: Well, Mr. Speaker, I don't know what municipal leaders she's talking to, because the ones that I've been talking to—I know that the Premier was just

at the Ontario's Big City Mayors conference on the weekend, and he was resoundingly congratulated for the work to get more shovels in the ground, for the \$1.8 billion worth of infrastructure investments that we're making.

We've heard that everywhere that we have gone. We have heard the exact same message: that this government is finally listening. After 15 long, dark years under the previous Liberal government, supported by the NDP, this government understands that the best way to support our municipalities is to let them do the jobs that they were elected to do. What they have said to us overwhelmingly, and I'm sure the Premier understood this message, as did the Minister of Finance and the Minister of Infrastructure: Get more shovels in the ground by building sewer and water capacity; build communities by bringing them schools, transit and transportation. That is what we are doing across the province of Ontario.

That is why there are more Conservatives representing more municipalities across the province of Ontario than at any other time in the province's history and why that party continues to shrink to irrelevance.

TAXATION

Ms. Patrice Barnes: My question is for the Minister of Finance. The federal carbon tax is creating financial pressure for Ontario families, who are being forced to pay more for everyday essentials. Small and medium-sized businesses in Ajax tell me that they are concerned about rising energy bills and fuel costs. Business owners are seeing soaring expenses affect their bottom line, threatening their livelihood and that of their employees. This really must come to an end.

While the carbon tax queen, Bonnie Crombie, stands with her federal buddies, our government will always support hard-working people of this province.

Speaker, can the minister please explain how our government is helping Ontarians cope with rising costs driven by the carbon tax?

Hon. Peter Bethlenfalvy: Thank you to the member from Ajax for that question. We know things are hard for the people of Ontario right now. High interest rates and high inflation are driving up the cost of food, driving up the cost of gas. Even the Bank of Canada has said the carbon tax drives up inflation, yet somehow, the Liberals continue to support it. The government should be working together to drive down the costs for Ontario families. That's why our government is keeping costs down by extending our gas tax cut until the end of year and helping Ontario families save hundreds of dollars.

But we need the federal government to do their part. I'll renew another call I made before, the Premier has made before, all of us have made before to the federal government: Join us in driving down the cost of living in ending the carbon tax once and for all.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The supplementary question.

Ms. Patrice Barnes: Thank you to the minister for the response. The federal Liberals are fuelling the affordabil-

ity crisis with their tax hikes, and to make matters worse, rather than standing up for their constituents, their provincial counterparts are supporting this price gouging federal carbon tax. This is unacceptable. Our government must continue to keep costs down for families and businesses while calling for an end to this costly tax.

Just a few weeks ago, the minister delivered a budget that is continuing our plan to build a better Ontario while ensuring people keep money in their pockets.

Speaker, back to the minister: If the Ontario Liberals won't help and the federal Liberals won't listen, what is our government doing to build a better future for Ontarians and our province's economy?

Hon. Peter Bethlenfalvy: Thank you again to the member from Ajax—my neighbour—for the great job you do for the constituents of Ajax.

It's very simple, Mr. Speaker: You cannot tax your way to prosperity. There are two types of governments. There are the ones that raise taxes and add tolls and increase the cost of living, and there are the ones that cut costs, ban tolls and put money back in the hard-working pockets of the people of Ontario. And, under this Premier, I am more than proud to be part of the second group. In our budget, we delivered historic new cost-saving measures and are providing billions in savings across the province. But politics is a team sport. We are seeing the price of gas spike across the province, and we all know why.

So, to the federal Liberals, to the queen of the carbon tax, to that party over there: Join us in making life more affordable for Ontarians and finally scrap the carbon tax.

CANCER SCREENING

MPP Jill Andrew: Bishop Brigante, a local hip-hop artist and actor, is fighting stage 4 colorectal cancer. He's 45 years old and was diagnosed last fall. Bishop had symptoms earlier, yet they were dismissed. He has started a petition with 30,000 signatures from people who, like him, are demanding this government lower the current colonoscopy colorectal screening age criteria of 50.

The Minister of Health has indicated that their ColonCancerCheck program is "actively monitoring" colorectal cancer and will evaluate program recommendations—such as screening age criteria—based on new and emerging data.

My question is to the Premier. Can the government explain to Bishop and other late-stage metastasized colon cancer patients in their twenties, thirties and forties what new and emerging data this government is waiting for?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The Deputy Premier and Minister of Health.

Hon. Sylvia Jones: We will continue to rely on clinical advice, clinical feedback to ensure we have the best cancer screening in the province of Ontario.

And I have to say that while it is very disturbing when we hear examples of individuals who are dealing with a colon cancer treatment and diagnosis early in their stages, we have some of the most exceptional clinicians in the province of Ontario.

Yes, we will continue to monitor, using the experts at Colon Cancer Ontario and Cancer Care Ontario, to ensure that, as emerging evidence comes forward, it is the most appropriate pathway for diagnosis and treatment. We will be there, as we were when we announced last year a decrease in when access for breast cancer was announced and will start in September of this year.

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The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): And the supplementary question.

MPP Jill Andrew: The experts at Colorectal Cancer Canada, Canadian Cancer Society and Sunnybrook Health Science Centre's Young Adult Colorectal Clinic have noted the rise in people under 50 with colorectal cancer.

Colorectal Cancer Canada says that diagnoses "rapidly climbed in recent years," and referred to it in a recent news story as an "alarming reality." And many would add that this rise is especially acute for racialized, Indigenous, Black, people of colour, but this government does not collect race-based data. We've asked for this for many, many, many years.

My question is back to the Premier: Can this government share with all Ontarians, including BIPOC Ontarians in their twenties, thirties and forties fighting colorectal cancer, if they are prepared to lower the age criteria for a colonoscopy, and if not, what is their provincial plan for early detection to help save lives like Bishop and countless others?

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Members will please take their seats.

The Minister of Health.

Hon. Sylvia Jones: I'm not sure if the member opposite is suggesting that the \$2 billion that we fund Cancer Care Ontario to allow hospitals across Ontario to provide exceptional cancer treatment is not what she thinks is appropriate. I believe that we must continue to rely on clinicians, to rely on expert data to drive our decisions.

I will not put the risk of people of Ontario into suggesting that these are political decisions. They must be made by experts, by our specialists, by our clinicians working in the field. I will continue to rely on their expertise because, frankly, our numbers show that we are doing an excellent job in Ontario, including, of course, making changes that increase access to cancer treatment in Ontario.

OFFICE OF THE PREMIER

Mr. John Fraser: Last week, I sent the Premier a can of gravy to symbolize the runaway gravy train that is his office, more than doubling his budget to \$6.9 million, going from 20 to 48 people on the sunshine list.

The average salary of the Premier's sunshine staff is twice that of the median family income in Ontario—not individual; family income. For those families, life is more expensive than under any other Premier in Ontario's history. So Speaker, how is the Premier's runaway gravy train helping Ontario families at all?

Hon. Doug Ford: It's very hard to take the member seriously. This is the person that invented the gravy train. His government ran the gravy train right into the ground, losing 300,000 jobs from this province. Talk to the 300,000 people that don't have a paycheque because of his government, supported by the NDP.

Talk about what we're doing today: Over 700,000 more people are bringing home a paycheque because of our policies. We're building new hospitals in the province. We're building new long-term care. We are building the largest subway expansion in North America. We're building roads and highway and bridges.

Our economy right now is one of the strongest in North America, one of the strongest in the world. We have become an economic powerhouse—no matter if it's the EV batteries or being the number one in the world when it comes to having six of the largest auto manufacturers right here. That's what—

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Thank you. The supplementary question.

Mr. John Fraser: Thank you to the Premier for that answer. But I hear there are rumours of a shuffle, because apparently some cabinet ministers are applying for jobs in the Premier's office. It pays better. The bonus is, they get to tell other ministers what to say and what to do every day.

The truth is, the Premier's gravy train is leaving Ontario families behind. Every day, more and more families are forced to use their credit card instead of their OHIP card. Rent is skyrocketing because there's no real rent control. Small landlords are being bankrupted by delays at the Landlord and Tenant Board, and now we hear that the Premier wants to start charging people for testing their well water.

So, Speaker, when will the Premier and his office stop the gravy train and stop leaving Ontario families behind?

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Order.

The Premier.

Hon. Doug Ford: Well, Mr. Speaker, there's been no government that's taken more money out of people's pockets than the government you are under. There's no leader in this province that wants to charge people more on the carbon tax than the queen of carbon tax. The one who came up with the carbon tax wants to make sure we keep it, wants to come back with a cap-and-trade, increase gas prices by 19.5 cents per litre.

You know, Mr. Speaker, the gravy train was going full steam under this government. We're the only government—think of this—that has never raised a tax. We reduced taxes. We got rid of the licence registration. We cut tolls on the 412 and 418. We reduced the gas price by 10.7 cents a litre.

We're going to continue putting money back into people's pockets, unlike the Liberals and NDP. They know one thing: tax and spend.

TAXATION

Ms. Laura Smith: My question is for the Minister of Energy. At a time when families across Ontario struggle to cover their basic living expenses, the federal carbon tax is an additional burden to their already stretched budgets. Despite the hardship people in Ontario are going through, the Liberals, led by the carbon tax queen, Bonnie Crombie, and the opposition NDP, want to triple this tax by 2030.

Speaker, Ontarians need urgent relief from the negative impacts of this devastating tax. And despite the Liberals' persistent advocacy for higher taxes, our government understands the need to alleviate financial pressure and deliver real affordability for the people of this province.

Speaker, can the minister please tell the House what actions our government is taking to combat the carbon tax?

Hon. Todd Smith: Thanks to the member from Thornhill. As a matter of fact, we've done a lot: We've reduced the gas tax until the end of the year, we brought in One Fare. The great minister of One Fare with great hair, he introduced that earlier this year, saving those who take transit \$1,600 a year. We have never raised a tax, as the Premier just said, or a fee.

Now, you've got the Liberals over here, led by the queen of the carbon tax, who are in full support of the federal carbon tax that—you know, this is like déjà vu all over again, Mr. Speaker. I remember standing in this House as an opposition member when those Liberals brought in the Green Energy Act, and all we saw were tail lights headed for the US, as 300,000 jobs left for the southern part of the United States.

Now, they're doing it again at the federal level with the carbon tax. They're doing their best to stop the work that's happening in here, those 700,000 new jobs that have come to Ontario since Premier Ford and our government have taken office. We're on the right tack—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Supplementary question.

Ms. Laura Smith: Thank you to the minister for his response and his dedicated work within his portfolio.

On April 1, the federal Liberals, alongside their NDP allies, enacted a staggering 23% carbon tax. That's crazy. This is unacceptable, Speaker.

This tax hike inflicts further harm on families across Ontario, forcing an additional 17.6 cents per litre to their gas bills. It's not surprising that Ontarians across this province oppose this unjust measure. But it's unfortunate that the Liberal and the NDP members in this House care more about playing politics than advocating on behalf of the people they represent.

Speaker, Ontarians need relief. The federal government needs to abolish the carbon tax now. Could the minister please elaborate on how this recent tax hike imposed by the Liberals is adversely affecting Ontarians?

Hon. Todd Smith: Well, Speaker, just like the Green Energy Act did with the Liberals previous, the federal carbon tax is driving people into energy poverty. We just heard the Minister of Finance talking about the impact that

it's having. And the Bank of Canada affirms everything and the environmental commissioner in Ottawa has also said that the federal Liberals' plan, supported by the queen of the carbon tax, Bonnie Crombie, isn't working. That's why we've released a different plan. It's called Powering Ontario's Growth, and we're seeing the results. We're reducing emissions from our energy sector.

I mentioned last week I was down in Niagara Falls for that massive refurbishment announcement. We have massive refurbishments going on at our Candu nuclear facilities at Darlington and also at Bruce, and about to get under way at Pickering. That's going to ensure affordable, safe, reliable energy for the next 30 to 40 years.

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As a result of those investments, including the small modular reactors we're building at Darlington—last Friday, I was with MPPs Riddell and Dixon in Cambridge, and we saw an \$80-million expansion at BWXT: 250 new jobs. That's on top of all of the jobs that these refurbishments are creating.

We have a plan for Ontario. It's working, and it—

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Thank you very much.

The next question.

ENERGY POLICIES

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Speaker, to the Premier: Today is Earth Day. The Premier's Bill 165 will increase people's Enbridge bills and force them to finance expansion of the gas system. That will mean people will be poorer and the world's climate will get hotter.

This Earth Day, will the Premier abandon Bill 165 in order to protect people's pocketbooks and avoid climate disasters?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Minister of Energy.

Hon. Todd Smith: Mr. Speaker, I just answered a question about all of the things that our government is doing to ensure that we have clean, reliable, safe, affordable energy for our province going forward. That includes multi-billion-dollar refurbishments that are happening at Bruce and OPG's Darlington station and multi-billion-dollar investments at Pickering, something that that member is opposed to. He's opposed to the 76,000 jobs in our nuclear sector and the baseload power that comes from those facilities, providing up to 60% of our power every day.

We rely on natural gas in our province, Mr. Speaker. Over 70% of homes—do you know what they're heated by? Natural gas, something that member would pull out of people's homes tomorrow if he had the chance. We're going to ensure, through Bill 165, that we keep energy costs affordable, and we're going to keep all of the new homes that we're building in Ontario affordable as well, something that the NDP is opposed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Supplementary question?

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Again to the Premier: Your actions to increase gas-burning in homes and in the electricity

system will mean higher bills for everyone. Your actions make it impossible to meet even your inadequate plans for reducing carbon pollution. We all know that rising costs and rising temperatures will make life much harder for people.

Again, this Earth Day, will the Premier abandon Bill 165 and protect people's pocketbooks and futures instead of Enbridge's profits?

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Members will take their seats.

Minister of Energy.

Hon. Todd Smith: Mr. Speaker, it's absolutely ludicrous to have the NDP standing up and talking about affordable energy. Nobody in this country believes it. The NDP are supporting Prime Minister Trudeau on the federal carbon tax. They're going to do it again when they reinforce or vote in favour of the budget in a couple of weeks' time on Parliament Hill. That's driving people into energy poverty.

They supported the Green Energy Act that the previous provincial Liberals brought forward, and we know how the current Liberal leader, the queen of the carbon tax, Bonnie Crombie, feels about the federal carbon tax. It's driving people into energy poverty as well.

Our Powering Ontario's Growth plan will ensure that we have non-emitting baseload power going forward that our province can count on, to see the type of investments that we have been seeing under the leadership of Premier Ford and our Minister of Economic Development, Minister Fedeli, out there beating the bushes and bringing back billions of dollars of investments into our EV, EV battery and manufacturing jobs, back to this province.

TAXATION

Mr. Kevin Holland: My question is for the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs. The Liberal carbon tax hurts Ontario farmers and limits their potential to grow our agricultural and food industry. Since the implementation of this punitive tax in 2019, our farmers have seen production costs increase exponentially.

People in my riding of Thunder Bay–Atikokan and all across the province rely on Ontario farmers to grow high-quality, healthy food for their families. It's not fair that the federal Liberals are continuing to punish farmers who already use environmentally responsible practices with a tax that does absolutely nothing to reduce emissions. They need to scrap the tax now.

Speaker, can the minister please share what she has heard directly from Ontario farmers about the impact of the carbon tax on their businesses?

Hon. Lisa M. Thompson: I'm pleased to rise in the House today and first and foremost acknowledge the great member from Thunder Bay–Atikokan, who's doing a beautiful job advocating for his riding as well as all of northern Ontario.

We're meeting with farmers every day, and just a couple of weeks ago, Drew Spoelstra, president of the Ontario Federation of Agriculture, joined the Premier and

myself and the President of the Treasury Board at a rally in Holland Marsh. Drew spoke to people and shared that he dried 2,200 tons of grain last fall and it cost him \$4,500 in carbon tax alone—and that was before the 23% increase that we realized as of April 1.

Drew explained that the carbon tax makes Ontario farmers less competitive against imports and it also makes Ontario products less competitive around the world.

Ladies and gentlemen, Beef Farmers of Ontario are in the House today and the chair of the BFO shared earlier this morning that 40% of all beef produced in Ontario is exported. So, for goodness' sake, we need to be doing everything we can to make sure that Ontario farmers are competitive, not only in Ontario and North America but around the world.

The queen of the carbon tax needs to jam on the brakes of that minivan and—

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Thank you. Supplementary.

Mr. Kevin Holland: Thank you to the minister for that response. I know my constituents will be pleased to hear that, unlike the federal Liberals and their provincial buddies, our government is actually listening to farmers in Ontario.

The carbon tax harms hard-working individuals, business and farmers, but, Speaker, the Prime Minister keeps saying that farmers are exempted from the carbon tax. As we just heard from the minister, that is not the case. Ontarians won't be fooled by the Liberals' money-grabbing schemes and their carbon tax.

Speaker, can the minister please explain how the federal carbon tax is negatively impacting Ontario's farmers?

Hon. Lisa M. Thompson: We need to get something straight here in the House today. There's been a lot of rhetoric that farmers are exempted, but the fact of the matter is, the only thing exempted on an Ontario farm today is the diesel used in tractors—coloured fuel. And the fact of the matter is, we need propane, we need natural gas on our farms to heat our barns and to also dry down our crops in the fall.

Greenhouses are really getting hit hard. Drew, the president of OFA, also explained that one greenhouse relied on natural gas and their total energy bill of \$13,614 included nearly \$4,000 in carbon tax alone—and, again, that was before the April 1 increase.

Ladies and gentlemen, there's one way that we can stand by farmers in Ontario, and it's by joining together and telling the queen of the carbon tax to get to Ottawa and tell those federal Liberals once and for all to scrap the tax.

EMPLOYMENT SUPPORTS

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: My question is to the Premier. Employment service providers help job seekers find meaningful long-term careers, helping people break the cycle of poverty and homelessness.

Employment services funding has been stagnant for well over a decade. Why?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Minister of Labour, Immigration, Training and Skills Development.

Hon. David Piccini: Speaker, that's just categorically not true. We increased employment services' funding when we led employment service transformation across Ontario.

But, Speaker, to look at that in isolation would be doing a disservice—a disservice to the hundreds of thousands of—

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I'm going to ask the minister to withdraw the unparliamentary comment.

Hon. David Piccini: Withdrawn.

It would be doing a disservice to the hundreds of thousands of men and women trained through the Skills Development Fund for better jobs with a bigger paycheque. We've been helping racialized, marginalized, socio-economically disadvantaged groups all across Ontario have access to a meaningful job, Speaker.

And I visited the justice-affected individuals at Oaks Revitalization centre. I'm meeting with them—I think it's this week or next, Speaker—to talk first-hand with men and women literally who have had run-ins with justice, but today, thanks to this Premier, this government, they are taxpaying members of society working on the front lines of skilled trades.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Supplementary question?

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: Perhaps the minister should talk to the providers and read the notes that they prepared, not the notes that the government prepares for him.

The numbers speak for themselves. When people have help finding good, stable jobs, it represents savings for the province and happy, productive lives. Yet ESPs are now being forced to take over Ontario Works responsibilities on top of their core mandate to help people find work.

1130

Why do Conservatives always expect hard-working people on the front line to do more with less?

Hon. David Piccini: Again, the only people in this House who want these men and women to do more with less is the NDP, because they voted, every time, against budget measures that have put more funding into programs like the Skills Development Fund.

I would encourage that member to join me in the union training halls in his own riding, look them in the face and explain to those business reps why he voted against SDF funding that's helping people who are out of work get access to a job. It's because he doesn't want to build the hospitals. He doesn't want to build the schools. He wants misery. He wants government handouts. He doesn't want to give these people a leg-up.

That's what we're doing with this government. We're giving people dignity and purpose, and I'm proud of it.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Order. The next question.

TAXATION

Mr. Rick Byers: My question is for the Solicitor General. It's no secret that Ontarians are fed up with the Liberal carbon tax. It's driving up the cost of living and forcing Ontarians to pay more at the gas pumps.

But, Speaker, people in my riding are concerned about the impact of this regressive tax on our public safety system. They know that the Liberal carbon tax is draining resources that should be better spent on protecting their communities. Our first responders deserve support and resources to keep people safe instead of paying for additional fuel costs because of the carbon tax.

Speaker, can the Solicitor General explain the effects that the carbon tax is having on law enforcement in Ontario?

Hon. Michael S. Kerzner: I want to thank my friend for that serious question.

I've said this before. The unnecessary carbon tax has an impact on public safety. When police services, when animal welfare departments, when other departments within governments and across Ontario have to spend money for the carbon tax, it means that they are diverting resources that they could use to keep our communities safe.

Mr. Speaker, let me be specific about our great firefighters. These are amazing people. All we ask of them is that they come home safe at the end of the day to their families. The 21 cents a litre for diesel is affecting every fill-up. It means that \$60 of a fill-up on a fire truck, on average, is just for the carbon tax—on average, \$8,000 a year. Do the math all across Ontario.

Bonnie Crombie was the mayor of Mississauga. She knew the fire department budget in Mississauga. She should do the right thing and be honest with Ontarians.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Supplementary question.

Mr. Rick Byers: Thank you to the minister for his response. It's disheartening to hear how the carbon tax puts a strain on our public safety system. Ever since the carbon tax came into effect in 2019, it has increased the cost of the very institutions that help keep Ontarians safe.

Speaker, our government has promised to protect what matters most, and few things matter more than the security of our communities. We want our police, firefighters, paramedics, corrections officers and our front-line responders to be able to continue providing the potentially life-saving services we rely on. That's why we will continue to fight the federal carbon tax.

Speaker, can the Solicitor General please explain what our government is doing to fight increased costs to community safety services caused by the imposition of a burdensome federal carbon tax?

Hon. Michael S. Kerzner: Our goal has been clear, to keep Ontario safe. But, Mr. Speaker, it means that the resources need to be provided—to the police services, as an example—across Ontario. It means that \$4 million-plus of the OPP budget is being used to pay the carbon tax. It is so simple to understand.

I said this last week: Bonnie Crombie sat on the Peel Police Service Board. She knew the numbers. It's a fact that Peel police have to pay the carbon tax on their vehicles, just like everywhere in Ontario. Let her come clean and say she knows this, and that she'll call her friends Justin and Jagmeet and say, "This is punitive to public safety. Cancel that tax."

WATER QUALITY

Mrs. Jennifer (Jennie) Stevens: My question is to the Minister of Health. Despite recent assurances that there have been no changes to water testing, communities like Niagara depend heavily on Public Health Ontario's free drinking water testing. They need to know the minister is committed to keeping those labs open.

Last Friday, the Niagara Peninsula Conservation Authority urged a reconsideration of the plan to close those labs and essential services. They pointed to Niagara's high instances of bacterial contamination—a revelation only made available because of PHO's free water testing program.

Can the minister explain why the discontinuation is still under consideration when so many experts are telling you it's a big mistake?

Hon. Sylvia Jones: Speaker, this is going to be the third time: To be clear, there are no changes, where the people of Ontario can get their well water tested for free in the province of Ontario.

I grew up on well water; I know how important it is. There are many people in this chamber who understand the value and importance of why and when we test public well water in the province of Ontario.

I want to remind the member opposite that this was actually a report that came out from an independent officer of the assembly, the Auditor General. And the last time I checked, the Auditor General does not impose and set policy on the people of Ontario; we do that.

As a government, we have been very clear that there are no changes anticipated in well water testing.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The supplementary question.

Mrs. Jennifer (Jennie) Stevens: The Niagara Peninsula SPC expressed significant concern that discontinuing PHO's free drinking water testing program will negatively impact Ontario residents. In fact, their request to keep the labs open and maintain government responsibility for essential services is more than advice from the experts; it's a recommendation that was made by the Walkerton inquiry.

Given your previous assurances that no changes have been made to the water testing program, can you clarify why the government is not completely committed to keeping these labs open, ensuring the health and water quality for our families and children across Ontario remain safe?

Hon. Sylvia Jones: Speaker, I'm going to try to draw a picture here. The Auditor General makes a recommendation. That recommendation is assessed, reviewed, and

Public Health Ontario looks at it. Public Health Ontario perhaps, perhaps not, makes a recommendation to the Ministry of Health. The Ministry of Health makes a recommendation, makes an assessment and decides to proceed or not proceed.

There has been no recommendation from Public Health Ontario to the Ministry of Health. I don't know how much clearer I can be. When we do not have a review ongoing—I am not going to tell the member opposite that we are going to do or not do.

We will continue to test the well water in the province of Ontario. We've had it for decades. I grew up with it. It is a system that many of us understand the value and importance of in rural Ontario because we lived it every single day. We're going to continue that process.

TAXATION

Ms. Donna Skelly: My question is for the Associate Minister of Small Business. Ontario's vibrant tourism and hospitality sector is one of the cornerstones of my local community and our economy, contributing billions of dollars in revenue and sustaining countless jobs right across Ontario. However, the prosperity of this critical industry is being threatened by the Liberal carbon tax. From skyrocketing fuel costs for transportation to soaring energy bills for hotels and restaurants, this dreaded tax is imposing severe financial strain on small businesses right across our province. That's not fair.

Our government will continue to support Ontario's small businesses and ensure their concerns are heard.

Speaker, through you, can the minister tell the House the devastating consequences that this regressive tax is having on Ontario's tourism and hospitality operators?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The parliamentary assistant.

Mr. Stéphane Sarrazin: Thank you to my colleague for the excellent question. Our government recognizes the profound importance of Ontario's tourism and hospitality sector, which showcases the best of our province to visitors from around the world. In 2022, Ontario welcomed over half of all international visits to Canada, generating \$38 billion of tourism revenue.

Unfortunately, the opposition seems content to sit idly by while their tax-friendly allies in Ottawa strangle small businesses in this industry with the suffocating carbon tax. From picturesque bed and breakfasts in rural communities to iconic restaurants in our urban centres, these small businesses are being under crushed under the weight of exorbitant costs, especially with summer around the corner—

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Thank you very much. That concludes our question period for this morning.

NOTICE OF DISSATISFACTION

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Pursuant to standing order 36(a), the member for Ottawa South has given notice of dissatisfaction with the answer to their question given by the Premier regarding the Premier's office budget. This

matter will be debated tomorrow following private members' public business.

DEFERRED VOTES

FEWER BACKLOGS AND LESS PARTISAN TRIBUNALS ACT, 2024 LOI DE 2024 SUR LA RÉDUCTION DES RETARDS ET DE LA PARTISANERIE DANS LES TRIBUNAUX

Deferred vote on the motion for second reading of the following bill:

Bill 179, An Act to establish the Adjudicative Tribunal Justice Council and to improve the transparency, independence and capacities of administrative tribunals / Projet de loi 179, Loi visant à créer le Conseil de justice régissant les tribunaux décisionnels et à améliorer la transparence, l'indépendance et les capacités des tribunaux décisionnels.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Call in the members. This will be a five-minute bell.

The division bells rang from 1141 to 1146.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Members will please take their seats.

On April 18, 2024, Mr. Hsu moved second reading of Bill 179, An Act to establish the Adjudicative Tribunal Justice Council and to improve the transparency, independence and capacities of administrative tribunals.

All those in favour, please rise and remain standing until recognized by the Clerk.

Ayes

Andrew, Jill	Harden, Joel	Schreiner, Mike
Armstrong, Teresa J.	Hazell, Andrea	Shamji, Adil
Bell, Jessica	Hsu, Ted	Stevens, Jennifer (Jennie)
Blais, Stephen	Karpoche, Bhutlia	Stiles, Marit
Bourgouin, Guy	Kernaghan, Terence	Tabuns, Peter
Brady, Bobbi Ann	Mamakwa, Sol	Taylor, Monique
Clancy, Aislinn	Mantha, Michael	Vanthof, John
Fife, Catherine	McCrimmon, Karen	Vaugeois, Lise
Fraser, John	McMahon, Mary-Margaret	West, Jamie
Gates, Wayne	Pasma, Chandra	Wong-Tam, Kristyn
Gélinas, France	Rakocevic, Tom	
Gretzky, Lisa	Sattler, Peggy	

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): All those opposed will please rise one at a time and be recognized by the Clerk.

Nays

Anand, Deepak	Holland, Kevin	Rae, Matthew
Babikian, Aris	Jones, Sylvia	Rasheed, Kaleed
Barnes, Patrice	Jones, Trevor	Riddell, Brian
Bethlenfalvy, Peter	Jordan, John	Sabawy, Sheref
Bresee, Ric	Kanapathi, Logan	Sandhu, Amarjot
Byers, Rick	Ke, Vincent	Sarrazin, Stéphane
Calandra, Paul	Kerzner, Michael S.	Saunderson, Brian
Cho, Raymond Sung Joon	Khanjin, Andrea	Scott, Laurie
Clark, Steve	Leardi, Anthony	Skelly, Donna

Coe, Lorne	Lecce, Stephen	Smith, Dave
Crawford, Stephen	Lumsden, Neil	Smith, David
Cuzzetto, Rudy	MacLeod, Lisa	Smith, Graydon
Dixon, Jess	Martin, Robin	Smith, Laura
Dowie, Andrew	McCarthy, Todd J.	Smith, Todd
Dunlop, Jill	McGregor, Graham	Surma, Kinga
Fedeli, Victor	Mulroney, Caroline	Thanigasalam, Vijay
Ford, Michael D.	Oosterhoff, Sam	Thompson, Lisa M.
Gallagher Murphy, Dawn	Pang, Billy	Triantafilopoulos, Effie J.
Ghamari, Goldie	Parsa, Michael	Wai, Daisy
Grewal, Hardeep Singh	Piccini, David	Williams, Charmaine A.
Hardeman, Ernie	Pierre, Natalie	Yakabuski, John
Harris, Mike	Pirie, George	
Hogarth, Christine	Quinn, Nolan	

PETITIONS

HERBICIDES

M^{me} France Gélinas: I have with me the signature of 300,000 Ontarians who support this petition. I would like to recognize the work of Elder Caroline Recollet and Jo Boyer from the Traditional Ecological Knowledge Elders in the Robertson-Huron Treaty territory of 1850, as well as—supporting the elders is Jodi Koberinski, who is a PhD candidate at the University of Waterloo. From my riding of Nickel Belt, and more specifically, Foleyet, is Mr. Joel Theriault from Stop the Spray.

Here is what the petition that 300,000 Ontarians—actually, 302,000 Ontarians have signed. I have problems with math, sometimes, in English. But here it goes:

“Stop the Spray.”

They want the government of Ontario to realize that there is a wide variety of non-chemical alternatives to what is currently being used to effectively meet vegetation management needs.

Quebec has banned the use of chemical herbicides by their forestry industry since 2001.

We had a report done by the Senate, of the committee at the federal Legislature, that looked at the boreal forest, and they published a report entitled *Competing Realities: The Boreal Forest at Risk*. The committee recommended that all herbicides and chemical pesticides used in the boreal forest should be phased out as soon as possible. They did that in 1999, 25 years ago, yet here we are in Ontario in 2024 and we still use those chemical herbicides. Don't get me wrong; they are not being used in southern Ontario. Toronto has banned it. Many areas of the province do not allow chemical herbicides to be used. But on crown land in northern Ontario, on First Nations territory in northern Ontario, they are used all the time. They are a threat to our environment. They are a threat to the health of the population. Many, many cancers are directly linked to the use of those sprayed herbicides. It doesn't have to be that way. We have other ways to do this. So they hope for the government to listen.

Ban the use of non-essential chemical herbicides throughout Ontario.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I thank the member, but I must remind all members of standing order 42(b): “A member may present a petition in the House during the afternoon routine ‘Petitions.’ The member may make a brief statement summarizing the contents of the petition and indicating the number of signatures attached thereto but shall not read the text of the petition.”

The member did not read the text of the petition; I'm not suggesting that she did. But I would ask the members to keep the presentation of their petitions brief.

Petitions. The member for Sudbury.

LABOUR LEGISLATION

MPP Jamie West: This is a petition about passing anti-scab labour legislation. Basically, the idea is to protect the

The Clerk of the Assembly (Mr. Trevor Day): The eyes are 34; the nays are 67.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I declare the motion lost.

Second reading negatived.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): There being no further business this morning, this House stands in recess until 1 p.m.

The House recessed from 1150 to 1300.

ESTIMATES

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I recognize the President of the Treasury Board on a point of order.

Hon. Caroline Mulroney: Mr. Speaker, I have a message from the Honourable Edith Dumont, the Lieutenant Governor, signed by her own hand.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The Lieutenant Governor transmits estimates of certain sums required for the services of the province for the year ending March 31, 2025, and recommends them to the Legislative Assembly.

Members may now take their seats.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

M^{me} France Gélinas: I have some visitors all the way from Foleyet. Joel Theriault is here with Stop the Spray Ontario. I also have a group of Traditional Ecological Knowledge Elders from the Robinson-Huron Treaty territory who are here for the petition: Jodi Koberinski, Caroline Recollet, and Jo Boyer. And we have the coalition of elders, environmentalists, hunters and anglers who say, “Stop the spray,” who will also be joining us momentarily.

Welcome to Queen's Park.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

1828469 ONTARIO INC. ACT, 2024

Ms. Ghamari moved first reading of the following bill:
Bill Pr45, An Act to revive 1828469 Ontario Inc.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Is it the pleasure of the house that the motion carry? Carried.

First reading agreed to.

rights of workers to withdraw their labour. When you're not able to withdraw your labour effectively, when they're using replacement scab workers, that means that that work continues and the employer doesn't feel the pressure to come back to the negotiating table. It creates more conflict on picket lines, as well.

For example, I'm sure, at picket lines, they're going to want to have this sort of thing in place. The AGO, for example, is using replacement workers; I'm sure those workers would prefer to have it.

There are signatures from Sault Ste. Marie, Brampton, Georgetown, London, so it has strong support across the province.

I support this petition.

They also urge people to support bills such as the one that I tabled, Bill 90, the Anti-Scab Labour Act.

So we could pass this into legislation—very similar that was done at the federal level because of the NDP there.

ONTARIO SCIENCE CENTRE

Ms. Stephanie Bowman: I have a petition with over [*inaudible*] signatures from residents in my riding of Don Valley West who are against the government's plan to undermine, downsize and relocate the Ontario Science Centre to Ontario Place. The petitioners indicate that this plan, which the government initiated without public consultation, environmental assessment or a sound business rationale, will cause irreparable harm to their community.

The petitioners request that the Legislative Assembly reconsider the decision to relocate the science centre and prioritize renewing the Ontario Science Centre at its current site in Don Mills and ensure thorough public and environmental evaluations of any future proposed changes.

I wholeheartedly endorse this petition and will affix my name to it and ask page Erwin to bring it to the Clerk.

STUDENT SAFETY

Ms. Peggy Sattler: I have a petition that is signed by many parents and residents in London—in particular, from my riding of London West—who are very concerned about the safety of students and staff in our schools. They are calling on increased investment by this Legislative Assembly to take action to address violence in our classrooms.

1310

They want to see an investment in more mental health resources for students, and that's something we heard from the Ontario Medical Students Association, who are meeting with MPPs today.

Most of all, they want our schools to be properly funded so that class sizes can remain small, so that kids can get the individualized attention that they need—and more support staff in our schools.

I am pleased to affix my signature and will send this petition to the table with page Simon.

SOCIAL ASSISTANCE

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: I have a petition to raise social assistance rates, and we know that—actually, with the goal of doubling OW and ODSP.

We know when we had the CERB program, which was providing a basic income of \$2,000 per month, that was very helpful to Ontarians.

People have asked for this for a long time, far and wide, and it has been in many election platforms, and a goal of some parties. There are signatures from all over Ontario asking for this. We know that people are living below the poverty line, and we're here to help all Ontarians and provide a decent quality of life.

So I will sign my signature to this powerful petition, and I'll send it with page marvelous Mariam.

EMERGENCY SERVICES

M^{me} France Gélinas: I would like to thank Sylvie Courchesne from Garson in my riding for these petitions. The petitions are called “911 Everywhere in Ontario.”

As you know, Speaker, when something goes wrong, when somebody is sick, we know to dial 911. We teach our kids—I'm sure you could ask the pages; they all know, if you're sick, call 911.

Unfortunately, in many parts of my riding and in many parts of the north, 911 doesn't work. The service is there—there are ambulance services, there are police officers to come and help you—but you have to remember a 1-800 number that nobody knows, and that 1-800 number changed three times just through my riding.

Ontario is the only province that does not have 911 everywhere. Every other province has made arrangements with Bell Canada so that 911 is available throughout. In Ontario, only municipalities have signed those arrangements. As soon as you're outside of municipal boundaries, 911 doesn't work, and most people discover that in a time of need.

So what those people are asking for by signing the petition is, do what every other province in Canada has done. Bring 911 everywhere in Ontario, so that when you visit beautiful northern Ontario, where I live—I don't wish harm upon you—if something happens and your family dials 911 for you, the ambulance will be there to help you.

LABORATORY SERVICES

MPP Jamie West: The petition is titled “Keep Our Community PHO Labs Open.” This is, unbelievably, more than 9,000 signatures for these petitions—only some of them are here—in a very short amount of time.

Basically, what they're concerned about is, there was a recommendation or suggestion that maybe six of the 11 Public Health Ontario labs would be closed. These are the people who do the medical testing, and most people know them from the water testing. The worst crisis was Walkerton, but people have water testing done all the time, especially in rural areas where they have manure that can

affect it as runoffs. It's very important that these are kept open. It would create inequities in rural areas and northern areas.

As well, in pandemics—I know that we always think of COVID-19, but H1N1, for example. Any time there's an uptake in medical testing of that nature, these smaller public health labs do the runoff of large organizations like Ottawa and Toronto when they can't keep up to it, which keeps all of us safer.

Like I said before, there are 9,000-plus signatures on this. It's a very important issue. I'm very happy to hear the Minister of Health say that there is no conversation about closing it—she says “at this time.” So I just want to ensure that she knows how important this is to people right across the province.

I support this petition. I'll give it to page Lyra for the table.

HEALTH CARE

M^{me} France Gélinas: I would like to thank Sandra and Bryan Smith from Woodstock, as well as Danielle Brosseau from Hanmer, for these petitions. It's called “Health Care: Not for Sale.”

As you know, Speaker, medicare is a program that defines us as Canadian, as Ontarians, where the care you need is based on your needs, not on your ability to pay. Unfortunately, more and more of our publicly funded care is delivered by private companies. The private companies exist for one reason: to make money for their shareholders. They do not exist to make sure that you get the care you need. We have seen—the report from Kingston, the reports from different parts of Ontario, show that those companies that deliver care—

Hon. Lisa M. Thompson: Point of order, Speaker.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Point of order: the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs.

Hon. Lisa M. Thompson: Speaker, as per your direction just a moment ago, the synopsis of a petition is supposed to be brief, and not a statement. Thank you for your consideration.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I appreciate the intervention of the minister and again would remind members to keep the summary of their petition as brief as possible.

The member for Nickel Belt.

M^{me} France Gélinas: As I was saying, medicare is a program that defines us. Care is based on needs, not on ability to pay. When care is delivered by corporate entities, they want to make a profit, so they will sell you add-ons that you don't know if you need or not, and they will charge you for services that you may need or not. That presents a lot of barriers to care for a lot of people. So they have signed this petition to make sure that our health care services continue to be delivered by not-for-profit agencies.

I fully support them. I will affix my name to it and ask my good page Simon to bring it to the Clerk.

TUITION

MPP Jamie West: These petitions are entitled “Fight the Fees.” There's a substantial number of students and parents who have signed these.

Basically, what they're talking about is the high level of tuition in Ontario—the increases of over 200% for undergrads and almost 250% for grad students. The median debt for grads is around \$17,000. It's costing a lot of money to go to school.

As well, there were changes made to OSAP which resulted in about a billion-dollar cut to assistance to students to be able to afford to go to school.

What they want out of this is ultimately to have accessible and free tuition, going to school. They want an increase in grants instead of loans.

And they want to, as well, legislate students' right to organize. That was a bill that was challenged and lost in court, when they had removed the right for students to organize, but they don't want to have to challenge this in court on a regular basis—and have it legislated.

I do support this petition. I think it's very important that our students have accessible access to post-secondary school so they can be successful in the future.

I'll affix my signature and provide it to page Shylah for the table.

ANTI-VAPING INITIATIVES FOR YOUTH

M^{me} France Gélinas: I would like to thank Peter Churan, who is from Blezard Valley in my riding, for signing these petitions. It's called “Protect Kids from Vaping.”

As you know, Speaker, there are a huge number of underage kids who vape. It is so bad that the Minister of Education is actually spending \$3 million to put detectors in the bathrooms of our schools to detect kids vaping at school. It would be a whole lot better to prevent those kids from picking up vaping, and this is what the bill that I have tabled is entitled to do and this is what the petition wants to do.

One of the biggest tools we have to make sure that kids don't get addicted to nicotine through vaping—because once they're addicted to nicotine, they will keep buying the products. How do we keep them out of the hands of kids? You ban flavours, and then kids are not attracted to vaping as much as they are now.

I fully support this petition. I will affix my name to it and ask my good page Ryder to bring it to the Clerk.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): That concludes the time we have available for petitions this afternoon.

1320

ORDERS OF THE DAY

SUPPORTING CHILDREN'S FUTURES ACT, 2024

LOI DE 2024 VISANT À SOUTENIR L'AVENIR DES ENFANTS

Mr. Parsa moved second reading of the following bill:

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

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Would the minister care to lead off the debate?

Hon. Michael Parsa: I would. Thank you very much, Speaker.

Good afternoon, colleagues. Today, I'm going to walk you through some exciting changes that will support the futures of some of the most vulnerable children in our province.

Before I begin, I would like to note that I will be sharing my speaking time today with my colleagues and parliamentary assistants, the member for Markham–Thornhill and the member for Thornhill. They will speak to the important foundational work that we have done in recent years.

The new proposals in Bill 188, the Supporting Children's Futures Act, 2024, build upon the work that the government has undertaken over the past several years.

Specifically, I'd like to commend the member for Sarnia–Lambton for his years of advocacy on this file. While he's unable to join us in today's debate, he has twice been the author of private members' bills on the subject. His years of hard work have enabled the changes that are currently being proposed, so I want to thank my good friend the member for Sarnia–Lambton, Bob Bailey, for all his great work.

Indeed, this work was only possible with the collaboration and valued input of children, youth and families with lived experiences in our child and youth protection sector, children's aid societies and service providers in every part of the province. Through many engagements that the ministry held, our partners have taken time to share their insights and their lived experiences.

I do want to thank everyone once again who took the time to share the details with us.

I'd also like to acknowledge the incredible work that the overwhelming majority of our partners do. Their tireless work has a profound and life-long impact on the outcomes of vulnerable children and youth as they transition into adulthood.

I want to acknowledge that many of our child welfare service providers devote their time to delivering high-quality care for children and youth. However, we must also address those who should not have become operators

in the first place and those who are not operating in good faith.

Speaker, we are here today because our government will not leave anyone behind. And it is especially important that no child or youth is ever left behind, and that they have every chance to thrive and succeed regardless of their circumstances.

We have heard from our sector partners and communities about the need to implement measures that will better protect the rights of children and youth, that better enhance the quality of services and improve the accountability of service providers. That's why we have introduced these legislative proposals along with other regulatory and policy changes.

This bill builds on the many initiatives already taken and is another step forward. We will continue to hear from experts, from advocates, from communities to continuously improve services so that all children and youth have a chance to succeed and thrive in every corner of this province. We're working towards a province where all children, youth and families, including those getting support through Ontario's children and youth services sector, are empowered with the necessary resources and supports.

Our government's proposals would, if passed, modernize and standardize important safeguards throughout the children and youth services sector, including stronger licensing enforcement tools to hold bad-faith operators accountable to the high standards and safeguards that are in place to help keep children and youth safe and healthy.

It would also create a framework that would enhance privacy protections of those currently or who were formerly in the child welfare system by further restricting access to protection of records comprised of their personal childhood histories, once regulations are developed.

Likewise, it will enable individuals to speak freely about their lived experience and give them more control over what they want to share publicly about their child protection experiences, in circumstances to be outlined following further consultations with the sector.

And it will provide authority for regulations that would expand the type of information individuals working with vulnerable children and youth can be required to provide beyond formal police record checks, such as an offence declaration.

We're also ensuring that children's aid societies and out-of-home care licensees provide children and youth with information about the Ombudsman and how to contact their office.

We are proposing to clarify that early childhood educators can be subject to an offence for failing to report child protection concerns to a children's aid society, similar to other professionals such as teachers and social workers.

The children and youth services sector supports a wide range of individuals with diverse needs as well as their families and caregivers in every corner of our province. For example, we support children and youth in need of protection who may have experienced trauma or have been or are at risk of being abused or neglected. Additionally,

I'm also talking about youth who are involved in the youth justice system and how we can help support them to choose another path forward.

Ensuring timely support, care and intervention can mean supporting the family who is experiencing or going through some challenging times. It can mean protecting a child from an abusive caregiver. It can mean empowering a child to overcome barriers to their future goals. And it can mean helping a youth involved with the justice system find their way so they can engage with their friends, their family and their community in a positive way.

The proposals in this bill stem from a broad range of feedback. For this, I'd like to take this opportunity to thank the individuals with lived experience, advocates, service providers, children's aid societies, as well as First Nations, Inuit, Métis and urban Indigenous communities. Their input is vital to help ensure the success of the government's vision of leaving no child or youth behind.

I'd like to share some of their public feedback since Bill 188 was introduced last week.

From John E. Fleming, council chair, and Denitha Breau, registrar and CEO: "We at the Ontario College of Social Workers and Social Service Workers—overseeing the largest group of mental health providers in the province—value its ongoing work with the ministry, and we are pleased with this step towards the strongest possible protection for the public, including the province's most vulnerable, children and youth."

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

From former foster child Diana Frances: "I'm writing to express my support of Bill 188 ... that is currently before the Ontario government. Speaking from my life experience, I believe with all my heart that these improvements to the safety, well-being and privacy of children and youth in care are of vital importance. Many important changes have been made to the system since I was adopted, given up again at age 13 and placed with another family as a ward of the province. However, more issues need to be updated and amended as our social structure changes and social media poses new risks to privacy and safety."

Likewise, "The Ontario Association of Children's Aid Societies and its member children's aid societies and Indigenous child and family well-being agencies welcome efforts to build a child and family services system that supports all children and youth to succeed and thrive through the consistent delivery of high-quality, trauma-informed and culturally relevant care. We will continue to engage our members to analyze the impact of Bill 188, Supporting Children's Futures Act, 2024, on the child welfare sector. We look forward to collaborating with the Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services to

ensure the bill centres equity and supports improved outcomes for the children, youth, and families supported by child welfare agencies across the province."

Building on that, Valerie McMurtry, president and CEO of the Children's Aid Foundation of Canada, had this to say: "We commend the Ontario government for their work to increase clarity regarding the care of young people placed in out-of-home settings through the Supporting Children's Futures Act, 2024. Our collective priority should be to ensure that young people remain in the care of their families and communities. However, when this isn't feasible, it's critical that young people have access to the high-quality supports they need, including understanding their rights and assistance available to them through Ontario's Ombudsman. We value the government's commitment to making sure young people receive this information and ensuring their voices stay central in shaping this act and next steps with respect to child welfare redesign."

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Lastly from Susan Somogyi Wells, CEO of Family Service Ontario: "The Supporting Children's Futures Act, 2024, enhances the safety, privacy and rights of children and youth. Family Service Ontario strongly supports this legislation for its commitment to safeguarding the well-being of our children and youth, mitigating the risks of developmental trauma."

Madam Speaker, while the proposed legislative and non-legislative changes are a step in the right direction, we continue to consult and learn from these stakeholders and many others as we continuously seek to improve safety, supports and access to resources for children and youth who are served by our child protection system.

We also acknowledge that the needs of First Nations, Inuit, Métis and urban Indigenous communities are unique, and we need to ensure flexibility and space to consult and support the needs of these communities when implementing changes in child protection systems, as we all work through the ongoing transition process to self-governance of these communities in the child welfare space.

Just last Friday, April 19, the Algonquins of Pikwakanagan First Nation made history by becoming the third Indigenous governing body in Ontario and 11th in Canada to have its own child and family services law take effect with the force of federal law, in accordance with An Act respecting First Nations, Inuit and Métis children, youth and families. The law, Nigig Nibi Ki-win, provides a foundation for a service delivery system that has been specifically designed to meet the needs of children, youth and families of the Algonquins of Pikwakanagan First Nation.

Speaker, the changes that we are currently proposing in Bill 188, coupled with our ongoing work, may be categorized into three themes: strengthening oversight, enforcement, licensing; establishing clear and consistent practices; and supporting stable transitions.

I'd now like to spend some time outlining the specific actions we are proposing to take under each theme and how they will support better outcomes for children and

youth counting on all of us to ensure they are safe and supported.

By strengthening the oversight, enforcement and licensing of out-of-home care, we are working to enhance the safety of children and youth. It's important to note that we have many hard-working and selfless people working in out-of-home care, such as foster and group homes, who are dedicated to the lives of the children and youth they serve. Many give so much of themselves and make personal sacrifices to provide the best possible support to those who are experiencing some of life's most difficult circumstances. This is hard work, and it takes very special people to care for our most vulnerable children. They have my deepest thanks for the love and the care that they share with the children.

On the other hand, we have also seen stories in the news; not all service providers are created equal, and some do not operate in good faith. The changes that we're proposing in this part of the legislation would have little to no impact on good operators—to those homes that are striving to provide high-quality support to vulnerable children and youth. The proposed changes seek to enhance both licensing processes up front and enforcement tools in cases where operators are acting in bad faith. This is based on the principle that all children and youth in care deserve safety, security and high-quality services that are culturally appropriate and that meet their unique needs.

The proposed legislative changes would modernize and standardize important safeguards in the licensed out-of-home care sector. The amendments would strengthen the ministry's oversight of foster care and group homes; support the quality of care for children and youth; and introduce additional or strengthened enforcement tools to support better compliance with licensing requirements. These proposals are aimed at enhancing compliance with licensing requirements designed to ensure children and youth receive high-quality care that supports their health and safety and empowers them to reach their full potential.

Speaker, I'll now turn to the second theme that I mentioned earlier, which is clear and consistent practices. By establishing practices that are clear and consistent across the children and youth services sector, we aim to improve the safety and quality of services delivered by all service providers. We are proposing six actions under this theme.

First, to improve the safety of children and youth, we propose to clarify that service providers, such as children's aid societies, can share personal information with the College of Early Childhood Educators and the Ontario College of Teachers. Information shared could be used to support proceedings, such as investigations, hearings and new registrations to support the safety of children and youth. Currently, service providers are only authorized to share personal information with colleges of regulated health professions and social work colleges, and we're proposing that they be allowed to share information with the Ontario College of Teachers and the College of Early Childhood Educators. This would reduce potential delays, for example, when either college requires information

from a society about a verified allegation against an early childhood educator or teacher. Currently, if the Ontario College of Social Workers and Social Service Workers believes that a member poses a risk to others, the college would be prohibited by the Social Work and Social Service Work Act to share their concerns with anyone without the member's consent, or until after the college investigated and the results of the investigation were made public. A practical example of this was when a social worker had their membership revoked by the Ontario College of Social Workers and Social Service Workers in February 2023 for professional misconduct involving sexual abuse and sexual misconduct with a student. The college opened their investigation in August 2019 but would have been unable to share their concerns about the social worker with new employers or out-of-province social worker colleges during that nearly four-year span. Everyone would agree that what happened is completely unacceptable and it put children and youth at risk. And we are ensuring that that scenario never happens again.

Second, we propose to enable the Ontario College of Social Workers and Social Service Workers to share information with governing bodies and others, including children's aid societies, in particular circumstances. Several professional colleges already have this authority, including the College of Early Childhood Educators, the Ontario College of Teachers and other regulated health professionals. To improve the safety and well-being of children and youth, we want to make this consistent for the Ontario College of Social Workers and Social Service Workers. This would help enable timely information-sharing about a member during an investigation to support an action. The amendments, if passed, would add exceptions to the confidentiality provisions of the social service worker act to allow the Ontario College of Social Workers and Social Service Workers to:

- (a) share information with a body that governs a profession inside or outside of Ontario;
- (b) confirm whether the college is investigating a member and if there is a compelling public interest reason to make such a confirmation;
- (c) share information if there are reasonable grounds to believe that the disclosure is necessary for the purposes of eliminating or reducing a significant risk of serious harm to a person or group of people;
- (d) share information as otherwise required by law.

Third, to support the long-term success of adoptions and to help keep children safe, we intend to bring forward future regulations that would require children's aid societies to conduct safety assessments, create safety plans as needed, and create plans of care for children in adoption-placement settings. The proposal for these regulatory amendments has been posted on the regulatory registry. Children's aid societies are already required to take these steps for children in care when they are in other types of placement settings. Our goal here is to make these requirements for safety and service planning consistent for adoption-placement settings.

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

Fifth, we propose to clarify that early childhood educators can be subject to an offence for failing to report a child protection concern to a children's aid society. This proposal would clarify that ECEs, early childhood educators, can be subject to the same offence as other persons who perform professional or official duties with children—such as teachers, social workers—in the event that they fail to report a child protection concern.

And sixth, to further improve the safety of children and youth who are in care or receiving services, we are proposing to provide the Lieutenant Governor in Council the authority to make regulations that would allow information other than a formal police record check, such as an offence declaration, to be required of an individual. Above and beyond this, the government intends to bring forward future regulations to standardize police record check requirements for the child and youth services sector.

Those are the six actions we propose taking to establish clear and consistent practices.

Speaker, now I will turn to the third theme that I mentioned a bit earlier, and that's supporting stable transitions. Under this theme, we're proposing two actions which aim to support children transitioning into adulthood. All children deserve a fresh start, especially those who have experienced great turmoil, trauma and challenges in their early years.

First, we propose to enhance privacy protections for individuals with previous involvement in the child welfare services sector. We have heard concerns from former children and youth about their personal information being held in perpetuity in society databases, where any employee could easily search and access very private childhood histories of those who were raised in care. There are many examples when this information has been used negatively to impact their future. For example, former youth in care have shared that their personal childhood stories were counted against them when seeking board positions or employment at a children's aid society or in custody proceedings. To clarify, these are not criminal records. Foster children have many details recorded about themselves during the course of service, much in the same way any parent observes their own children's childhood experiences. However, Speaker, being the parent that you are, you would know that parents do not record this information nor do they use it to limit their children's future, and children raised in care deserve the same respect and equal

treatment under the law. By restricting access to or disclosure of these records, we will create a framework that would protect the private details of their childhood experiences and reinforce their control over their own personal information.

Second, we are proposing to make changes that would further reinforce control of personal information by enabling individuals who have had a history of child protection involvement to publicly identify themselves and speak about their own lived experiences in child protection if they choose to do so. For example, currently in Ontario, it's illegal for someone raised in care to identify themselves as a "former foster child." This is in contravention of article 2, freedom of expression, under the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, and it will be remedied by our proposed changes. We all have the right to freedom of expression. This will also be true for children and youth in care. The circumstances in which individuals would be able to do this would be prescribed in regulations at a later date, following consultations. This would help clarify the rules for publishing this information and give individuals more control and ownership over their own stories, over their own experiences.

Speaker, the proposed legislative changes, as well as the regulatory and policy changes that I have just outlined, are another important step towards achieving our government's vision where no child or youth will ever be left behind in the province of Ontario. We are building a province where all children, youth and families have the resources and the supports they need to succeed and thrive. These new proposals build on the work that the government has undertaken over the past several years. But we must always move forward. And we are committed to doing that work with our sector partners.

I want to thank everyone who took the time to share their insights and their experiences with us. As we continue to take steps forward together, we'll continue to strengthen families and communities across Ontario.

I would now like to turn it over to my good friend and colleague the outstanding parliamentary assistant and the member for Markham–Thornhill. And prior to doing that, I want to thank my good friend former parliamentary assistant Nolan Quinn, who did an absolutely amazing job and who is a champion for the sector and his community.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bhutla Karpoche): I recognize the member from Markham–Thornhill.

Mr. Logan Kanapathi: I'm happy to rise today and join my colleague the Minister of Children, Community and Social Services to speak on behalf of Bill 188, Supporting Children's Futures Act, 2024.

I would like to greatly thank the minister for his passion, dedication and hard work—as well as the dedicated work of my fellow parliamentary assistant, the member from Thornhill, and my colleague the member from Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry.

Madam Speaker, this bill is about children and youth in the great province of Ontario. Under the leadership of the Premier, our government is ensuring no children will slip through the cracks in the system. We are here today

because our government will never leave anyone behind. And it is especially important that no child or youth is left behind, and that they have every chance to thrive and succeed regardless of their circumstances.

Our government wants the best for every child and young person approaching adulthood. And we are working together to deliver better outcomes for young people, their families and their caregivers who are receiving support from the child and youth services sector.

This bill is an important element of the government's ongoing redesign of the child welfare system.

I would like to speak to the connection with the proposed work and the child welfare redesign for a moment. It is key to understanding the context in which Bill 188's reforms are being proposed.

Every child and youth deserves a safe, loving and stable home regardless of their circumstances. That is why members of the House will know that in July 2020, the ministry announced the Child Welfare Redesign Strategy, because our government wants youth in care to feel supported and to be set up for success in their life. Through that comprehensive redesign, our government is introducing new initiatives to improve the quality of care in out-of-home care.

To echo the minister, we commend the many services providers who are devoting their lives to support vulnerable children and youth. However, sometimes there are gaps, and our proposed changes seek to close these gaps. Some of these changes have included:

- developing a new framework for what out-of-home care looks like;
 - increasing and enhancing oversight and accountability for out-of-home care services; and
 - supporting that oversight by adding 20 new positions across the province to support the management, inspection and oversight of out-of-home care for children and youth.
- launching the Ready, Set, Go program, which provides youth in the care of children's aid societies with the life skills they need starting at 13 and financial support when they leave care up to the age of 23 so that they can focus on post-secondary, including the skilled trades, or pursuing employment.

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Every child and youth deserves a fair starting position in life, and our government is delivering that. We hit the ground running by:

- consulting widely in the community and with service providers to better serve children and youth;
- increasing the number of responsive inspections;
- bolstering customary care arrangements to focus on family-based options, like kinship and foster care, to ensure children, youth and families have a strong voice in decisions about their care;
- improving the quality of the child welfare data to establish a baseline of common measures across children's aid societies that can be reported publicly, as well as developing an outcomes-based performance measurement framework;

—releasing the children and young persons' rights resource to help children and youth understand their rights and use their voices; and

—connecting youth leaving care with more supports to succeed.

Speaker, we have backed this important work with significant investments of over \$1.5 billion in the child welfare system to support Ontario's 50 independent children's aid societies and 13 Indigenous children's aid societies. This is a historic amount.

Here are some of the initiatives we support:

We have invested \$800,000 annually in funding to support One Vision One Voice, a community-led project focusing on anti-Black racism that supports the delivery of culturally appropriate services and addresses systemic racism.

We have also invested an additional \$1.5 million annually in the Education Liaison Program to help children and youth in care across the province get the support they need to focus on their studies.

We have invested more than \$2.9 million to help support kinship service and customary caregivers, adoptive parents and caregivers who have obtained legal custody of a child who was in extended society care. This is new funding that never existed under the previous government. This is in addition to the \$3.5 million in existing funding that ensures children's aid societies can improve educational outcomes for youth in care.

We also announced over \$5 million in annualized funding to enhance access to prevention-focused customary care for Indigenous children and youth. This investment will help more children and youth to thrive, closer to their homes, families and communities.

Speaker, our government wants all children and youth to have the supports they need to be safe and to succeed and thrive. Transforming child and family services is a significant undertaking and takes time. We are committed to doing the work that is needed to promote safety and stability, and to ensure that children, youth and families have access to the supports they need to succeed and thrive in their communities.

Many of the reforms proposed in this bill are designed to better support youth and provide skills and knowledge that will help youth transition to adulthood. The changes also build on the Ready, Set, Go Program we launched on April 1, 2023. This program represents another significant step coming out of the Child Welfare Redesign Strategy.

The Ready, Set, Go program connects youth in the child welfare system with additional services and supports earlier to better prepare them for life after leaving care. This includes life skills development like financial management, incentives for participation in post-secondary education, and support with pathways to employment. This program has a three-year, \$170-million funding commitment from the ministry. In addition, this year, the Ready, Set, Go program is expected to support more than 4,000 youth as they prepare for adulthood.

The ministry has been hosting regular engagement sessions to gather feedback from key stakeholders and

working collaboratively across ministries to implement the Ready, Set, Go Program, in an effort to ensure youth have the information they need to build a bright future after leaving care. As members of this House know, soliciting regular consultation and feedback is essential for a government that works with so many key partners in the child and youth services sector. So I just want to recognize the time and effort that goes into this cycle of consultation and feedback on the part of our community partners and service providers. It is very much appreciated by our government. We are grateful to work with passionate and committed partners on initiatives that will ultimately benefit people all across Ontario who are looking to us for support.

Speaker, we have recently achieved further progress in reforming the child welfare system, which provides an important foundation for the new proposals that the minister outlined. On July 1, 2023, our government implemented key components of a comprehensive quality standards framework into regulations to help licensees, placing agencies and other service providers improve the quality of care in licensed, out-of-home care settings. The framework is based on feedback from a panel of 12 youth with lived experience in out-of-home care. And these youth told the ministry very clearly what quality of care means to them. The framework provides guidance on how to better meet the needs of children and youth in licensed out-of-home care and to support them to thrive and achieve better outcomes. The framework also encourages care that is safe, strength-based, trauma-informed and culturally relevant.

The ministry will continue to work with service providers on the implementation of these important changes. In cases where it is necessary, our goal is to improve the quality of care and better hold licensees and placing agencies—including children's aid societies—accountable for the quality of care they provide to children and youth.

I would also like to discuss the important work the ministry is undertaking in partnership with First Nations, Inuit and Métis people to help reduce the overrepresentation of Indigenous children in care. Working with representatives of First Nations, Inuit, Métis and urban Indigenous peoples, we are committed to finding and furthering approaches that meet the specific needs of their communities.

We have heard for many years that the approach to supporting Indigenous children and families needed to evolve to reflect the central role that First Nations, Inuit, Métis and urban Indigenous communities have in the well-being of their children and families. That is why supporting access to services that integrate Indigenous cultures, heritages and traditions is a key part of our work to achieve better opportunities and outcomes for families.

To support these goals, in March 2022, the Legislature passed amendments to the Child, Youth and Family Services Act, 2017, that will, once in force: increase access to customary care, which helps Indigenous children and youth to remain connected to their culture and

traditions; establish circles of supportive persons; improve access to updated complementary services; and strengthen the role of prevention-focused Indigenous service providers. We completed engagements on the draft regulatory proposals for the prevention-focused regulations in early 2024. And we continue to engage with Indigenous partners to further this process—this includes representatives of First Nations, Inuit, Métis and urban Indigenous peoples and Indigenous service providers, the Association of Native Child and Family Services Agencies of Ontario, as well as the Ontario Association of Children's Aid Societies.

Speaker, another part of this work involves important discussions and negotiations with Indigenous partners pursuing models of child welfare under Indigenous laws. For example, in March 2022, Wabaseemoong Independent Nations, Ontario and Canada signed a trilateral coordination agreement in respect of child and family services. This was the first coordination agreement signed in the province and the second in Canada since the federal legislation—An Act respecting First Nations, Inuit and Métis children, youth and families—came into force in 2020. This coordination agreement supports the implementation of the Wabaseemoong Independent Nations' Customary Care Code, which acquired the force of federal law in January 2021.

On March 31, 2023, a coordination agreement between Kitchenuhmaykoosib Inninuwug—or KI for short—Ontario and Canada was executed to support the implementation of KI's child and family services law, which came into force the following day. This is the second such agreement in Ontario and the first in Treaty 9 territory.

And just last Friday, April 19, the Algonquins of Pikwakanagan First Nation made history by becoming the third Indigenous governing body in Ontario, and 11th in Canada, to have its own child and family services law take effect with the force of federal law, in accordance with An Act respecting First Nations, Inuit and Métis children, youth and families.

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Speaker, these changes will bring us closer to achieving our government's vision of an Ontario where all children, youth and families—including those getting support through Ontario's children and youth services sector—have access to the resources and services they need to succeed and thrive.

I would like to turn things over to my colleague the member for Thornhill.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bhutla Karpoche): I recognize the member for Thornhill.

Ms. Laura Smith: I am pleased to join my colleagues the Minister of Children, Community and Social Services and fellow parliamentary assistant, the MPP for Markham–Thornhill, to speak on behalf of Bill 188, the Supporting Children's Futures Act, 2024, currently under consideration by this House for second reading.

We want the best for every child and young person approaching adulthood, and we want to ensure that nobody is left behind in our province. The Minister of Children,

Community and Social Services has done incredible work to deliver better outcomes for children, youth and their families and caregivers who are receiving support from the children and youth services sector.

Speaker, I am proud of our government's record in this area. The Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services is there for the people throughout their lives. It's there for the young people who, at age 18, may need to transition from receiving children's special needs services to receiving ministry-funded adult developmental services, including Passport funding and disability supports, also known as ODSP. The ministry is there for survivors of gender-based violence, who may also be receiving child support enforced by the Family Responsibility Office, also known as FRO. It's there to help survivors of human trafficking rebuild their lives with dignity and compassion. It's there for youth who were involved with the youth justice system by providing them with the right supports and interventions that respond to their unique risks so they can contribute fully to their communities. And the ministry is there for children and youth who, in care, have experienced abuse or neglect, who now need supports in finding a job, pursuing training or furthering their education.

These investments in our youth are so important. They demonstrate our government's solid commitment to help ensure that they have a positive outcome. The future is essentially in the hands of the next generation, and supporting youth and providing them with the tools to better equip them and help them navigate through these challenging times—it's not only better for the young people, but it's better for the community as a whole. Every child deserves to have a fair start.

And it's not just the children and the youth that are our focus. Through the Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services, the government delivers, funds and licenses programs and services that support people at key moments in their lives and helps them be the best they can be.

Bill 188 is only the latest example of how this ministry has stood by the people across Ontario who rely on these many programs and services for support. With the rising cost of living across the province, it is this government that is standing up for Ontarians. We increased minimum wage to \$16.55 per hour just last fall, and we will continue raising the minimum wage with annual increases to reflect the cost of living.

We're also working across government to make life more affordable. We introduced the CARE tax credit, which will provide about 300,000 families with up to 75% of their eligible child-care expenses, and the low-income individuals and families tax [*Failure of sound system*] 1.7 million people. Similarly, in order to continue to bring children out of poverty, our government invested roughly \$1.2 billion last year in the Ontario Child Benefit.

Speaker, under the minister's leadership, our government is working with a number of community partners and organizations to improve outcomes for children, youth, families and individuals who need support. We're committing to putting people at the centre of what we do.

This past year, the ministry partnered with the Ministry of Health to invest an additional \$330 million each year in pediatric health services, including \$45 million for children's rehabilitation services. To support children and youth with special needs, the ministry invested in the children's treatment centres. This includes moving forward on a brand new facility for the Lansdowne Children's Centre in Brantford.

The ministry also continued its work to redesign the child welfare system so that children, youth and families [*Failure of sound system*] youth with additional support earlier in their journey, and that's so important. It helps to prepare them for adulthood by guiding them toward work and school opportunities so they can thrive after leaving care. It was our government that invested \$170 million on this innovative program to support youth after care.

As part of our efforts, we continue to work with Indigenous partners who are pursuing Indigenous-led models of child and family services. Last year, we celebrated another coordination agreement that supports the implementation of the Kitchenuhmaykoosib Inninuwug's child and family services law, the second agreement of its kind in Ontario.

Just last Friday, on April 19, the Algonquins of Pikwakanagan First Nation made history by becoming the third Indigenous governing body in Ontario, and 11th in Canada, to have its own child and family services law take effect with the force of federal law, in accordance with An Act respecting First Nations, Inuit and Métis children, youth and families.

The law, Nigig Nibi Ki-win, provides a foundation for a service delivery system that has been specially designed to meet the needs of children, youth and families of the Algonquins of Pikwakanagan First Nation. We look forward to continuing to work collaboratively with the Algonquins of Pikwakanagan First Nation and Canada to support the implementation of the Nigig Nibi Ki-win.

Moreover, to ensure students across this province get the nutrition they need, we invested an additional \$5 million in the Student Nutrition Program and the First Nations Student Nutrition Program. To build on this investment, we partnered with community organizations to launch the Healthy Students Brighter Ontario campaign. This is part of the first province-wide fundraising partnership of its kind, helping school-aged children and youth have healthy meals and snacks throughout the school year so they are well-nourished and ready to learn. All of this progress was only possible with the support and efforts of our government's many partners and front-line workers.

As you can see, Speaker, Bill 188 is part of our continued commitment to people across Ontario who depend upon our services.

In my previous life, I worked under the child protection act. I want to take a moment to recognize so many of the important people who worked within that sector: the caseworkers, the social workers, the administrators, the court workers and all the different professionals within Ontario's social services sector. Your dedication and compassion make all the difference for those you serve.

You truly work as a team to help our most vulnerable. I was proud to work in that field.

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The Supporting Children's Futures Act, 2024, would, if passed, modernize and standardize important safeguards throughout the child and youth services sector. The bill proposes new and enhanced enforcement tools to support compliance with licensing requirements that are designed to protect the safety and security of children and youth in licensed, out-of-home care, including foster care and group homes, and hold service providers more accountable for the care that they deliver.

We're proposing changes to better protect the personal histories of children and youth who experience the child welfare system. These changes would further restrict access to child welfare records, once regulations are developed. The proposed changes would also further enhance control over personal information for children and youth who experienced child protection, to enable them to share their stories freely, if they chose to do so.

In addition to legislative changes, complementary regulatory changes will enhance children's aid societies' oversight by requiring them to conduct more frequent visits to children in care; broaden the list of unacceptable methods of discipline in licensed, out-of-care settings; and establish new offences for failing to comply with certain requirements.

Our government is working to ensure that individuals involved with the child and youth services sector receive high-quality care from service providers that support their health, safety, and ability to reach their full potential. All children and youth have access to the resources and supports they need to succeed and thrive.

I would also like to note that Bill 188 proposes amendments to clarify when children's aid societies and licensed, out-of-home care providers are to inform children in care about the Ombudsman office and their many functions. This proposal complements an important piece of work that our government launched a few years ago called the Children and Young Persons' Rights Resource. We developed this resource to help children and youth understand their rights, set out in the Child, Youth and Family Services Act, 2017. They have to know where to go or who to talk to if they have questions about their rights and know what to do if they feel like a service provider is not respecting their rights.

The Child, Youth and Family Services Act, 2017, and its regulations require service providers to explain rights under the act to children and youth when they first receive any services under the act, explain rights under the act to children and youth in words that they understand, be available to help children and youth understand their rights under the act and answer any questions they might have about those rights, and continue to check in with children and youth about their rights under the act.

We want all children and youth receiving services to understand their rights under the act because the paramount purpose of it is to promote their best interests and the protection of their well-being. The proposed changes

would also clarify that early childhood educators can be subject to the offence of failing to report a child protection concern to a children's aid society, in line with other professionals.

In addition, we are proposing to provide the Lieutenant Governor in Council the authority to make regulations that would allow information, other than a formal police record check, such as an offence declaration, to be required in the child and youth services sector.

In the future, we intend to consult on bringing forward future regulations to standardize police record check requirements for the youth and child services sector.

Bill 188 also proposes changes that would enable the Ontario College of Social Workers and Social Service Workers to share information with governing bodies and others, in particular circumstances. This includes to confirm when a member of a college is under investigation or when a member poses public safety concerns. The changes would also seek to expand the list of professional colleges with which children's aid societies and other service providers can share personal information. These measures are all to ensure that every child is safe and protected.

I would like to share some of the public feedback that our partners have shared since Bill 188 was introduced last week. From Carly Kalish, the executive director of Victim Services Toronto: "We commend Minister Parsa and the government for their commitment to improving the safety, well-being and privacy of children through the introduction of the Supporting Children's Futures Act, 2024. Every child deserves a safe and supportive environment to thrive, and these changes mark a significant step towards achieving that goal. By strengthening oversight, protecting privacy, and increasing support for children and youth in care, the government is demonstrating its dedication to ensuring all children have the resources and opportunities they need to succeed. We look forward to seeing the positive impact of these measures on the lives of Ontario's children and families."

Mohamed Firin, Ontario's advocate for community opportunities, also known as ACO, said, "I want to applaud the government for introducing the Supporting Children's Futures Act, 2024. This legislation will complement the mission of the ACO to empower young Ontarians by ensuring that all young people, in particular those in foster and group homes, receive the safest and highest quality of care so they can succeed and unlock their full potential."

From the Child Welfare Political Action Committee, Ingrid Palmer said, "The Supporting Children's Futures Act is a significant move in the direction of enhancing the well-being of children and youth with child welfare experience. One's time in care should never be a source of harm or discrimination years afterward. The protecting" of "the personal histories of this vulnerable community must be" a "high social priority."

Lastly, Nadia George, another volunteer with the Child Welfare Political Action Committee: "A new era is marked. One that could give those who have lived experience in the

child welfare system the much-needed privacy and protection rights we deserve. This is something myself and others at the Child Welfare PAC have been advocating for since 2016. Thank you, Minister Michael Parsa and team, for letting current and former foster kids know we matter.”

Speaker, as you can evidently see, these proposed changes are a result of extensive and continuous consultation with our valued partners in this sector. This is why I urge members on all sides of this House to grant Bill 188 unanimous passage. Passage would bring us closer to achieving our government’s vision of an Ontario where all children, youth and families, especially those getting support through Ontario’s children and youth services sector, are empowered with the resources they need to succeed and thrive.

We will continue the work to reform the services and supports that help so many people across Ontario, and we will continue to work with our fantastic network of community partners and organizations to deliver quality supports and services as we partner together on improving outcomes for vulnerable youth and children in our province.

Speaker, children and youth are our future. As I said earlier, these investments demonstrate our government’s commitment to help ensure that they have a positive outcome. The future is in the hands of the next generation, and supporting our youth and providing them with the tools that will better equip them and help them navigate a challenging time is not only better for those young people, but it’s also better for our community as a whole.

As I said earlier, every child deserves to have a fair start. We have to help guide them safely to their adult years and set them up for successes so that they may realize their full potential and contribute to the province. We’re getting closer to that goal, and, as somebody who worked in that sector, I am beyond proud to stand here, an advocate for such a monumental change that will affect so many children in a positive fashion.

I want to thank the minister for doing—

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bhutla Karpoche): Thank you. Questions?

Miss Monique Taylor: Thank you to the minister, as well as the PAs who have spoken to today’s bill. We have had a very short time to look over this bill, but I’ve done my best to get through it, to see what is there and to speak to folks within the system to have their input.

There are a few questions that we’re getting to, and one of them would be the lack of inspectors currently in the system to be looking at residential care homes, group homes that we know have been troublesome—and often worse than troublesome—for decades. And this bill now calls for further inspections into homes.

Can the minister please let us know, will he be hiring more inspectors to do this work?

1420

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bhutla Karpoche): Response?

Hon. Michael Parsa: I want to thank both parliamentary assistants and my honourable colleague for the question as well.

Madam Speaker, it’s very simple. When we talked about the child welfare redesign—I’ve said this from the day that I was appointed to this ministry: that no child or youth will be left behind and that we will do whatever it takes, which is why, Madam Speaker, we hired 20 more new staff to do inspections, to do unannounced inspections, to make sure—and I want to thank the vast majority of the service providers who are providing care with love for our children and youth in the province.

But we want to make sure that the bad actors are held accountable, Madam Speaker, which is why we hired more inspectors, which is why we are doing more inspections. We’re doing more unannounced inspections and that’s why, through this bill and through this initiative, we’ll be looking at introducing measures that will further hold those bad actors to account, Madam Speaker.

So, when it comes to protecting the children and youth in this province, we will never waver from that commitment, making sure that they’re looked after.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bhutla Karpoche): Next question?

Mr. Trevor Jones: As the minister highlighted in his leadoff, the bill proposes to add early childhood educators to the list of professionals with a duty to report if they suspect a child is suffering from harm, abuse or neglect.

How do these efforts specifically improve the safety of our children?

Hon. Michael Parsa: I thank my colleague for the important question.

The amendments here clarify, Madam Speaker, that early childhood educators have the duty to be able to report. Again, at its core, this is to make sure that every child and youth is supported, is looked after, and that, for us, is to make sure that those are held to account. The ECEs, just like other professions, like teachers and physicians, counsellors and child care providers, who already have that—we want to make sure that early childhood educators also have the obligation to be able to provide that information to societies, as most of us have the opportunity, Madam Speaker. Everyone can report, but this now clarifies the role of early childhood educators in the bill to make sure that they have an obligation to report, in case there’s a—

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bhutla Karpoche): Next question.

Miss Monique Taylor: Further to the conversation that just happened opposite, there are many educational workers who should probably also be incorporated into this bill and that’s an amendment that I’m sure we’ll be bringing forward when we get to the committee process.

But it really encompasses Katelynn’s Principle, which was a recommendation into her inquest many years ago and a bill that I brought forward to ensure that children must be at the centre when they are receiving services through the child welfare, justice and/or educational system.

Is the minister interested in actually enacting Katelynn's Principle during this process?

Hon. Michael Parsa: Thanks again for the question.

Madam Speaker, as I said from day one, we will leave no stone unturned when it comes to protecting children and youth in care. That's why, through the child welfare redesign, we have looked at every possible solution. That's why we've had consultations with partners, with stakeholders, those with lived experiences: to give us the feedback that we need to implement policies to protect them. Madam Speaker, we will never waver from that commitment.

As I've said many, many times on many occasions, children and youth may be a portion of our population, but they're 100% of our future and we will do everything we can to provide that protection for them.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bhutla Karpoche): Next question?

Mr. Brian Riddell: We've heard that the CYFSA currently contains language that prevents young people and adults who have a history of child protection involvement, such as having grown up in a foster care home, from identifying themselves and thus from speaking or writing about their childhood.

The bill proposes an amendment that will allow individuals who want to and choose to tell their stories about their time in and out of homes' care can do so. What is the amendment to remove this restriction? Why is it so important?

Hon. Michael Parsa: Thanks very much for the important question.

Well, Madam Speaker, it's called freedom of expression. It's a fundamental freedom in our country. Those of us who have grown up, we have the opportunity to be able to talk about our childhood experiences. You and I can talk about our school and where we attended and the interactions that we had with people. Currently, under the CYFSA, individuals who were formally in care are not able to do that Madam Speaker, and it's just about their right.

Everyone should have the right to be able to express their—talk about their past, good or bad, and be able to fully express themselves. And we want to make sure that's captured in this bill.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bhutla Karpoche): Next question?

Miss Monique Taylor: I've heard the minister say several times in this House over the years that no child will be left behind. And while I support the initiatives in this bill, I think there is so much more that could be done to truly help children of this province—not just with the child welfare, but right across the spectrum of child services in this province.

But one of the things that I want to point to, which would help with children and youth, is funding children's aid societies in the province of Ontario. Just last year, in the 2021-22 budget year, there was a \$15.6-million deficit to children's aid societies, which the government had to

bail them out of. That is no way to be able to keep these working in a proficient way. Can the minister speak to—

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bhutla Karpoche): Thank you.

Response?

Hon. Michael Parsa: Thank you very much for the question. The member is absolutely right about one thing, Madam Speaker, and that is that we will continue to make sure that this is not a one-and-done bill. As I've said from the beginning, the measures—we are not going to stop. We going to continue talking to our partners on the ground. We are going to continue listening to those with lived experience.

As far as the support, I can tell you, Madam Speaker, the Ready, Set, Go Program, for leaving care, came with \$170 million of funding that was provided to societies to make sure that children and youth are supported at the age of 13 with the life skills they need to succeed and thrive. And after they leave care, they will receive that funding right up to their 23rd birthday, because we want to make sure that they are set up for success in every community. And we backed that up with \$170 million of funding.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bhutla Karpoche): Next question?

Ms. Laurie Scott: I want to congratulate the Minister of Children, Community and Social Services and his parliamentary assistants for all their hard work and dedication. The minister mentioned other pieces of legislation that had been brought in to protect children, and it's ongoing. And I know there are many advocates in the room.

And I want to pull out one point from the legislation: There is a new suite of tools for oversight and enforcement and the introduction of administrative monetary penalties for non-compliances that are identified by inspectors. So will these be sufficient to go after for-profit operators who refuse to provide quality care? I know the minister will be able to answer this question, and I know that we've seen some news stories. And this is what this bill is: trying to enforce better compliance with the operators.

Hon. Michael Parsa: It's a very good question. And as I said in my speech, the proposed administrative monetary penalties are just one of the tools that we are proposing to make sure that we hold bad operators to account, to keep children and youth safe. And some of the proposed penalties that we have here go up to \$100,000, which currently are not available. They're not available to the inspectors to keep bad actors accountable.

And some of the other fines for the worst kinds of offences are increased to \$250,000. At its core, this bill is about protecting children and youth at all aspects. It's about making sure children and youth that are in care are receiving the supports that they need to make sure they succeed and thrive.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bhutla Karpoche): I recognize the member from Kingston and the Islands on a point of order.

Mr. Ted Hsu: I'm seeking unanimous consent that, in the opinion of this House, the Legislative Assembly of

Ontario calls on the Ontario government to listen to the concerns of residents in Milton and stop the Campbellville quarry expansion today.

1430

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bhutika Karpoche): Mr. Hsu is seeking unanimous consent that, in the opinion of the House, the Legislative Assembly of Ontario calls on the Ontario government to listen to the concerns of residents in Milton and stop the Campbellville quarry expansion today. Agreed? I heard a no.

Further debate?

Miss Monique Taylor: It is always a pleasure and an honour to be able to stand in this place to speak on behalf of the people of Hamilton Mountain. And it is always of my utmost honour to be able to stand as the official opposition critic for children, community and social services and to truly raise the voices of children in this province.

I have had the honour of serving mainly in this role since my time of election in 2011, and I had many opportunities to work with youth in various capacities under this role. One of the first things that I did shortly after being elected was to attend youth leaving care hearings. That was one of the most powerful beginnings to my career and to my opportunity as the child critic, to truly witness the voices of young people in care, to witness their ability to use their voices to talk about things that they needed; to talk to their parents, as the government, for things that needed changes, for things that needed to be implemented, for things to make their lives better as young people within the system of children's aid. They came out with a report called *My Real Life Book* back in the day, and I believe it was—it was 2011 when I was first elected, and I think it was literally shortly after I was elected that all of that work was being done.

Let's not forget and give full credit to the child advocate's office, who empowered young people to have their say, to be able to raise their voice, to have courage to bring their voice in whichever way they found suitable, whether it be through art, whether it be through music, whether it be through spoken words—so many different, various ways that young people were able to bring their voice to adults who were responsible for them during that time. The child advocate's office had done so much of that amazing work, and I benefited greatly from his office and from the young people whom he served in this province. It was a remarkable office that spanned the entire province, and every child in this province could find themselves seen within his office. Whether it was LGBTQS+, whether it was Indigenous, whether it was a child with a disability, whether it was a child in care, ethnic children—whatever it was, every child could find themselves within that office.

Unfortunately, Speaker, one of the first measures that the Ford government did in 2018 was to close that office—and in such a quick stroke, close that office. The advocate himself found out in an airplane from a news broadcast, a newspaper that he was reading, or something that happened. He was completely caught off guard that the

office was going to close and the provincial advocate would be no more.

And then the member from—let me just get the right riding—Nepean was the minister at that time and claimed that she was going to be the child advocate. And that, we have seen, turned into an awful mess and, really, the children of this province were left with no advocate and, really, someone who was in government that had their back.

Once again, I want to remind the government that they are the parents of children in care. It is their responsibility to take care of children in care. They are the only opportunity that a child in care would have to flourish. So when we have children's aid societies who are the parents, it's really bad when they don't have the funding to be able to house them accordingly, when they're putting kids in hotel rooms because there are no homes for them to be in. We have kids who are coming into care with critical, complex needs, and children's aid societies are literally putting them in hotel rooms, trying to find places to be able to help them through their journey.

We have parents who are forfeiting their rights of their children to care because they need mental health supports, and parents have gone through everything they possibly can to find those supports in our communities, to no end. As a parent, they think, "Well, if I can't find it in my community, I will certainly be able to hand over my child or my teenager to the children's aid societies, and they will be able to get them the help." But that is not the case.

The Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services does not work hand in hand with the Ministry of Health. The Ministry of Health holds all the purse strings for mental health, and we see a continued growing wait-list for children in the province of Ontario with mental health needs—a wait-list that is booming to, I believe, 30,000 kids waiting for services. And that last number, still pretty high—I think it's pretty outdated. That was a two-and-a-half-year wait.

And then add COVID on top of that, and the stunt in growth, really, from so many young people, the isolation—everything that came with COVID that we felt as adults. Imagine that compounded on young people in this province who were not able to get the help that they needed. They're still not able to get that help, and we're still seeing parents not being able to get what they need for their kids and still forfeiting the rights of their children to the children's aid societies, who are just not able to get the same services that those parents were looking for too. So there is a lot that goes into a young person being in the child welfare system, typically, of course, of no fault of their own, but really looking to their parents to have those answers for them.

The stuff that's in this legislation today is a step in the right direction. There is absolutely no doubt about it, and I want to give thanks where thanks is due, to the Child Welfare PAC folks who really have worked hard on this. Jane Kovarikova, who has become the chief of staff for the minister, led that group and, I believe, initiated that group and got it started. Being a former youth in care herself, she

knew that there were problems in care. She knew that there were things that could be done if you get on the inside and do the work.

Many people in our communities are out there and they're banging on doors and they're banging on windows to talk about the things that are wrong, but Jane found her way in as a very young person, as a student, to a Conservative MPP's office many years ago and continued to stay in that position, knowing that the way to make change is from the inside out.

So congratulations, Jane, because I know that this legislation is only in front of us because you took your journey and you continued to push and you gathered people around you—all of the amazing advocates; some are smiling down at me right now. I appreciate you and the work that you have done. I thank you for that work, and children in our province will thank you for the work when it's time to affect them.

1440

I know a big part of the legislation stems around the fact that when you've been a youth in care—and the minister went through this—you are not allowed to become an advocate, so you had to sign forms to be able to speak on behalf of yourself, as a former child in care. Part of this legislation is going to change that to ensure that former youth in care can speak for themselves; they are allowed to tell stories, they are allowed to work for change, because they were definitely put under the gun several times when it came to all of the work that they were doing as PAC advocates—I can't find it; it's fine. That's the base of one piece of it.

The other piece is that a children's aid worker, for whatever reason, could search a former youth in care's file and have every bit of information accessible to them. This could hurt somebody when they go for a job interview or a police record check, if they want to be a children's aid worker, if they want to be a social worker, if they want to do any of these things. All of their file would be open to anybody who could just punch in their name within the system, and that is absolutely wrong.

I cannot imagine that anybody could just type my name into a file and find out that I smoked cigarettes on the corner and my mom caught me when I was 12.

Imagine that concept—that a person in their adult years could be held accountable for what the 12-, 13-, 14- 15-year-old child inside them did, how many fights they had with their parent, or if they ran away from home? That should not change the outcome or the fact of who they are as an adult. So I'm happy to see those changes reflected in this bill. People deserve protection. They deserve privacy. They don't deserve to be dragged through the mud or to be held on a different level for something that they did as a young, teenage person. So I'm really happy to see this legislation that supports that work.

Again, congratulations to the PAC for all of the work, advocating for years. For years, they have been visiting, and I know I've been visiting with them for so many years, talking about this work. Jane found herself in the minis-

ter's office once again and was able to push it through and to get it done, so that's absolutely great.

A declaration—that's what they had to sign; it was a declaration. I knew I'd find the word eventually. I've got a lot of paper over here, because there are definitely a lot of pieces that I want to be able to talk about today.

The other piece that is a really important piece is the group home licences. I just want to go back on a little journey of horrific, horrific situations that we have heard time and time again in this Legislature, that we have read news accounts for, that we have seen in our communities, that have hit our communities, that have torn the hearts out of communities, torn the hearts out of families—the death of young people in group homes in this province—and it has happened much too often and on such severe rates. We see for-profit group homes that are responsible for taking care of our children, who have been, really, fed to the wolves. They have been what has been called cash cows. They have been neglected. They have been abused. They have been drugged. They have been locked in rooms. They have been restrained. They have seen every horror that we can imagine, as a child, and yet they were put there for protection. There can be nothing more tragic than a child who has been taken into protection under the government and has seen that abuse, died by that abuse, or lived to tell about the abuse, with trauma that they must live with day in and day out.

There have been several stories by these for-profit homes that are horrendous. The hardest part is that this has been happening for decades. We have seen these tragedies go on and on and on. In 2017—I was just trying to look up articles for stories to bring to the floor today, because there is nothing more appealing than a true-life story of real lives, of what has happened in these situations. I wanted to bring a few of them to the floor today.

And the dates—2017; we're seven years later and we're just getting to this. And if it wasn't for Jane and PAC really pushing hard to get the legislation that she wanted, would we see this here today? I have to question that.

We've been calling this stuff out and begging for help. And a minister who continues to say, "Leave no child behind," and a minister before him who said the same, and a minister before that who called herself the greatest advocate that this province would ever see—that was in 2018, that that started with this government. Like I said, the first thing they did was get rid of the child's greatest champion in this province, who was truly the provincial advocate's office.

May 15, 2017: "Foster Home Fire that Killed Teen, Caregiver Blamed on Bolted Door...."

"On a Friday afternoon in February, a raging fire swept through a foster home near Lindsay, Ont., trapping a 14-year-old resident and two caregivers in a second-floor bedroom.

"The teenager, Kassy Finbow, and one of the caregivers, Andrea Reid, were killed.

"My daughter was supposed to be in a safe place and, in the end, it's what took her precious life,' Kassy's

distraught mother, Chantal Finbow, told the Star. ‘Kassy was a beautiful young lady with so much potential.’

“A sliding glass door in the room in which Kassy and Reid were found was bolted shut, the Star has learned. And the only window—in a gable off the roof—was too small for the surviving caregiver to escape. She was saved by firefighters who smashed through the window’s upper sash, according to the foster home’s operator, Bob Connor....

“The deaths have triggered multiple investigations about lax or non-existent provincial standards governing group homes and foster homes run by private companies. The OPP, Queen’s Park, children’s aid and Ontario’s child and youth advocate are finding plenty of blame to go around.

“The Ministry of Children and Youth Services, responsible for licensing and inspecting these homes, is under fire for failing to adequately monitor and for being slow to improve the quality of care.”

I just want to remind everyone: That was May 2017, seven years ago. There was plenty of blame to go around. We’re just getting to it now.

“Both group homes and foster homes serve children and youth taken for their protection from parents by children’s aid societies, or sent there by parents for treatment due to mental health or behavioural issues.

“The similarities end there. Foster homes are capped at four children, while group homes typically serve eight or more. Foster homes also face far less stringent licensing requirements and fire code regulations.”

This is the next part I’d highlight: Irwin Elman, who was the provincial advocate, said that he considers them a dangerous symbol of the “power and control model” of residential care. “It’s about managing kids’ behaviour,” he said. Elman added that he repeatedly warned the ministry and fire marshal about them, with no result.

1450

“‘It wasn’t safe,’ an exasperated Elman said of the foster home that burned down. ‘For young people, it just all adds up to, “Nobody cares, unless we die.”’”

That’s from Irwin, and that’s an article from May 15, 2017.

I also found this article that talks about Kassy’s mom. She said, in this article:

“She’s had a lot of aggression, since the age of about five. And as she grew older she became more and more violent, towards myself and her brother as well as a lot of property damage to the home. We had exhausted all agencies for help and nothing got better. By the age of 12 she had become unmanageable at home.

“And so I reached out for help from Durham Children’s Aid Society as other agencies had not helped in the past. Both CAS and I decided maybe it would be best to put her in a group home and have a full assessment done.

“She was in care for a total of two and a half years before the fire. During that time she never got the full assessment that she needed. She continued to get worse, very violent and charged numerous times, and constantly running away—and for those reasons she had to be bounced around in the system.”

Then she ended up in the Connor Homes and they “thought this would be a great opportunity for her to get better as it was a smaller setting and out in the middle of nowhere. She was there for about six months but during that time we had seen great improvement and for the first time ... I had hope that she would return home at some point ...

“I really think the system needs an overhaul. This is why I decided to at least speak out via email. My daughter was supposed to be in a safe place and, in the end, it’s what took her precious life. In my opinion they should have more places for children with mental health and more separate places for violent children or behavioral issues. They are not the same needs and so they should be separate ...

“To make it clear, Kassy was never removed from the home—I reached out to CAS for help.”

She reached out for help, and the system didn’t help her. The government didn’t help her. The system failed her every step of the way. They failed her when she was five. They failed her when she was six. They failed her when she was 10. They failed her when she was 12. And they certainly failed her when she was 16, when she was put into a home owned by a private operator who locked doors and bolted windows.

And a staff person died on the same day. That person worked within a facility, went to work and never came home to her family because she was put into an unsafe working condition.

This is not a system that leaves no child behind. When the minister gets all “no child is left behind”—which he says about every child in this province—it hurts me to know there are so many children left behind in the province.

So a couple of little things within a bill that is seven years too late—it kind of gets me, and we all know that I’m a passionate person and I kind of get emotional about things. But that’s what our jobs are to do—is to protect these kids.

There is nothing more valuable, there is no resource more valuable in this province, in this country, than our children. And when we do not invest proactively in our children, we see children who end up in care—mostly not by their fault or by their parents’ fault or anything other than the fault of the system that they can’t get through. They can’t get mental health supports; they can’t get safe living conditions when they so desperately need them.

No parent wants to give over their kid, but they’re literally forfeiting their children in hopes that they’re going to get services that they can’t get on their own. That’s not okay.

As a province, we really should be leaving no child behind. And as a government that likes to talk a good game, they can do a lot better.

Interruption.

Miss Monique Taylor: My phone is buzzing, I’m told. Sorry about that. Sorry, broadcast.

I really lost where I was now.

Interjection.

Miss Monique Taylor: Yes, that's okay. I needed a break from that for a minute anyway.

Oh, I know where I was. I raised it during questions to the minister—of the underfunding of children's aid societies. The funding formula has never been right. The funding formula was based on how many kids in care—and now the systemic work that's supposed to be happening is keeping families together, right? So we know this, and children's aid knows this, and the OACAS knows this—everybody knows this. Everybody is working towards that. But now we have less kids in care, and we're supporting more kids at home, within their families. That's good money. That's a good way to do it. But the funding is not there now.

In 2022-23, a \$15.6-million deficit—the government had to pony up to help those children's aids that were in deficits. And from 2023-24, they're already projecting a \$15-million deficit.

How can we possibly keep kids safe in their homes if we're not providing the proactive work, like mental health supports, like affordable housing, like affordable groceries? These are the kinds of things that break down families—mental health and addictions. This is where families fall through the cracks.

If we're not providing that front-end money, then, sure, we're going to have to pay all that at the back end—which is more inspectors to get into homes to make sure that they're not abusing kids.

It's like building more jails instead of stopping crime. We need to be preventing the crimes. We need to be helping youth, making sure they have resources, making sure they have access to sports and to school clubs and to things that help them be healthy. Mental health supports—front end. The back end is the cleanup. The back end is the jail and more jail guards. That's not what we need to be doing.

And within the children's aid sector, it's the exact same thing—keeping families together, providing them the supports, making sure that they have food in the fridge and that they can keep the lights on and that everybody is in a safe environment takes us away from these for-profit group homes that are, decade after decade, abusing our kids.

There are, in this bill, further licensing restrictions, making it more stringent, making sure that things are built into legislation, so when an inspector does go there, they can see that there can't be—I don't know. What does the bill say? I'll look for it while I'm talking—that there are things in place that are further restrictions and that there is further implementation to keep kids safe from abuse, from suppression, from racism, from all of these things. They're now going to be built into the bill, which is great, and it does put heftier fines on these licensees—I believe it goes from \$1,000 to \$250,000. So there will be no mistake. The \$1,000 they blew off because the cash cows provided them that money already, so they didn't care about the \$1,000. But now, the \$250,000 is going to be a stark difference.

I wish I could find that article that talks about kids being cash cows, because—what a disgraceful article. When the

providers are living it up to the life in all their big beach homes and cottages and vacation homes and they're talking about kids as if they're cash cows within the system and calling the kids “paycheques.” Can you imagine that this is a system that this government and the Liberal government before them supported, and that we have been calling out for years and years to do better by?

1500

Devon Freeman was a young Indigenous man—I believe he was from Hamilton. He was put into a group home. He was an unhappy young man. He had some mental health issues. He did not get the supports that he needed, and he went missing. Nobody reported him missing for quite some time. Nobody really did much of a look for him to find out where he was. I don't even believe that his grandmother, who was his family, knew that he was missing for quite some time. He died by suicide. They found him six months after the fact in a tree not far from the group home—six months.

There was a great inquest that went into that case. I believe there were 80-some-odd recommendations to do better. I'm still looking into what recommendations have been enacted and which ones have not. There are various groups that have been called into that—Hamilton police, I know the ones that they were asked. I didn't have to ask, because I knew the one recommendation for them was to start a missing persons department, which they have done. I know that for a fact, so I know that part has been done. There are several inquest recommendations there that, like I said, we're having a deeper look into to try to find out which ones have been done and which ones haven't.

Again, that young man was let down by a system where his grandmother thought that he was safe and that he was going to be taken care of, and yet he was not.

This article is from November 24, 2022, two years ago:

“Ontario's official opposition is calling on the Doug Ford government to investigate one of the province's largest operators of kids' group homes following an investigation on Global News.

“The NDP demanded action on the ‘abusive’ conditions some kids are facing inside the for-profit company Hatts Off, which operates nine children's group homes and more than two dozen foster homes across southern Ontario.

“A Global News investigation revealed allegations of human trafficking that went ignored—kids who say they were overmedicated, underqualified staff and violent physical restraints, according to 70 interviews with current and former workers and youth who worked or lived in Hatts Off homes.”

I'm just going to skip through to a couple of places.

“The reporting also profiled the story of Cassidy Franck, who was 16 years old when she lived at a girls-only group home on the outskirts of Hamilton, Ontario, in 2021. Franck alleged that the conditions of the home were ‘terrible’ and that she managed to leave the home by going to live with a staff member.”

It gets better—a staff member from the group home.

“After arriving at the apartment, Franck said she was forced to sell drugs and was ultimately rescued by Hamilton Police Service’s human trafficking division.”

This is a staff person who lived in one of these unregulated group homes that really had no business being there. What qualifications did she have to be taking care of young people?

I’ve heard horror stories from other group homes in my riding, years ago—Hatts Off in particular—that had young women taking care of these teenage boys. The clothing was inappropriate, the behaviours were inappropriate. The neighbourhood was so concerned about what was happening there. We were able to file some complaints through the community and had things cleaned up a bit there—but this is just the unregulated, awful business of our child and youth sector.

“Global News also uncovered a trail of documents, including a secret draft report, an expert review for the Ontario coroner, and countless ministry inspections, which for years pointed to signs of concern at Hatts Off. The reporting also revealed a lack of accountability and oversight.”

It’s absolutely horrific what has been happening in these homes for so many years, with no direction from the government. This many years, this many deaths, this many occurrences—and now we’re starting to see some changes within the system. Is it going to be enough?

I asked the minister about the inspection levels. I’m happy to hear that there are going to be uninvited and unnotified inspections. I hope that they’re at night, when the young people are home, and not during the day, when they’re in school—because that happens a lot. Inspectors go up—“Oh, and everything is fine. Everybody was at school, and everything was fine and dandy and looked great.” How about going there when young people are home and making sure that you are seeing these young people, that they are home and that they are accounted for and they are not drugged?

We have definitely heard about the drugging incidents—the young people who state that sometimes they were getting five pills a day, just keeping them sedated all day long, where they couldn’t even function and be able to go to school, probably, and the aggression that came from that kind of restraint.

And there are many physical restraint complaints that came in about these homes that just went undone—and hopefully, some of this legislation will help fix that.

What I would truly like to see is public group homes. Take away the for-profit group homes that are currently in the system that are allowing these kids to be used as cash cows, that are creating income for private profit. We should be doing nothing but focusing on the well-being and health of our kids who are in care to make sure that they get the services that they need, and regulating the group homes to make sure that there is oversight, that there are bodies that will ensure that young people have the support that they need and that they are in happy and healthy homes. There can be nothing more important than making sure that that happens.

The Ombudsman is another piece that’s being added to this bill. Back when the government took out the provincial advocate for children and youth—when he fired the child advocate, quite frankly, closed down the office—the Ombudsman was given the powers to be able to speak up for children and youth in care. I did have a conversation with the Ombudsman the other day—asking him his insight. He believes that he is able to keep up. He thinks that at the rate that currently exists in his office, they’re fine and they will not need the extra expansion of funding, but he promises me that once that gets out of control and he does need that extra support, he will be making sure the government has that.

What is happening in this legislation? I know that it was something that we talked about with the child advocate when we did the new child and family services act—one of their recommendations was that every child have access to the information, to be able to contact the child advocate. So I guess that now this is being put in for the Ombudsman—that the kids have access to information about the Ombudsman.

My concern is, what has been happening for the past six years, since the child advocate was fired and the Ombudsman was put in place to take on this role of supporting young people when they feel that the system has treated them unfairly? The Ombudsman will tell us that they’ve had, I believe, 200-plus complaints come into their office from child welfare. That is the part that concerns me. There were 2,000-plus complaints that went into the child advocate’s office from child welfare. So that’s a big difference in numbers. I don’t know whether it’s because this piece has been followed through, whether the information for the Ombudsman has already been there, but now, it’s going to be forced to be there, so it will be interesting to see if those numbers increase or not and what that will do to the Ombudsman’s office. It will also come in regulations, I’m told—how this is going to be communicated to young people, ensuring that every young person knows when they enter the system that they have the right to access the Ombudsman, and to make sure that they have privacy to be able to talk to the Ombudsman without people hearing their stories. Of course, they wouldn’t want the same people they’re complaining about to hear their concerns. They would want and need privacy. So I’m hoping that’s going to be in there, to ensure that they do know their rights and they know where to go when they need help. That’s an important piece.

1510

Bill 188 adds a requirement that a person who is employed in the care of children’s aid, as defined in the act, needs to report instances of immediate danger to the well-being of a child or youth in care when that danger is caused by a licensee or provider. That essentially creates a whistleblower requirement that remains a requirement even when there have been previous reports relating to the child. This actually wraps in the need to be able to speak freely.

I brought forward a bill previously, in previous governments, on whistle-blower protection, to open up the Employment Standards Act to ensure that people did have

the ability to speak freely and without fear of reprisal, for the benefit of the kids and for the benefit of that person working within the system—to know that when they had something that they had seen was wrong, they weren't scared to tell, which is another way of keeping kids safe. So I'm happy to see that this is here and that that's now being looked at, because it's an important piece. I think it was in 2015 that I brought that legislation forward, so I'm glad to see it in this legislation today.

The other thing I mentioned which I was happy to see in the legislation, which I brought up to the minister earlier through the question portion of his debate, was Katelynn's Principle. The bill talks about the child being the centre and that every person has a responsibility—and that's where he wanted to add the educational assistants. I think that we could be adding educational workers—that any adult who comes in contact with that child and who is in a place of responsibility has a responsibility to do that.

Katelynn's Principle was another bill I brought forward many years ago, in 2016, which was a recommendation from Katelynn's inquest. Katelynn, unfortunately, died in the hands of the people who were, again, through children's aid, supposed to be taking care of her. They had been friends of her mother, who was not capable of taking care of Katelynn, and these people—it was all through children's aid. They had been looked at, and everything was supposed to be fine. They abused Katelynn so terribly that she died. The number one recommendation from her inquest was Katelynn's Principle—to enshrine it as the guiding principle for decisions affecting children. During the new Child and Family Services Act, we tried to get them to implement Katelynn's Principle again, at that time, but they did not do it. What they did was, they added it to the preamble of the Child and Family Services Act.

Seeing what's before us today, talking about adults who are in responsible positions to take care of and be there to speak out on behalf of children—to have that whistleblower protection, but to also understand that the child is the centre of all decisions, is, I think, a really important piece that needs to be looked at.

So I would ask once again—here it is. It says, “The first recommendation, referred to as Katelynn's Principle, places children at the centre of decisions affecting them. The jury requested that all parties to the coroner's inquest ensure that Katelynn's Principle apply to all services, policies, legislation and decision-making affecting children.”

This would ensure that every decision that is made is always child-centred and that individual rights—“The child must always be seen, the child's voice must be heard, and the child must be listened to and respected.”

“The child's heritage must be taken into consideration and respected. Attention must be paid to the broad and diverse communities the child identifies with, including communities defined by matters such as race, ethnicity, religion, language, and sexual orientation.”

“Actions must be taken to ensure that a child who is capable of forming their own views is able to express those views freely and safely about matters affecting them.”

“The child's views must be given due weight in accordance with the child's age and maturity.”

“In accordance with the child's age and maturity, the child must be given the opportunity to participate before any decisions affecting the child are made, whether the participation is direct or through a support person or representative.”

“In accordance with the child's age and maturity, the child must be engaged through honest and respectful dialogue about how and why decisions affecting them are made.”

“Every person who provides services to children or services affecting children is a child advocate. Advocacy may be a child's lifeline and it must occur from the point of first contact and on a continuous basis thereafter.”

Just reading those words after so many years—it still rings true. There is nothing about what I just read that could not be put into legislation today. There's nothing that we can do here that shouldn't be put through the lens of a child.

Like I said earlier, our most valuable resource is our children. They are the ones we are nurturing today to care for us later. They will be our doctors. They will be our lawyers. They will be our teachers. They will be our legislators. They will be our Premier. They will fill every role that we see in our community today. Our children of today will eventually fill those roles. If we don't nurture those children, if we don't maintain those children's mental health, if we don't help support them when they need support, then we are failing them and we are failing ourselves; we're failing our generations to come.

That is the basis of everything, and what I just read to you in Katelynn Sampson's principle could not ring more true today than it did the day that I did that reading in 2015 and the day that the inquest recommended that recommendation for Katelynn and for children, going forward.

1520

This is an ample opportunity to actually introduce that legislation again and to embed it into what we're seeing before us under Bill 188. There's always room for improvement, and I know that the folks who worked on this bill probably pushed for a lot of things to be put into this legislation today and they had to settle for what they got, but they also know that settling for what they got was still a win. I'll never take that away from them. I think it's fantastic that they were able to get to this point, because we have definitely seen years of neglect when it comes to our child welfare system and supports serving our children so they're not in the child welfare system. They have to go hand in hand. We can't talk about one system without talking about the other. We can't support children without supporting our health care system to ensure that they have what they need. How many complex-care kids are in care today because the health system denies them, because they don't have nurses in their homes, because they can't afford it, because now the private nurses cost more than what they're allotted through their critical care funding? This is a reality.

I'm not sure if the members across know these realities. I don't know if they've had the opportunity to speak to parents, like I have. I've only had that opportunity mainly, probably, because I am the critic on this file. Have they talked to parents with kids who have complex critical care needs and who are not able to maintain those 24-hour nurses like they need? And what happens is the kids then become—the children's aid stepping in and saying, "We're taking these kids because you can't care for the kids." But I'll tell you, they end up in the children's aid and they still can't get the same services, so it's a revolving door. Is it in the best interests of children? Definitely not. Can we fix it? Yes. We can ensure that there's proper funding into children's mental health services. We can ensure there's proper funding into complex care needs. We can ensure there's proper funding for autism services. We can ensure there's proper funding to really allow children's aid services to proactively keep families supported at home. We can actively ensure that we have enough children's aid, like, care homes, not group homes—family homes.

I remember, as a child, my parents were always foster parents, and how many kids we had in our house sometimes. My dad would be loading up—he had a deal with the grocery store. It's how we got more bread and how we got more of this and more of that, so my parents could take care of all these kids. I remember them so clearly. They were my brothers and my sisters. I still speak to some of them today, and when I do see them, the emotion that I have for them is overwhelming, because now, as an adult, and being in the role that I've been in, I've learned the trials and tribulations and struggles that I would never have known about when I was a kid. Now I know and understand, and I see and I think about it differently, and I can talk to them differently about their experiences in the children's aid societies. I remember very clearly the happy times that we had and the sad times, when they would leave and they had to go back to their homes or their families. It was such an exciting time for them, of course. They were going back to their families. But it was sad for us—because that was my brother, and now he's gone.

We have to do better. We don't have these foster homes to be able to care for these kids anymore. Indigenous homes—how hard is it to be able to get them into the system to be able to support them? We're not even helping kinship families. So if they're my family member, no one is going to help support me, even though I don't have money to buy a crib or I don't have money to buy all the extra clothes and the extra food and the extra everything that it costs to be able to raise a child. I'm just expected to do it now, because they're kin, they're family. Well, that's great. I really want to be able to help my family, but I need the financial support to be able to do that because I'm struggling already just to be able to support my own family. This is the reality of today's day and age. So if we don't put in this work to get more families into the systems, to attract Muslim families and Black families and families from everywhere so that children can see themselves reflected in the families they're actually put into—these are the kinds of initiatives that we still need to do.

This bill today isn't going to fix the system. It's going to fix a couple of little things. Hopefully, it's going to fix some things in the group home licensing, but it's really not going to be the bottom line for the children's aid societies, which are begging for funding. They're running deficits, which they're not allowed to do. The government had to bail them out in the last year, and they're going to have to bail them out again. They can't continue to function like this. They have to be able to proactively be ready to support those families coming in, be able to attract families to support kids—Black families, Indigenous families, Muslim families.

The work doesn't happen on its own, and it doesn't happen for free. It actually takes a fully funded system to save money.

And for Conservatives—you would think that they would understand the fact that they want to save money, but they don't. They just talk about it, and then they just say that everybody else wants to raise taxes. Well, it's the same taxpayer who is footing the bill, regardless of what level of government you're paying it to. And by making sure that our kids are supported—there can be absolutely nothing more important than doing that.

I want to say, once again, these homes should not be for-profit. They need to be not-for-profit. It will save money. It will ensure there's proper care. They need to be regulated. We need to ensure that we have ongoing inspections—day, night, all the time. Make sure those kids are home when those inspections are happening—not showing up when all the kids are in school and expecting that everything is fine and dandy, when we don't know that. We need to ensure that's the case.

We need to get these kids off of being drugged all the time. There's actual therapy that could happen, instead of drugging them with drugs to calm them down. No. Give them proper therapy. Make sure they have actual recreational sport and supports and other things that they need to live functional lives, like everybody else's kids. They should have access to these things, but they don't.

When they're cash cows and when they're doing nothing but putting a paycheque, then they're not—we can't expect them to not fail. We're setting them up for failure. That's not okay. It's not good enough. We live in a very, very prosperous, very rich province. But it's a province where people are struggling, and our kids who are in care—who are literally our kids; they are the government's kids. As the government, you are required to take care of them. It's your responsibility. You have to make sure that more legislation comes before this House quick.

Keep pushing, Jane. Push them hard. I know that you have the ability to do so and that you have the ear of the government, and that you've worked so hard to get to this position. You've put yourself on the inside, because that's the only way that change happens. It never happens from banging on a window from the outside. It happens from the inside. And you put yourself in a good position to do that.

Kids are counting on us to do the right thing. They're counting on us to ensure that there's legislation to protect

them, to keep them safe; that parents aren't giving up their children to group homes that are failing them; that parents can know, for once, they will be able to trust a system and say, "If I'm giving up my kid, I know they're going to be safe. They're not being abused, they're not getting drugged, they're not being locked up, and they're not dying by suicide"—because that's the actual reality.

We can do better. It's up to you to do better. This bill is a good start. It's a small start. It's a little thing that's happening. Let's get it done. Let's work through it. Let's work on some really good amendments and, hopefully, strengthen it up as best as we can. And then let's get on to the next bill that is actually going to do more and ensure that children's aid societies in this province have the ability to proactively keep families together—kids at home, happy and healthy, with the supports that they need to flourish and thrive.

1530

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bhutla Karpoche): Questions?

Mr. Matthew Rae: Thank you to my colleague from Hamilton Mountain for her opposition leadoff on the debate this afternoon for Bill 188.

The bill proposes a modern and flexible suite of tools that will empower the ministry inspectors to improve compliance rates among insured providers of out-of-home care to children and youth—at a higher rate of compliance—that would mean young people in out-of-home care receive a consistently higher quality of care that is safe, supportive and responsive to their needs.

Does the member opposite support stronger oversight and accountability for those providing care for Ontario's most vulnerable young people?

Miss Monique Taylor: Yes, I support it. I've been fighting for it for years. I'm happy to see that the compliance levels are raising—from \$1,000 to \$250,000. Like I said, this should have been done a long time ago, but we're here now.

I'm still concerned about the amount of inspectors and when the inspectors will be visiting. Will those inspections be thorough, and will young people be talked to—to know that they feel safe, that they are able to use their voice about whether this extra legislation is working on their behalf?

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bhutla Karpoche): Next question?

Mr. Joel Harden: I want to thank the member for Hamilton Mountain for her work, for a very long time, as our child critic.

I want to read into the record and just get the member's response to remarks made by the great Cindy Blackstock, who, in 2016, when the federal government lost a human rights tribunal case, said the following—I'm wondering if there's an echo in her remarks this afternoon.

Ms. Blackstock said, "Nothing the government can do can make up for the wrongs it consciously perpetrated against kids. And I want to emphasize that it was conscious. It wasn't an accident."

The report went on to say that while the federal government may be responsible, "funding at least 93% of on-reserve child welfare, the Ontario government created the system where these children died and provides the law within which the child welfare agencies operate."

I'm just wondering if the member for Hamilton Mountain has any reaction to that.

Miss Monique Taylor: Cindy has done some amazing work right across this country, trying to do better by enabling Indigenous youth, who have been overrepresented in care for decades. Quite frankly, I sometimes feel that it's no different than our residential schools that Indigenous people felt for years here in our country—and the work that needs to be done to ensure that Indigenous voices are heard and that we have community-specific resources available to them could never be more important than what we're seeing today.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bhutla Karpoche): Next question?

Mr. Ted Hsu: The member for Hamilton Mountain spoke about what previous governments did or didn't do. I was wondering if she could speak about the Ontario Child Advocate's office, an independent office of this Legislature. It was created in 2008 under the previous government and was cancelled by this government. I was wondering if she could speak about that fact and its connection to the needs that she has spoken about eloquently in her speech and the need for this bill.

Miss Monique Taylor: It's absolutely horrific that the child advocate was literally fired in 2018, the minute that this government came into power. It was found out through a news article that his office was being shut down, which left people reeling around this province. The most trusted voice for children, the voice that we could count on to ensure that all child voices were raised and were heard, was taken out by this government.

Now we're seeing, year after year, more children fall into a disrepaired state of affairs within our child welfare sector.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bhutla Karpoche): Next question?

Mr. Billy Pang: The bill proposes improving protections for the privacy of individuals who have a history of involvement with child protection, by restricting access to files by others once a young person leaves care. Children who grow up in the care of their birth parents don't need to worry that a written record about their childhood would be used to stigmatize them later in life. After all, kids will be kids. I think it's wrong that a child would have that worry just because they were in care.

Does the opposition support including enhanced protections for the privacy of children and youth leaving care in the CYFSA?

Miss Monique Taylor: Thank you to the member opposite.

Yes, as I have said throughout my debate portion as well as for years, I have been supporting that call being put into legislation. I'm happy to see that it is here today.

I agree with the member that it is absolutely not fair for someone to be judged as an adult for what they did when they were 12, 13, 14 in care and in a bad place in life as a child. Neither he nor I would want our time in school—I think the example was smoking in the parking lot when my parents catch me. That shouldn't be put into my file for the rest of my life. That is what is happening with these crown wards when they age out.

I'm happy to see these revisions put into place. I think it's a long time coming. I congratulate the welfare PAC for all of their hard work in making sure it's here today in legislation.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bhutla Karpoche): Next question?

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: I want to thank the member from Hamilton Mountain for her debate on Bill 188, Supporting Children's Futures Act, 2024.

It's no secret that these private, for-profit group homes call their clients, the children in their care, cash cows. That is, quite frankly, revealing of what kind of intention there is when businesses are actually caring for children—it's a business.

One of the examples I want to bring forward is Expanding Horizons. Back in 2021, the company's legal counsel surrendered its law licence to the Law Society of Ontario after admitting to a tribunal in 2018 they had misappropriated nearly \$500,000 from clients.

How can strengthening the oversight in a non-profit system for group homes help this kind of financial abuse be stopped?

Miss Monique Taylor: There can be nothing more important, as I've said several times, over and over again, as caring for our most vulnerable children. By allowing them to be in a for-profit system, we are allowing bad actors to abuse the system, and these are the types of things that we've seen. We see abuse, financially. We've seen abuse to the children. We've seen drugging of the children. We've seen children locked up. We've seen children restrained. These are the things that happen when we allow profit into a system that is supposed to maintain the well-being of our kids.

By moving to a not-for-profit system, ensuring that we truly become the parents of these kids and have people in position with education and requirements and regulations to actually manage how the group homes are going to be run, it would be a much better outcome for the kids who have no choice but to live in these group homes.

As Ontarians, I truly believe that we can do better in making sure that—a not-for-profit system would save us from allowing kids to end up as cash cows.

1540

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bhutla Karpoche): There's not enough time for another round of questions. Further debate?

Mr. Ric Bresee: Speaker, if I may, to start off, I'd like to thank the Minister of Children, Community and Social Services and the staff for the work that has gone into Bill 188, the Supporting Children's Futures Act.

I also want to acknowledge and express my appreciation that a lot of the preliminary work for this was completed by the now Minister of Energy and the now Minister of Colleges and Universities in their previous roles within the Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services.

Speaker, if I may, I'm going to take a few moments to digress, because I need to express my personal appreciation for all the wonderful, caring and compassionate parents and pseudo-parents who make the decision to take good care of a child.

As members of this provincial Parliament, all of us are heavily involved in our communities. Unfortunately, I think we have all been aware of a situation that turned out to be a bad situation for a particular family, a difficult time for a child and, more specifically or more likely, a highly tumultuous time between a teenager and a parent. Over 40 years ago, I was one of those kids.

I will be open with this House in saying that at the age of 15, yes, I was definitely one of those teenagers. I had come from a family situation that included divorce, alcohol and violence. I was not innocent in this; at the age of 15—actually, just shy of my 16th birthday—you might say I was a difficult child, a challenging teenager perhaps, in a house that simply could not handle that. It became untenable. There was violence; there was police involvement. But at that time—again, this was over 40 years ago—abuse was measured by broken bones, which I did not have. Being under 16, apparently it couldn't be defined as assault either. I was living with my father; unfortunately, my mother at that point did not have the capacity to support us and especially did not have the capacity to deal with the challenges presented by my alcoholic father.

At that particular time, custody was pretty much defined by age with a hard line in the sand. For a 15-year-old, which I was, if you left, it was the duty of the police to return you to the very place that caused the problem in the first place. Once you turned 16, you were a free agent, and the parent at that particular time could decline all responsibility. So a week later, on the date of my 16th birthday, I left that house. I left that house with no plan and no place to go.

But I was rescued. The parents of a very close friend of mine knew how I had been struggling for years at that point, and they took me in. For much of the next year, that household provided me refuge. They cared for me like I was one of their own. I will be forever grateful to them for saving me from being homeless and, more importantly, for showing me what strong and caring parents could be like. They were my pseudo-parents, and I would like to take the opportunity just to say thank you to John and Gaylia Prytulka.

I also need to say that after a time, my father got the help he needed, and he found an amazing partner in his second wife, Barb. Eventually, that all led to a situation that my father and I did reconcile, and we became close again until he passed when I was 31.

I want to take this opportunity to thank all the pseudo-parents out there for that unofficial caring and compassionate help that they are providing. Across the province,

there will be families like that. I want to thank them all, because their work has saved so many children from the struggles they face.

Speaker, I thank you for allowing the digression. I will return to the bill, a bill that works on improving the out-of-home care system, sometimes described as foster care. Certainly many children across this province need a safe place to stay for a variety of reasons, from needing basic accommodations and supervision to assistance with some very complex special needs. Some of those children need to be placed in out-of-home care for their own protection, and they end up being placed in foster care.

Speaker, let me be very clear to the out-of-home care parents who are out there. There are a great many excellent caregivers in the out-of-home care system. The vast majority are exactly as I was just describing before: caring, compassionate care providers, and I want them to note that this bill does not take aim at them. This bill is to address those that would misuse the system and fail the children in their care. That small minority of bad actors within that system may be a small number but they definitely need to be addressed, and that is what this bill, if passed, will do.

Speaker, there are three main directives to this bill. If Bill 188 is passed, it will strengthen oversight and provide enforcement tools for out-of-home care, protect the privacy of youth formerly in care and update the Child, Youth and Family Services Act with the lessons that have been learned since it became law.

So the first: The bill proposes a rigorous application process for potential care providers. This measure aims to sift out those that are not fit to offer that quality care, with the ultimate goal of safeguarding public interest. For children in care, accountability is paramount. The bill seeks to increase oversight of care operators, empowering inspectors to take decisive action in cases of non-compliance. This includes the implementation of a range of penalties, from compliance orders to administrative fines, to ensure adherence to the law. That's the purpose.

We've all witnessed, unfortunately, incidents where care providers have fallen short of delivering the quality of care that our children deserve. As a government, we stand firm in the stance that there is no room for such negligence within the province.

To tackle these issues head on, the bill introduces a set of robust enforcement tools. These include orders to reclaim misused funds, the appointment of new management where necessary and restraining orders in cases of imminent threats to the child's well-being.

Additionally, this bill outlines new provincial offences for violations against a young person's rights and significantly increased penalties designed to deter any misconduct. These penalties, including fines of up to \$250,000 and imprisonment, underscore our unwavering commitment to protecting our children.

Bill 188 proposes streamlined processes for inspectors, ensuring thorough documentation of findings and empowering them to conduct investigations with warrants where necessary. Changes to the appeal process aim to expedite decisions while ensuring transparency and ac-

countability. This includes stricter requirements for evidence and clarity on tribunal orders.

In essence, these measures represent a monumental step forward in holding service providers accountable to the standards of care that our youth deserve—that they need. By providing inspectors with a comprehensive tool kit and implementing stringent penalties, we are sending a clear message: The safety and well-being of our children are non-negotiable.

The Supporting Children's Futures Act marks a significant stride towards safeguarding the privacy and the dignity of our children and youth who have experienced the child welfare system. It's imperative that we enact measures to protect their rights, even after they've left care.

Speaker, this bill introduces restrictions on access to records held by the children's aid societies, concerning children and youth who are no longer in their care. This crucial step aims to shield privacy and ensure that their past involvement with the child welfare system does not impact them indefinitely. These changes are designed to provide additional layers of protection for the privacy of individuals with a history within the child welfare system. Regulations will be developed to further limit access to their records by third parties, again strengthening their right to privacy.

And within this bill is the empowerment of adults with a history of child protection involvement to publicly disclose their own experiences. It corrects a previous oversight within the CYFSA that could be interpreted as a breach of privacy for former children and youth in care who wish to tell their own stories. By implementing these changes, our government aims to create a supportive environment that respects the privacy of adults who were once children in care, while also empowering them to speak openly about their lived experiences, if they so choose.

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These amendments seek to ensure that youth in care are afforded the same rights and freedoms as every other member of society. It's our duty to uphold their dignity and protect their privacy as they navigate their life, their journey beyond the child welfare system.

Within Bill 181 is the establishment of robust information-sharing mechanisms between children's aid societies and professional bodies such as the College of Early Childhood Educators and the Ontario College of Teachers. This vital step will help to enable timely action in cases where there's an allegation or a risk to children involving a teacher or an early childhood educator, thereby safeguarding our children's well-being.

The Supporting Children's Futures Act seeks to broaden the scope of professions authorized to receive personal information from children's aid societies, now including teachers and early childhood educators. If passed, this bill will clarify the duty of early childhood educators to report children in need of protection and introduce penalties for those who fail to do so.

Another significant aspect of this bill is empowering the College of Social Workers and Social Service Workers to

share information about its members with relevant bodies, including children's aid societies. This change will align their practices more closely with other health professionals, enhancing the efficiency of investigations and helping to mitigate risks of harm.

We also aim to clarify the rights of children and youth in care to complain to the Office of the Ombudsman. By outlining these obligations within CYFSA, we seek to ensure that all service providers and children are fully aware of their rights, bridging potential gaps in that awareness.

Enabling offence declarations by sector workers will ensure that employers are promptly informed of any changes in the criminal records of their employees, strengthening safety measures within our institutions.

The bill embodies our unwavering commitment to the safety, well-being and rights of our children and youth. By establishing clear, consistent practices, enhancing information-sharing mechanisms and clarifying rights and responsibilities, we've paved the way for a brighter future, a safer future, for the most vulnerable members of our society.

It is essential to recognize that the bill before us is just one component of a larger, ongoing effort by this ministry. Our commitment to redesigning the child welfare landscape extends far beyond the pages of just this bill. In conjunction with the introduction of the bill, our government has taken additional actions by filing regulations that contain a multitude of new measures aimed at bolstering the safety and the well-being of children in our care. These regulations include mandates for enhanced information-sharing between children's aid societies and the ministry regarding specific health and safety risks faced by children in licensed out-of-home care settings. This initiative will ensure that no child falls through the cracks and that any risks are swiftly identified and addressed.

Furthermore, these regulations require increased collaboration between different children's aid societies to support service planning for children placed across jurisdictions, promoting seamless transitions and continuity of care. These are kids; they deserve continuity of care.

We're taking concrete steps to enhance oversight and monitoring by mandating more frequent visits to children in out-of-home care systems, as well as requiring unannounced visits in certain circumstances to ensure the well-being of every child is prioritized. These regulations clarify and strengthen rules surrounding discipline in licensed settings, emphasizing the prohibition of derogatory or racist language and requiring immediate reporting of any suspected prohibited methods of discipline. We're ensuring that licensees uphold their commitments by requiring adherence to program descriptions and enhanced financial record-keeping.

Additionally, provisions are being put in place to guarantee privacy and dignity for children in residence settings, including the requirement for bedroom doors and physical barriers in foster homes. These regulations will provide clarity in cases of conflict between regulations and health

recommendations. They will enhance financial reporting requirements and clarify rules governing the use of restraints.

Through the ongoing work of the Minister of Children, Community and Social Services, under the leadership of our Premier, this continues to demonstrate our unwavering dedication to a continuous improvement and our commitment to ensuring that every child receives the support, care and protection that they deserve.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Matthew Rae): Questions?

Mr. Wayne Gates: I always like to listen about how much you care about children, so I think it should be easy, quite frankly, to answer this question: Why is the government still not committing to reinstating the provincial Child and Youth Advocate role that it removed? Do you not believe that the organization had positive impacts on the lives of the children in this province that we care about so dearly?

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Matthew Rae): Questions through the Chair.

Response, please.

Mr. Ric Bresee: I think it is very clear that we do care about the children and we're trying to find the best path forward. This minister has committed to ensuring that we will continue to move, continue to improve the system. This is one piece of that. We will continue to get better.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Matthew Rae): Questions?

Mrs. Robin Martin: Thank you very much to my colleague for that great set of remarks. I was very touched by your initial story. I moved out when I was 16 as well for slightly different reasons, but something close enough so I kind of recognize some of that story. It's wonderful that there are these great people that are willing to stand up and help those, especially young people, in need so that they can get off on a better footing for the rest of their lives.

We've heard a lot about what we're not doing as usual from the other side, but I did hear the member from Hamilton Mountain say a number of good things about this legislation. We're starting to see some changes after years of neglect, that it's a good start and that these are things that are in the bill. There are some things in the bill she supports. She answered a couple of questions saying she does support those things.

Can you tell me why you think this is a good piece of legislation to be bringing forward at this time?

Mr. Ric Bresee: Thank you very much for the question and the comments on the story. Again, I think many of us understand, whether we've experienced it ourselves or certainly have known our colleagues, our friends, even our friends in youth that went through similar challenges. And hopefully, hopefully everybody comes out of it having learned something and having moved on and been able to become adults well. And I've rambled so long, I've forgotten the question; my apologies.

Mrs. Robin Martin: Do you like the legislation?

Mr. Ric Bresee: Yes, I definitely do like the legislation, and thank you for the reminder of the question. The legislation helps to address the few, the bad actors. We need to be able to address that so that we can fully support

the wonderful, compassionate and caring people that are providing the support well.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Matthew Rae): Further questions?

Mr. Ted Hsu: First of all, I just want to thank the member for Hastings–Lennox and Addington for adding his personal story to this debate. And I wanted to give him another chance to answer the question from the member for Niagara Falls, because I don't understand why this government cancelled the Ontario child advocate's office. It was created under the previous Liberal government in 2008 and cancelled in 2018. What was the rationale for cancelling that office? And I hope it wasn't just because it was created under a different government.

Mr. Ric Bresee: I thank the member from Kingston and the Islands for the question. I'll be honest, I was not here at the time when that happened, and I'm not sure of the exact details as to why that happened at the time. But I am very, very confident that we will continue—this is a path of continuous improvement.

We need to continue working with the minister, with all of the stakeholders, listening to the people that are providing the services, listening to the children. As the member from Kingston and the Islands actually knows, my sister is a foster mom and has been for about 30 years. I'm not even sure if he knows that she is my sister, because she has a different last name, but he does know her certainly.

So no, we will continue to improve the system through whatever means necessary. I've got great confidence that the minister will do that.

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The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bhutla Karpoche): Question?

MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam: Thank you to the member from Hastings–Lennox and Addington for his remarks, his presentation and his story. Thank you for sharing that. That was a very special gift, to be in the House to receive that.

I think it's very important for all of us to recognize that the welfare of children is of the utmost importance, and especially if children are away from their parents. So we have a responsibility within the system to do everything we can to make sure that they're safe, that they're placed in the hands of caring adults who are equipped to provide that continuum of care if their current home situation is unsafe.

I want to understand why the government is not investing more on the front end of ensuring that children are safe and kept safe, therefore that their parents have the resources they need to be able to provide that loving and supportive family, whether it's adequate affordable housing, it's access to supports for the children, maybe it's employment. I'm just curious to know why always on the back end and not the front end.

Mr. Ric Bresee: I would like to thank the member from Toronto Centre for the question. I'm going to start with the last half of the question first: What are we doing? We are working towards having more housing and helping with

the affordability crisis. We are and have been incredibly successful at making sure there are more jobs for people, because that is the absolute best way to support a family: for people to have good-paying jobs and be able to manage that.

But more specifically, we have invested \$3.8 billion in the Roadmap to Wellness. That has an increased focus on children's mental health, and that continues. We will continue to help to improve. Some of that is education. Some of that is working with the kids directly. All of it is to try to improve the overall situation for children across the province.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bhutla Karpoche): Next question?

Mr. Billy Pang: To the member: A lot of the ongoing work of the child welfare redesign was focused on improving the quality of out-of-home care. That's an important area of focus. Children and youth in care deserve the best possible quality of care. It makes their lives better, and it helps set them up for success. So what changes would the passage of this bill make to out-of-home care requirements?

Mr. Ric Bresee: Again, my thanks to the member for the question. There are a number of changes that I spoke to in my presentation. I think the focus—and I've actually echoed it a couple of times in previous questions. The part that makes me most excited of what we are doing is we are continuing. This is not an end statement; this is a journey, and we will continue this journey to continue to improve this system for the children. Again, if we can make it so there are less children in this situation, that is the absolute right answer, but we still need to be there when children do run into these problems, when families do run into these problems, supporting the family and supporting the child to make sure that they come out the other end in a better place.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bhutla Karpoche): Next question?

Mr. Joel Harden: Thank you very much to my friend for his presentation. I'm just wondering if he has any reflections on the fact that at the rate that I'm seeing, with the evidence we have, we have a situation where, with every week, we have a few kids who are passing away in one way or another in care. He's lived it. I've grown up with friends who have had a similar experience. While I acknowledge the positive things in this bill, we have youth in our province we're losing. So how could this bill be amended to make sure that we get the services and the supports, as my friend from Hamilton Mountain was saying, into these homes to make sure that the kids who are in crisis get the help they need?

Mr. Ric Bresee: Thank you to the member from Ottawa—I forget.

Mr. Joel Harden: Ottawa Centre.

Mr. Ric Bresee: Ottawa Centre; thank you. I appreciate the question. This bill is about making sure that we solve some of the problems within the structure, within the system. We have methods to make sure that the service

providers, those out-of-home service providers, are following the rules and we ensure the safety.

One of the most egregious things that we learn about is when people that are empowered and entrusted to take care of a child have abused that. This bill will help to address that because of the regulations, because of the monitoring requirements that are built into this particular bill. This is not a particular funding bill. Our budget was a particular funding bill, and we continue to provide more and more funding into these programs to make sure that they are supported. I hope the members opposite would consider supporting the budget to make sure that that funding that they keep asking about is there.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bhutla Karpoche): Further debate?

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: I first want to thank the member from Hastings–Lennox and Addington for sharing his experience of when he was a youth growing up in his family, and I think what I got from that, and many of us over time, is that everyone of us has a story of where we come from, our challenges, our successes. And I congratulate you that your father did overcome his challenges of alcoholism and was able to repair a relationship in your youth, because it's so important, those bonds that children develop with parents.

I've talked in the House about my family experience. My parents came here from Portugal. I was born in Portugal. They came here when I was six years old, with five kids, five children: three brothers and my sister and myself. One of the things that my dad wanted to come to Canada for, first of all, was because my mom was very, very, very ill, and her mother had the same illness, and he wanted to seek treatment for my mom. So as a young child, I never really had my mother as a role model, but she was the sweetest, kindest, gentlest person that could you ever meet.

Now, saying that, the roles in our family were vastly different from what we were used to culturally, because, coming from Portugal, there are set roles in that culture. So my dad, God rest his soul, he was an amazing individual, as my mom was. She was an incredible person, but my father stepped up to the role of being the mother and the father, the provider, the caretaker, the whole gamut. What is so awesome about that particular experience, from my perspective, is that, in my culture, that is not normally—that a father would take that role on. And so, he was obviously so adaptable to making sure our family stayed together, because it's so easy that a family could fall through the cracks, and that's, I think, what I'm trying to express.

So, while we were in Canada, my brother Steve was born, so there was number four, four brothers and one sister and myself, so we ended up to be six. When my mother was gravely ill, for decades, quite frankly, my sister, Nelia, she was the older sister of the two of us, by two years, and so, because of her ranking, her position in the family, she, again, was kind of selected to be the mother, the head of the household, literally at eight years old, because when we came here, as I said, my mother was

sick. She became the person who translated for my father, took my mother to medical appointments. As a young girl, as she was older, if the principal called, she would be dealing with my brothers if there was a little bit of turmoil, which wasn't at all a bad thing. But the nice part was we had a support system in the school. It was very, very comforting. We had a support system in the school.

The interesting part is my father never hid my mother's illness. None of us ever hid my mother's illness. There was nothing, really, to be ashamed of, and maybe that's because of our ignorance; I don't know. Or maybe we just loved our mother so much we felt that she should belong and we shouldn't have any stigma because she's our mother, regardless of what her situation was.

So, going to school, we had a lot of support. I'll never forget my kindergarten teacher, Mrs. Bladek. She and Mrs. Weaver, they took me under their wing. Mrs. Bladek, in particular, knew our situation. I'm sure all the teachers did. If one did, I'm sure that they all talked about the situation. But she would come over to our home and have dinner with us, and she'd come over and give us Christmas presents. She'd socialize with us outside of school. She would take me to the local diner back then, when Simpsons had a lunch counter, and she would take me out for lunch when lunch hour was. You could do that back then.

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We were very fortunate, and I think that what I'm trying to illustrate here is that if we didn't have the help—from our extended family, by the way. I have to thank my aunts and my uncles. They all knew about my mom's situation. They all helped out, and my cousins. It was a very strange way to have an upbringing because, if I talk about the story, you'll hear in my voice that it was a very positive experience that I had, but in a very odd circumstance, where your mother was ill for decades. But because of the people who were around us, helped us, didn't see it as something to be ashamed of, something to be disgusted by—because my mother did have very, very frequently, daily, regularly, episodes that made it hard on all of us.

But again, the upbringing that I had, the people who were in my life—I'm so fortunate and grateful that they were there, because we as a family and each of my individual siblings—no one strayed, thank goodness. I listened to the member from Hastings–Lennox and Addington, what happened with him and how he had to leave his home at 16. Depending on the situation, maybe I would have had to have left because of the conditions. But because of my father and my sister and my brothers, it was a good home. It was a stable home, and we all knew the predictability and what to expect. It was nothing tragic that traumatized me growing up, because I was raised with that illness, and the expectation to support each other was, I guess, an underlined, known, unspoken thing. So we did that.

But if that wasn't the case, I reflect on the story I heard earlier from that member, that things could have gone sideways. My father could have turned to alcoholism. My father could have been an abusive person. I mean, he had six children; that's stressful. He worked full time as a

labourer and then had to come home and make dinner and account for all of us. So it was quite remarkable, I have to say, that we are not a story that we're discussing today.

The bill does make some headway in ways. There's strengthening in licensing. There's strengthening inspectors. But one thing I should tell you I think should be in here is that the for-profit private group home piece should be removed, because I think that goes a long way. We had some history; we all know what the history is of these group homes, and I'll talk about something that's current in my riding in a short piece. But the history that has happened, all the cases that have come forward in the media: Those for-profit homes did not have the oversight required to protect our children.

This is part of the reason why I think we need to—it doesn't matter what government, but there's always the financial piece that we forget. And once there's a private home or a private long-term-care home or a private child care or daycare centre, the oversight, the transparency and the accountability just isn't there like if it was a non-profit-run organization. That, to me, is a very important piece that should be in here.

Like I say, this bill is supportable. There are lots of good things that are happening. But the history how we led up to here is really devastating. As everyone knows right now, back a few years ago—in 2012, actually—there was a class action lawsuit by crown wards because of the treatment from CAS, and so the government of Ontario agreed to a proposed settlement for all persons who were alive as of January 22, 2012, who were crown wards in Ontario at any time from the period on or after January 1, 1966, until March 30, 2017, and suffered physical or sexual assault before or while a crown ward, and the court approved a notice of settlement approving hearing available etc. So these things go back to 1966.

And do you know what? We've heard articles about calling these kids or clients, these residents, "cash cows." When we're talking about 1966, and still today we're hearing horrible stories in the news about the Conner Homes, about Expanding Horizons, about the Johnson Children's Services—these are for-profit homes who have really created these issues in their homes because they were worrying about the profit and not the service delivery, not looking after the best interests of the children. There were various other things, too, the government—which I'm surprised that we're still talking about today: training and education for people who worked in these for-profit private homes.

Quite frankly, the Expanding Horizons home is one of the—they're all horrific. But a young man, around 14 years old, David Roman, was murdered in that home. If that doesn't move you to understand that this is not a business, this is not a for-profit enterprise, we need to really do some more digging in making changes to how we perceive and how we are setting policies when it comes to financial intent when it comes to our children.

And I can tell you what happened was that, because this went before the courts, the person who had the children in their home, they said that they did not have any training

whatsoever. They were 24 years old, by the way, and I believe they had four high-risk residents. The person that was in charge of the home explained to Expanding Horizons that he didn't have any training, had never had interaction with children, but that didn't stop that business transaction from happening, and that is what the problem is, I think, when we talk about making things better, and we forget that it's not a business. Human resources, human beings, are not businesses.

That leads me to talk about, in London—so this is a very recent article. I'm hoping I can get through it so I can actually talk about what currently happened yesterday.

This was on November 15, 2023. It's an article written about the London CAS and that they're saying that they currently have no beds available for some of the city's most vulnerable youth. Because of pre-existing gaps in services, they've only grown wider and wider in the city and across the province, according to Gerry Healy, and there's no space to place high-needs children who require special treatment and aren't able to return home for a variety of reasons.

That's the other thing: There's a lot of high-needs children here whose parents cannot continue to care for, because the resources aren't there for them to be supported at home. I actually talked to a family and the whole team at the time about how they adopted a child, a young girl. Now she's 12 years old, and her behaviours have gotten so bad that they need help, and the children's aid society is not able to place her because of her needs. This is another family who is in crisis, who can fall apart at any time. We don't want children to be the victims or the outcome of the fact that we don't have the right supports for these children. But what's happening—that's a high-risk situation. Again, they want to be placed, and CAS doesn't have the capability of placing those children in specialized homes where people have that training.

But what is also happening here in London is—"When you're putting a teenager or a child as young as 11 in hotel rooms and calling that home, I'd say [the situation] is significantly dire," said Healy."

That's what's happening, like I say, in November 2023, and during the pandemic that was also happening. But what is more alarming, Speaker, is that it's still happening today. Just yesterday, I was speaking to someone that I know, who's very close to me, and their 15-year-old niece was in a London hotel room through the custody being in CAS. This is a huge, huge inadequacy and can lead to so many problems.

One of the things in the article—and I'm sure we can all connect the dots when it comes to a young person in a hotel room, isolated from connecting with other people—you've got social media. The 401 is on the hub of human trafficking, because there are so many hotels on the highway. So, of course, you've got these youth, very impressionable, come from a family—in her case, her parents, unfortunately, are addicts, and they can't place her. And the other thing is they separated her from her younger siblings, which is very traumatic for her. This is a story that continues to happen.

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One of the things that CAS had said is that they're on the verge of filing bankruptcy because they have such high deficits. And I know government had at one time bailed out or funded those deficits, but we need to make sure that we actually provide the funds to the CASs that are supposed to be in charge or overseeing our children. Bills like this are a good step, but if the mechanisms and the instruments are not in place to actually deliver what this bill promises, then really, we're not doing anything. It's not justice for our children. We're not giving them the opportunity to thrive. We're not giving them the opportunity to live in a safe home and access all the basic needs that they have.

One of the things that this person told me that their niece was experiencing was a lack of food, believe it or not. So at one point, they were in school and they fainted because they didn't get anything to eat. A growing teenager—this is not the kind of nourishment that we should be offering, having a granola bar for breakfast. When her parents were in a bad way, they left the home for a month, and nobody found out. Do you know how they found out that she was the one that was looking after her younger siblings? It was because she was actually stealing snacks from school and bringing them home so that the children could have something to eat. This is a true story, and it's not exaggerated. I don't like exaggerating. People who know me here—I don't make things up to get attention. This actually is from someone who I know, very close to me, telling me what they're experiencing now.

So I really implore the government, maybe in committee, that when you're in committee, really think about making sure that all these rules have a purpose, all these rules will actually mean something and create the outcomes that we need. Because we can create all the rules we want, but when we have a system that isn't transparent, that isn't accountable and that doesn't have the right oversight, we're failing the children that we are protecting.

There are inspections here, which great, they're on site; you don't have to call anymore. There are fines of \$250,000 and a year in jail. But that isn't going to help the victims. That isn't going to help the children that were offended, that were taken advantage of by those people that work there or by those operators. That's too late. So we need to make sure that when there's the non-profit piece for our kids, they're not a cheque for the care system. These are human beings. They're the most vulnerable.

There is a piece in here now that they can go to the Ombudsman, but we have to remember the child advocate was really the strongest voice for our children in care. I understand that since the Ombudsman has taken over—I had down here that there were 200 complaints in one year as opposed to 2,000 when there was a child advocate. So it's not getting out there, if a child needs to speak out on their behalf. And it shouldn't be their responsibility, quite frankly. Imagine being a child, an eight- or nine-year-old, and you're supposed to seek out where you're going to report what's happening to you. It's good that the list has been expanded for reporting; that's good. But again,

there's so many other things that need to be strengthened in this legislation.

I know that early childhood educators are one of the ones in here dedicated to report, and that's really important because, again, they look after the youngest populations. That's why it's so important, when we are talking about child care in this province, that we respect the workers that work in those spaces. We want to make sure that there is that retention because continuity is how you catch some of these reports of abuse. It's the continuity of care. You know, the same person, perhaps, is looking after that little child that comes in. But if you have an overturn on staff all the time, you're going to miss those signs of what the child might be going through. So having a strong early childhood educator workforce is so important.

We have to make sure that we create it as a career and pay early childhood workers, registered ECEs and all staff a wage that makes them want to be in that career, and it's not a revolving door for a step up to another job. I've advocated for that in this Legislature, and I'm going to bring a private member's bill. I'm very passionate about that because we need, again, to look to the future, that if we're building these child care spaces and we want to have early childhood educators understand and report, that we need to create the workforce. We need to have the training and the proper workforce environment to make sure that these professionals get the respect that they deserve, because we owe them that, because we owe it to our children, if we're going to have people who are supposed to care for them, give them the best care.

We owe it to the children and we owe it to the workers to have the training and the education, and we need to make sure that these agencies are non-profit. It shouldn't be a for-profit business; it should be a not-for-profit so we can have the proper care and oversight to look after our most vulnerable children.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bhutila Karpoche): Questions?

Mr. Graham McGregor: Thank you to my colleague across for your remarks. I was taken aback by the story that you told about your family and your father particularly. What an awesome man to raise six kids and provide and take on all those roles. And what a great community you must have had around you. I'm so glad that you are now here, sitting as a member of provincial Parliament. What a success story that says for Ontario, for our province.

One of the things that this act is trying to change is, right now, while you were able to tell your story, a lot of the children that are in care—under the current wording of the Child, Youth and Family Services Act—aren't able to tell their stories. We, on our side—and certainly I—believe that they should be able to tell the stories of what they experienced and what it was like for them growing up and growing up in care.

Does the member agree this is a good, positive change that members of the House should be voting for?

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: Yes, absolutely. I think good policy in any ministry takes into account the people

that it's trying to make policies for. And when you're trying to make policies for people with mental health, with addictions, when you're trying to make policies for intimate partner violence, when you're trying to make policies for children—our most vulnerable—absolutely, you need to listen to children.

Quite frankly, children are very smart. They'll tell you the truth about everything and I think listening to children is a huge part of how we can actually make the system better, so that we can eliminate—hopefully, in the future—all those blemishes that they've experienced before we make things better in this bill.

Yes, this bill is supportable. There are some good things in there and it's good to have, making sure that children have contributions into the care that they receive.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bhutla Karpoche): Next question?

Mr. Wayne Gates: In Bill 188, fines have been increased to \$250,000 under this bill, including the ability to fine that provides direct—but not to individuals. While this is supportive, we see what's happened in the long-term-care system, that increased fines don't always mean fines will actually be enforced. Why the Conservative government continues to do that, I don't know.

So, my question is, what resources do you think the ministry will have to do to actually enforce these fines and ensure that bad actors are held accountable and our children are taken care of?

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: I thank the member from Niagara Falls for his question because it is like every sector of care when it comes to providing care for vulnerables, and he's the critic for long-term care. And so, you have children who are the most vulnerable—the young, they can't speak for themselves—and you have elderly people, who are in the most vulnerable situations because they depend on the care of the long-term care.

And those infractions, those types of horrible acts that happened in long-term care and the fact that this government waived their legal liability to be accountable for those acts is really awful. It's despicable, quite frankly.

So in order to make sure that fines are enacted, they have to be enforced and they have to follow through. And I hope that the paper that this bill is written on isn't just useless paper; it actually has some teeth and people will be charged. And these homes then will also be taken over by the government and given to someone else to manage instead.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bhutla Karpoche): Next question?

Mr. Rick Byers: I thank the member for her comments. As was noted, the comments she made about her family, and listening earlier to the member for Hastings—Lennox and Addington about his family, his situation—and earlier, the parliamentary assistant, the member from Thornhill, also shared her past experience. I find those make the comments so relevant for all of us. I very much appreciate the member sharing those with us.

1630

The government introduced many measures in this area, but like everything, there's always more to do. This bill contains a number of measures—you mentioned them in your remarks, enforcement measures. In contemplating those important measures, which we believe will increase the quality of care for children, are those measures something the member can support through this bill?

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: I did read the sections of the bill, and there was one particular one which, again, is left up to the minister, where the minister has discretion in a certain section under 261.1 that isn't subject to the tribunal—because again, there are parts in here where they can't actually file an appeal if the infractions are so egregious. But it shouldn't take infractions to be that egregious before things are revealed. Having inspections and compliance and that follow-through has to happen, as in long-term care. That's what happened. All these inspections happened, compliance never really got followed through, and things got worse.

So yes, there are some strong pieces in here. I just hope that they're actually used, and it's not just on paper, black and white.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bhutla Karpoche): Next question?

Miss Monique Taylor: Thank you to the member for London—Fanshawe for sharing such a deep, personal story of her family and the struggles that they faced with mental health. We know now that mental health is that much more prevalent. We definitely see that in our children and youth—many of those children who are ending up in care due to their mental health, which really shouldn't be the purpose of child protection. Could the member maybe give some insight or thought to what the government could do better to ensure that children with mental health don't end up in the children's welfare sector?

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: Absolutely. I think it's much more of a topic that people are more willing to talk about openly, especially during the pandemic. I heard from a member, actually, across the way. He was talking about one of his children. They're 18 and during the pandemic it really took a toll on them, but luckily, they found the resources and the resilience inside themselves to move forward. But that's not the case with everybody.

Mental health is a huge, huge problem in Ontario—quite frankly, in society—and we have to make sure that we actually put the resources in. We talk about upfront investment in mental health. There are wait-lists. Can you imagine? There are wait-lists for a child to get mental health services. And when you have services for children under 18, then they actually don't transfer those services over to when they're 18. Those things need to change. We need to make sure we look after our children so that as they age into adulthood, they become productive and healthy people in our society who can contribute in the way that they know best.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bhutla Karpoche): Next question.

Mr. Sam Oosterhoff: The new application process for anyone wishing to provide care that is proposed in this bill would ask for more details from applicants about the services and the programming that they are proposing to provide for the children and youth in their care. I'm wondering if the member opposite supports these changes and if she believes it's important that those who are seeking to provide care to children in our communities, those who are committing to providing for some of the most vulnerable in our society, are transparent about which services and programming they're going to be providing.

I know it's something I've heard about in my community, the need for ensuring that there is more accountability and transparency around the provision of this type of care and services, and I'm wondering if the member opposite has any thoughts on that or anything she wants to add to that.

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: Actually, in the bill, in that section that the member is referring to, there is a part where they actually have to describe the access to care that the youth will be getting. It's basically a plan, what services are available. That wasn't in legislation before, which, again, seems kind of common sense, that if someone is accessing services, especially a child, a youth, they would have a prescribed plan of how to help the youth, whether it's social services, whether it's education-based, whether it's physical, whether it's therapy, whatever the case may be. That is in this bill, that that has to be revealed, and that will give some legitimacy to these resident group homes.

But again, I stress that they should not be private, for-profit facilities. These should all be non-profit, so that all monies go into the care of our children, and the responsibility and oversight is wide open so that if anything can happen, the government is prepared to deal with it on the spot.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bhutla Karpoche): Further debate?

Ms. Aislinn Clancy: I'm here today to share a little bit about my perspective as a social worker. I worked in social work for 11 years, and I have seen that the kids are not okay.

I do appreciate the policies being brought forward today and the efforts they make to stop harm to children and youth in care. We know that these children are the most vulnerable in our society. We've seen over the years, especially since COVID, the increased need and complexity of kids acting out. We hear this from our school staff, who face this every day. We also hear about the demand for care, that children's aid societies are struggling to find enough foster parents to provide adequate care and have enough housing for kids. We have kids living in hotels, kids living in the children's aid society buildings themselves. We know that this is not okay.

I do want to thank the government also, though, for funding more beds for kids who are facing complex mental health needs. We've seen beds in London; we've had a few beds added in my community in Kitchener. But I want to draw on some concerns not only about the problem, the root causes of this, but also what we could be doing to prevent kids from ending up in care in the first place.

We are the richest province in Canada, but we contribute least to children's and youth's mental health and, of course, children's aid societies. I was saddened in 2018 to hear that the Child and Youth Advocate, the lawyer for kids in care—their office was closed, their shutters shut. I think we could have done well to avoid some of these bad-case scenarios if we had kept that advocate in their place for the last six years when this government has been in office.

I do appreciate this policy, because as a social worker I know that when I hear a kid is in a certain home or a certain provider in my community, we need to be vigilant. We call children's aid on the care provider. I've had family members work in this care setting and leave traumatized, never to work in social work again, because they're understaffed and under-supported as social workers. So not only do we need to fund foster parents, but we also need to fund these homes adequately to ensure that social workers working in that setting are supported.

Just this past Friday, I talked to a family whose child has autism. They're on the wait-list. They've been waiting for two years. They shared with me that they're hanging on by a thread. Because their child doesn't get the adequate support in the community, they are faced with the reality that they may not be able to support their 12-year-old in their home going forward. We need to do better to fund kids with complex needs.

Not only that, but I have a grave concern for the services we offer kids with complex needs. We've seen child and adolescent services in Hamilton and offices in Burlington and other communities facing closures because they offer long-term outpatient care for those with trauma, attachment and complex needs.

So, if I may ask one thing, I hope that this government will properly fund the specialists who are the experts in addressing complex mental health.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bhutla Karpoche): Questions?

Miss Monique Taylor: Thank you to the member from Kitchener Centre. I'm grateful that she brought up the fact that she was a social worker, that people who she knew have been social workers, and their experience within the sector forcing them to leave the sector. We have definitely seen a lot of that, a lot of turnover—underpaid, overworked, not enough qualifications. That may not be the case with yours but with others who are working within the system and the fault of the system.

1640

I'd like to know if the member would support the NDP request to ensure that all group homes be not-for-profit in the province, and ensure that kids are not just cash cows.

Ms. Aislinn Clancy: It is a for-profit home that I have the greatest concern about. I would like to see the data on the differential. I think that was helpful when it came to long-term care. We saw that the outcomes were better in not-for-profit homes. I know that that was the reality in my community: that they offered better outcomes for all the

residents living there in terms of COVID and health outcomes.

I do think that not-for-profits are the way to go for all the complex mental health care that existed in our communities. As it shifts to brief eight-session services and we get away from things like long-term outpatient supports, those expert clinicians, people who write the books on sexual abuse survival, sexualized behaviours, attachment, trauma—all those expert professionals are leaving the not-for-profit sector. They're being pushed and shoved into the for-profit sector, which we know is out of reach for so many families who cannot afford \$180 an hour.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bhutila Karpoche): Next question?

Mr. Logan Kanapathi: Thank you to the member from Kitchener for sharing your experience as a social worker. It is commendable, and thank you for that.

Madam Speaker, this bill proposes a modern and flexible suite of tools that will empower ministry inspectors to improve compliance rates among the licensed providers of out-of-home care to children and youth. In my remarks, I mentioned that we are supporting that oversight by adding 20 new positions across the province.

My question to the member: Does the member opposite support stronger oversight and accountability for those providing care for Ontario's most vulnerable young people?

Ms. Aislinn Clancy: Thank you to the member opposite. Of course, we want to ensure accountability; we want to ensure protection for kids. I think it's more cost-effective and humane to invest in prevention. I think prevention is the way to go, especially as we look at these young people. They are young; we know that if we leave trauma and attachment concerns and complex needs unaddressed—whether that's autism or sexual abuse or

other kinds of mental health concerns, we know that the longer we leave those issues unaddressed, the more likely it is that the child will have a struggle to recover from these difficulties. So while, yes, it is good to be responsive and reactive to harms that happen in these foster care settings, we need to look at the value of investing in prevention. I truly believe this is outpatient care from expert clinicians that we are losing in this province.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bhutila Karpoche): Final question? A quick one.

Mr. Joel Harden: I want to thank the member for Kitchener Centre for talking from the perspective of a social worker, which is a useful one for this discussion. I want her to reflect upon what we could do as a province to incentivize people to pursue social work as a career, particularly for marginalized people, given that you've walked in those shoes. And I'm wondering if you could talk specifically about cases where we know private, for-profit homes are inadequately staffing residential facilities for people at risk.

Ms. Aislinn Clancy: Yes, I think we see a big problem of social workers being underpaid. I know I worked in the not-for-profit sector, and we got paid a fraction of what people get paid in the private clinical counselling. Most of the folks, I think, if you go to an MSW program, they're looking to do private practice because you can get paid much more. We underpay our social workers.

But, yes, I've heard time and time and time again social workers quitting for this for-profit setting in my community because they felt unsafe, unsupported and they could no longer do their job, even to keep themselves safe, let alone the kids in their care.

Report continues in volume B.

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