

Legislative
Assembly
of Ontario



Assemblée
législative
de l'Ontario

STANDING COMMITTEE ON FINANCE AND ECONOMIC AFFAIRS

PRE-BUDGET CONSULTATION 2023

1st Session, 43rd Parliament
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The Honourable Ted Arnott, MPP
Speaker of the Legislative Assembly

Sir,

Your Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs has the honour to present its Report and commends it to the House.

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Ernie Hardeman".

Ernie Hardeman, MPP
Chair of the Committee

Queen's Park
April 2023

STANDING COMMITTEE ON FINANCE AND ECONOMIC
AFFAIRS

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1st Session, 43rd Parliament

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*TERENCE KERNAGHAN was replaced by DOLY BEGUM on February
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ARIS BABIKIAN regularly served as a substitute member of the
Committee.

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HEATHER CONKLIN
Research Officer

ALEX ALTON
Research Officer

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COMMITTEE

INTRODUCTION

The Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs conducted its pre-Budget hearings in the following locations: Kenora (January 9); Windsor (January 23); Essex (January 24); Sudbury (January 30); Sault Ste. Marie (January 31); Timmins (February 2); Ottawa (February 6); Kingston (February 7); Barrie (February 13); and Toronto (February 14).

The pre-Budget consultation provides an opportunity for citizens, stakeholders, and local government partners to discuss their social, economic, and program-related concerns with elected representatives, and to make recommendations to provincial ministries. Many witnesses discussed continued challenges for their sectors in connection with Ontario's ongoing COVID-19 recovery. In total, 140 witnesses appeared before the Committee and more than 200 witnesses provided written submissions.

This report is an overview of the main issues raised by presenters during the pre-Budget consultation. Details of submissions by witnesses and their responses to questions by Committee Members can be found in the *Hansard* of the Committee's proceedings. Committee recommendations, and a list of the witnesses and organizations and individuals submitting written briefs, appear at the end of the report. The Committee thanks all witnesses who shared their experiences and recommendations.

COMMENTS BY MINISTRY

Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs

The Ontario Risk Management Program is an insurance program designed to protect farmers in the grains, horticulture, and livestock sectors from market volatility and production risks. Provincial funding for this program increased in 2020 from \$100 to \$150 million. A number of organizations asked for a further \$100 million increase.¹

The Ontario Federation of Agriculture spoke positively about the Province's investment in the Farmer Wellness Initiative, a mental health program aimed at farmers and their families. They suggested continued investment and expansion of the program to include farm employees.

Attorney General

Alcohol

Several stakeholders spoke about the sale of alcohol. Organizations representing convenience stores requested they be permitted to sell alcohol, urging the government to make this a priority given the impact of the pandemic on the industry.²

¹ Beef Farmers of Ontario, Grain Farmers of Ontario, Ontario Federation of Agriculture, Ontario Fruit and Vegetable Growers' Association, Ontario Sheep Farmers.

² Convenience Industry Council of Canada, Ontario Convenience Stores Association.

They suggested the ability to offer beer and wine would not only be an additional revenue stream, but also lead to customers purchasing other goods. Spirits Canada would like to see the sale of spirits in stores that are already authorized to sell beer, wine, and cider. They maintained that not having their products more widely available puts them at a disadvantage relative to other alcoholic beverages.

Industry representatives from alcohol manufacturers requested changes to the taxes and fees charged for their products. Grape Growers of Ontario, Ontario Craft Wineries, and Wine Growers Ontario recommended eliminating the 6.1% Basic Wine Tax charged on VQA/100% Ontario-grown wines because it only applies to Ontario producers. Ontario Craft Brewers asked the Province to cancel the beer can tax as it has been in place since 1992 and they suggested it is outdated. They explained that the impact of the tax increased during the pandemic as brewers had to shift sales away from higher margin draught beer to selling close to 100% of their product in cans.

Court Administration

The Ontario Trial Lawyers Association said that COVID-19 exacerbated the existing backlog of civil cases awaiting trial. They recommended eliminating juries for most civil cases as a measure to streamline court processing, noting that civil jury cases have longer trials and use more court resources.

Legal Aid

Witnesses expressed concerns about access to legal aid and recommended the Province restore and enhance legal aid funding.³ Legal Assistance of Windsor and Community Legal Aid stressed that, with the courts reopening and the tribunal system working to address case backlogs, stable funding for legal aid is required.

The Ontario Council of Agencies Serving Immigrants asked that Ontario work with the federal government to establish a long-term, sustainable funding model for immigration and refugee legal aid, and end the agreement with Canada Border Services Agency on holding immigration detainees in provincial correctional facilities.

Lotteries and Gambling

The Ontario Convenience Stores Association urged the Province to make necessary policy changes to allow convenience stores to launch 50/50 electronic charitable raffles to support local charities and hospitals.

The Responsible Gambling Council expressed appreciation for the Responsible Internet Gambling Fund, implemented as part of the launch of Ontario's iGaming market. They requested increased investment in the fund.

³ These witnesses included the Advocacy Centre for Tenants Ontario and Income Security Advocacy Centre.

Children, Community and Social Services

Child Welfare and Child Protection Services

The Ontario Federation of Indigenous Friendship Centres asked Ontario to prioritize shifting resources away from child protection agencies and into community-based Indigenous prevention services. They requested \$38.1 million annual funding to advance this work.

Child and Family Services of Grand Erie requested funding to address Children's Aid Society (CAS) deficits and increase CAS capacity to support children and youth with complex needs. They also said funding should be provided to support the development of prevention programs aimed at reducing the need for removals and keeping children with their families.

Developmental Services

Service provider organizations asked the government to lead the development and implementation of a fully funded sector workforce strategy to attract and retain staff and provide stability for the specialized developmental services workforce.⁴

Specific requests for capital investments and other support included

- \$8 million to support construction of an affordable housing complex with units for the general population, dedicated units for people with intellectual disabilities, and a respite unit for individuals and families to receive short-term supports (L'Arche Sudbury);
- Stage 1 planning approval for the Lansdowne Children's Centre's plan to develop a new main site facility in Brantford (Lansdowne Children's Centre); and
- a direct funding option for all adults who are eligible for developmental services funding, regardless of the level of assessed need for services and supports (Microboards Ontario).

Gender-based Violence

The Committee heard that Sexual Assault Centre and women and children's shelter staff are facing high levels of fatigue and burnout as a result of the heightened violence experienced by clients throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. Organizations acknowledged investments the Province has made in the sector, including COVID-specific supports. They asked for increases in core funding and staff salaries to help address hiring and retention challenges.⁵

⁴ Ontario Agencies Supporting Individuals with Special Needs, Community Living Essex County.

⁵ Hiatus House, Sexual Assault Centre Kingston.

The Ontario Association of Interval and Transition Houses requested a \$60 million investment in core operating budgets for violence against women shelters to maintain services across Ontario.

The Ontario Nurses' Association requested funding for assault and domestic violence clinics to hire additional full-time sexual assault nurse examiners.

YWCA Ontario recommended creating and implementing a coordinated province-wide strategy to eliminate gender-based violence.

Social Assistance

The Income Security Advocacy Centre was among a number of witnesses who requested a doubling of Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP) and Ontario Works (OW) rates, and for OW rates to be indexed to inflation to align with the recent commitment made for ODSP.⁶ The Interfaith Social Assistance Reform Coalition said it would make sense to merge the two components of social assistance benefits—the basic needs and housing allowances—into a single combined benefit all recipients would qualify for, regardless of their housing status.⁷

Social Services

Ontario 211 is a helpline that connects people across the province to social services, programs, and community supports. Ontario 211 Services asked for increased operating funding, together with a one-time investment of \$1.8 million to address infrastructure upgrades and transition costs as they work to provide more connected services to Ontarians.

Colleges and Universities

Funding

University, faculty, and student representatives asked for increased funding for universities. The Council of Ontario Universities described financial pressures for their sector, including the effects of Ontario's 2019-20 tuition reduction and tuition freeze, implemented as relief measures for students. They said these measures result in universities having fewer resources to provide student supports. They also cited fiscal impacts resulting from delays in international student visa approvals. They requested additional immediate financial support and the implementation of a multi-year financial sustainability framework which would include a new tuition fee policy. The Ontario Confederation of University Faculty Associations were also concerned with post-secondary finances and requested a \$615 million increase in the per-student funding for 2023-24.

⁶ ODSP Action Coalition, Ontario Federation of Labour, Quinte Labour Council, YWCA Ontario. The National Coalition Against Poverty Canada - Ontario Chapter requested an increase in ODSP rates and changes to the Special Diet Allowance.

⁷ The Diocese of Toronto, Anglican Church of Canada made similar recommendations.

The Ontario College Student Associations for International Tuition Equity Coalition focused on tuition from the perspective of students. They recommended increasing post-secondary core funding and indexing it to inflation and requested a tuition freeze for international students for the 2023-2024 academic year.⁸ The Ontario Undergraduate Student Alliance asked the Province to extend the repayment grace period for the provincial portion of Ontario Student Assistance Program (OSAP) financial aid to a minimum of two years.

NOSM University requested support for a robust clinical faculty wellness program. They felt this would assist in the needed recruitment and retention of physicians and allied health professionals in northern Ontario. Université de Sudbury, who were previously federated with Laurentian University, called for their full integration as a standalone public French language post-secondary institution. The Assemblée de la francophonie de l'Ontario echoed this request and emphasised the importance of a francophone-operated university to the Franco-Ontarian community.

Infrastructure

Several organizations requested assistance for specific infrastructure projects on university and college campuses. The Seven Generations Education Institute and the Kenora District Services Board sought support for an expansion of the Manidoo Baawaatig Education Campus in Kenora. The expansion plan is for a new five-storey building with residential and educational spaces.⁹ Oshki-Pimache-O-Win: The Wenjack Education Institute was also focused on Indigenous education. They urged the Province to ensure operational funding and resourcing parity for Indigenous Institutes with Ontario colleges and universities to solidify Indigenous Institutes as the “third pillar” within Ontario’s post-secondary education system.

Algoma University requested support for the creation of a mental health and addictions research and training institute, led by Algoma University in partnership with Indigenous institutes, colleges, medical schools, hospitals, and other health care providers. They asked for \$1.6 million over two years to support Phase One of the development. York University requested approval and operating funding in 2027 for their planned School of Medicine to be located in the York Region.

Programs

Some presenters suggested ideas for educational policy changes to help address pressures within the provincial workforce. The Ontario Federation of Agriculture asked the Province to provide financial incentives for veterinary students and practitioners to practise in rural and remote areas to fill a shortage, especially for large animal veterinarians. The Ontario SPCA and Humane Society also made recommendations to address veterinarian shortages by increasing the size of the

⁸ The Ontario Undergraduate Student Alliance also supported limiting increases to international student tuition.

⁹ The Seven Generations Education Institute also requested support for an expansion project on their Fort Frances Campus, including a new Language Lab.

core Doctor of Veterinary Medicine program at the University of Guelph and expanding this program into northern Ontario through Lakehead University.

triOS College warned of the need to quickly hire and train more early childhood educators (ECEs) in order to meet future demand and support Ontario's goal of expanding child care spaces in the province. To address this, they contended that the Province should take steps to enable more private career colleges to train new ECEs. They commented that the College of Early Childhood Educators approves ECE training programs and has only ever approved one private college training program in terms of graduates qualifying for membership in the College.

Economic Development, Job Creation and Trade

Economic Development

Several witnesses made proposals for economic development. Invest WindsorEssex suggested that a way to support the “backbone” of local economies was to increase core funding for Small Business Enterprise Centres (SBECs) across Ontario. Small Business Centres Ontario recommended an increase of \$5 million for SBEC annual core funding. The Northwest Business Centre, Kenora and Rainy River also asked for enhanced funding for SBECs. They specifically requested an increase of \$120,000-150,000 per year for their branch. Huron County Economic Development also requested increased funding for SBECs generally, and specifically asked for investment to support increased operating funding and allocation of an additional full-time staff person for their branch.

The South Eastern Production Accelerator Fund presented information about a proposal to develop the film and television production industry in their region. They asked the Province to create a “film stream fund” of \$25 million annually for southeastern Ontario as part of the regionally focused Eastern Ontario Development Fund. They suggested that this fund could function similarly to a film and television funding stream already available to productions in northern Ontario as part of the Northern Ontario Heritage Fund Corporation's Cultural Supports Program.

Non-profit Sector

The Ontario Nonprofit Network proposed creating a dedicated Associate Minister-level appointment for the sector within the Ministry of Economic Development, Job Creation and Trade supported by a deputy or assistant deputy minister (ADM) in an office representing non-profits, charities, and social innovation. The Pillar Nonprofit Network also presented the idea of creating a minister-level appointment as a “home in government” for the sector as a way to reduce “red tape” and inefficiencies.

Education

Child Care

The Committee heard that significant investments are needed to support Ontario's child care sector. The Ontario Coalition for Better Child Care asked for an increase

of at least \$240 million for the Provincial Child Care Allocation to keep pace with inflation. YMCA Ontario sought the development of a workforce strategy for the child care sector, including investing in an early childhood education workforce public recruitment campaign and incentivizing colleges and universities to grow their ECE programs.¹⁰

The Home Child Care Association of Ontario asked the Province to provide start-up capital assistance for new licensed home child care providers. The Child Care Providers Resource Network requested support for the recruitment and training of home child care providers.

The Ontario Federation of Indigenous Friendship Centres asked that the Province help to enable Indigenous-led child care and early learning by transferring administrative and management responsibilities for child care and early learning programs to Indigenous Friendship Centres (IFCs) and allocating child care dollars directly to IFCs rather than through Service Managers.

The Association of Day Care Operators of Ontario suggested expanding the Ontario Childcare Access and Relief from Expenses (CARE) Tax Credit.

Elementary and Secondary Schools

The Committee heard from a variety of education stakeholders about the ongoing challenges for learning recovery in Ontario schools. A common theme was the need for increased mental health supports for students and teachers. Witnesses also spoke about the importance of enhancing supports for students with special needs, students who do not speak English as a first language, as well as Black and Indigenous students to address inequities and improve education outcomes.¹¹

The Ontario English Catholic Teachers' Association spoke about the importance of investing in learning recovery in the classroom, stating that COVID-19 magnified issues of student mental health and well-being, especially for equity deserving students. The Ontario Catholic School Trustees' Association asked for a multi-year funding strategy for learning recovery, faith formation, and student mental health programs and services to address COVID-19 impacts, and additional funding for operational costs associated with virtual, board-operated, online learning programs.

Representatives explained that the pandemic also highlighted existing concerns about the need to reduce class sizes, improve student and staff safety, and improve the physical conditions of schools. Specific recommendations included

¹⁰ The YMCA of Eastern Ontario and YMCA of Northeastern Ontario presented before the Committee and made similar requests. They also urged the Province to recruit new immigrants to the ECE sector and recognize home country credentials.

¹¹ For example, the Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario requested increased funding for school boards to hire additional counsellors, social workers, and school nurses that would specifically assist families and students from Black, racialized, and Indigenous communities, as well as students living in low-income communities.

- allocating funding to reduce class sizes and establishing a class size cap of 24 students for grades four to eight, and 26 students for kindergarten classes (Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario);¹²
- providing sustained funding for programs to reduce violence in schools and establishing a specific education sector regulation under the *Occupational Health and Safety Act* (Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation);¹³
- investing an additional \$1.6 billion annually to repair publicly funded schools and address school infrastructure problems, which are estimated to total \$16.8 billion (Fix Our Schools);
- increasing the level of provincial funding for replacement workers to cover staff sick leaves (Ottawa-Carleton District School Board);
- investing roughly \$19 million in community use of schools and related programs (SPACE Coalition);
- increasing funding for specialised programs, such as the International Baccalaureate and Advanced Placement programs, and ensuring all students have access to them (Federation of Canadian Secondary Students); and
- providing \$975,000 annually for three years to Connected North to deliver a range of virtual educational and mental wellbeing resources for students living in remote northern communities (TakingITGlobal).

Underpinning these recommendations were requests for significant investments in public education. The Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario and Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation were critical of existing funding formulas, suggesting, for example, that they do not provide sufficient funding to support students with special needs.

The Ontario Public School Boards' Association (OPSBA) made a number of recommendations directed at supporting Indigenous education in the province, including that the Ministry develop and fund a mandatory residential schools curriculum as part of the Ontario Secondary School Diploma. They said the curriculum should include supports for teaching staff and ensure collaboration at the local level between First Nations and school boards to embed locally developed content reflecting local history.

OPSBA also highlighted the need for an updated framework for student transportation, recommending a needs-based approach and benchmarks that reflect the true costs of providing student transportation. School Bus Ontario asked the Province to provide emergency funding to respond to rising school bus operating

¹² Ontario English Catholic Teachers' Association and Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation also spoke about reducing class sizes.

¹³ Several witnesses touched on the issue of violence in schools. ETFO Thames Valley Teacher Local suggested developing an Anti-Violence Action Plan to eliminate violence within schools. They said it should include concrete and attainable violence reduction targets and be fully funded with annual review to measure outcomes.

costs and to enhance wages for drivers, noting that school bus drivers have the highest class of driver's licence in Ontario and must pass multiple yearly certifications and courses.

On the topic of virtual learning, a number of witnesses stressed the importance of a full return to in-person learning and asked the Province to abandon any plans to make virtual learning a permanent fixture of elementary school.¹⁴ The Federation of Canadian Secondary Students requested increased funding for standalone virtual schools operated by district school boards to relieve the burdens of hybrid learning.

Energy

Energy Costs

Witnesses expressed concerns about the impact of electricity rates on businesses and households. The Windsor Essex Regional Chamber of Commerce recommended the return to off-peak hydro pricing for an additional year to reduce operating expenses and alleviate cost pressures that continue to affect many businesses and industries. The Coalition of Concerned Manufacturers and Businesses of Canada suggested a constant industrial power rate and providing small businesses with a flat electricity rate that does not require load-shifting to off-peak times, noting this can be impractical for businesses. The Low-Income Energy Network recommended creating a new, ongoing monthly support program for low-income people who rely on unregulated fuel types such as oil, propane, and wood to heat their homes.

The Canadian Fuels Association proposed a low-carbon fuel producer tax credit for fuels produced in Ontario for a period of 10 years. Under the proposal, the rate could vary according to carbon intensity reduction, with the highest reductions receiving a tax break of \$0.34 a litre.

Environment, Conservation and Parks

Flood Prevention

Witnesses identified concerns about flooding and made recommendations to the Committee about flood mitigation. The Muskoka Lakes Association asked that the Province continue providing \$5 million in annual funding for the Muskoka Watershed Conservation and Management Initiative, allowing for planning and execution of key flood risk projects. Conservation Ontario requested an increase in the investment in natural hazards programs and urged the Province to consider matching federal disaster mitigation and flood hazard programs.

¹⁴ For example, Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario and Ontario English Catholic Teachers' Association presented on this topic.

Finance

Financial Literacy

The Canadian Bankers Association discussed the importance of financial literacy. They recounted a story of an elderly person going to a bank to withdraw thousands of dollars. The teller—who was educated in detecting financial fraud—identified that the elderly person was the victim of a “grandparent scam” and took steps to stop the withdrawal and protect the vulnerable senior. They advocated broadly for more financial literacy in Ontario and supported making financial literacy a mandatory component of the school curriculum.

Insurance

Several witnesses from the insurance sector recommended changes they would like to see in regulating the insurance market. The Canadian Association of Direct Relationship Insurers suggested removing the insurance rating territory design rules which they saw as arbitrary and preventing fair and accurate prices for drivers.

Desjardins Group proposed establishing an independent expert assessment agency to make medical determinations that would be binding on both the insurer and the claimant. They said this would replace the current industry dispute practice of “dueling medical expert opinions” between the insurer and claimant.

FAIR Association of Victims for Accident Insurance Reform called for reinstating pre-judgment interest as previously determined under the Financial Services Regulatory Authority Dispute Resolution system. They also detailed mechanisms to encourage timely resolution of claims, such as imposing interest charges on overdue payments.

Targeted Investments and Strategies

Witnesses made arguments for direct investments intended to develop their specific industries and grow the Ontario economy more broadly. The Ontario Institute for Regenerative Medicine requested an investment of \$25 million in funding for their organization to help accelerate the translation of academic research in stem cells and regenerative medicine technologies to practical marketable applications.

The Chemistry Industry Association of Canada requested the creation of an Action Plan for the chemistry and plastic sectors to create a competitive business environment, support innovation and commercialization of innovative technologies, and improve the talents and skills of Ontario’s workforce.

The Council of Canadian Innovators promoted a provincial semiconductor strategy that would include tax incentives for domestic semiconductor manufacturers, funding for research, increased access to skilled labour, and protections for domestic intellectual property.

Life Sciences Ontario and Ontario Bioscience Innovation Organization asked the Province to create a Health Innovation Capital Fund of \$100 million over five years.

This would be separate from the existing Life Sciences Innovation Fund (LSIF) and be managed by life science investment specialists. They argued that such a fund is needed to help commercialize emerging research and would lead to sustainable financial returns and enable Ontario life sciences companies to compete globally. The Ontario Bioscience Innovation Organization further requested that the Province establish a two-year, \$20-million fund to encourage procurement of domestically developed health technologies.

Tax Policies

As with previous pre-budget hearings, there were many recommendations from assorted witnesses seeking specific changes to tax policies and legislation. This year these requests included

- exempting museums from municipal property taxes as educational institutions (Canadian Automotive Museum);
- exempting not-for-profit historical organizations incorporated through affiliation with the Ontario Historical Society from property taxes (Ontario Historical Society);
- increasing Ontario's small business tax rate deduction threshold to at least \$600,000 and indexing it to inflation (Canadian Federation of Independent Business);
- simplifying the Ontario Computer Animation and Special Effects (OCASE) Tax Credit and untethering the OCASE credit from the other film and television credits (FilmOntario);
- expanding the Non-Resident Speculation Tax exemption to include participants in the Rural Northern Immigration Pilot as well as those awaiting permanent resident status and post-graduation work permit holders living in northern communities (Thunder Bay Chamber of Commerce);
- temporarily reducing age eligibility for the Ontario Seniors' Public Transit Tax Credit to include a larger segment of the working population (Toronto's Downtown Business Improvement Areas); and
- lowering the tax rate for seniors generally and across all income levels.¹⁵

Transparency and Accountability

The District of Kenora Unincorporated Areas Ratepayers Association was concerned with the Provincial Land Tax (PLT). They highlighted potential changes they characterized as improving transparency regarding the use of PLT funds for taxpayers. They requested a requirement that landowners who pay PLT be provided an annual report with a summary of the allocation of the tax revenue on a service-by-service basis.

¹⁵ Doug Jones.

The Community Commonwealth Association wanted to see more accountability for the effectiveness of money spent in the budgeting process. They suggested including what they called “Community Standards of Performance for Government Policies and Public Service Programs” aimed at developing unbiased measures of government performance.

An individual suggested changes to the budgeting process that would see “each government department budget divided by the number of taxpayers contributing to the budget” and have further assessments of the efficiency of the use of these funds.¹⁶ Another individual expressed concerns with the budgetary consultation process. In particular, they would like the survey that is part of the Ministry of Finance’s pre-budget consultation to include more explicit reference to a range of topics such as climate change and the environment.¹⁷

Tobacco and Vaping

The Committee heard from witnesses concerned with the distribution of contraband tobacco in the province. Rothmans, Benson & Hedges emphasized the negative effect of the contraband tobacco trade on government revenues from tobacco products. Witnesses made suggestions for amendments to the *Tobacco Tax Act* to enhance enforcement, including giving police services more authority to conduct tobacco enforcement investigations.¹⁸

Several witnesses were concerned with tobacco use contributing to cancer and other health complications. They recommended implementing a cost recovery fee on tobacco products that would fund Ontario's tobacco control and cessation activities.¹⁹ The Heart and Stroke Foundation also advocated for Ontario to work with the federal government on a vape tax aimed at discouraging youth vaping.

Francophone Affairs

The Assemblée de la francophonie de l’Ontario told the Committee that Francophones share many of the priorities of the general population of Ontario. The Assemblée made recommendations spanning multiple Ministries, including requests relating to university-level instruction in French and accelerating the process of recognizing prior learning and upgrading skills for French-speaking and bilingual immigrants. They particularly urged the government to provide the necessary funds to actively offer French language services throughout the health sector. They also asked that the Ministry of Francophone Affairs be provided additional funding for implementation and promotion of the modernized *French Language Services Act*.

¹⁶ Wade Hoople.

¹⁷ Sanford Borins.

¹⁸ Imperial Tobacco Canada, National Coalition Against Contraband Tobacco, Rothmans, Benson & Hedges. The Convenience Industry Council of Canada and Ontario Convenience Stores Association made similar recommendations.

¹⁹ Alliance for a Tobacco Free Ontario, Canadian Cancer Society, Canadian Lung Association, Heart and Stroke Foundation.

The Fédération de la jeunesse franco-ontarienne highlighted that youth leadership and development events moved online during the pandemic. They said these experiences are not equal to in-person experiences and requested funding to rebuild the programming links that have been lost. They also urged that the Province take into account regional disparities in funding decisions to ensure equitable cultural experiences in French-language schools.

Mouvement d'implication francophone d'Orléans (MIFO) asked for \$10 million to support the development of an infrastructure project for a new, expanded facility. They described the significant contribution of the project to the cultural, social, and economic life of Francophones in Ottawa and throughout the Francophone community in Ontario, saying it would also create jobs and contribute to the economic recovery of the National Capital Region and Eastern Ontario.

Health

Disease Prevention and Treatment

The Committee heard from organizations that provide services for persons suffering from illness and disease. These organizations recommended the Province invest

- \$11 million to stabilize MINT Memory Clinics and prevent further site closures (MINT Memory Clinic);
- \$3.26 million to expand the Alzheimer Society's First Link® program that supports individuals and families affected by dementia (Alzheimer Society of Ontario);
- \$1 million per year for the F.A.S.T. Signs of Stroke public awareness campaign for the next three years (Heart and Stroke Foundation);
- funding for the March of Dimes After Stroke program (March of Dimes Canada);
- funding to enable access to the Transcatheter Aortic Valve Implantation (TAVI) procedure (Edwards Lifesciences (Canada)); and
- support for Ronald McDonald House Ottawa's planned expansion to add 22 rooms to provide a home-away-from-home to more families with children receiving treatment at the Children's Hospital of Eastern Ontario (Ronald McDonald House Ottawa).

Drugs, Devices, and Coverage

The Assistive Devices Program (ADP) helps individuals with long-term physical disabilities pay for customized equipment. The Ontario Home Medical Equipment Providers Association requested an increase in the coverage amount for all ADP funded assistive devices. The Ontario Association of Prosthetics and Orthotics asked that an additional \$9.7 million be provided to improve affordability and increase access to prosthetic and orthotic treatment. The Ontario Home Respiratory Services Association asked for a change in the reimbursement model for Positive Airway Pressure (PAP) therapy from a fixed price model to a maximum contribution

model. The Bone Conduction Advisory Group requested \$300,000 annually to offset the cost of an initial fitting for preschool bone conduction hearing devices. They explained that such devices, suitable for infants who have conductive hearing loss, are not currently funded under ADP. Easter Seals Ontario said that increased funding is required for pediatric and youth accessibility equipment. They also recommended expanding the list of eligible accessibility equipment for children, including essential bathroom equipment and mobility aids.

With regard to services funded through the Ontario Health Insurance Program (OHIP), the Ontario Association of Cardiologists asked that new rules governing the provision of virtual care be changed to allow virtual consultations on new patients by telephone and increase funding for follow-up visits provided by telephone. They said that, for patients who cannot or do not use video conferencing technology, limits on telephone consultations restrict access to virtual care. The Canadian Celiac Association noted that a provincially funded community-based pilot program covering the celiac blood test has received positive feedback “from all levels.” They advocated permanently adding the celiac blood test to the standard laboratory services schedule under OHIP so that it would be covered when ordered by a patient’s family physician.

The Canadian Cancer Society asked the Province to expand access to take-home cancer drugs by publicly covering their costs (as currently covered for drugs administered in hospitals). They explained that over half of new oncology medications are developed for patients to take orally and at home. Because these medications do not fall under the jurisdiction of the public cancer agency budget, patients must rely on private drug plans or provincial drug programs, if eligible. They recommended coverage either through a second-payer or a universal public model at an estimated cost between \$17 and \$44 million.

Indivior Canada expressed the view that physicians and health care professionals should be compensated for management of a patient and not incentivised by a “pay-per-prescription” system. They also said that pharmacists should be trained to administer long-acting injectable treatments.

The Ontario Dental Association explained that government-funded dental programs for low-income Ontarians do not adequately reimburse dentists and requested increased investments with a focus on preventative care.

The Ontario Chiropractic Association requested authorization for chiropractors to order specific advanced diagnostic imaging and lab tests and to have access to the Ontario Laboratories Information System (OLIS) and other diagnostic imaging storage systems. The Ontario Physiotherapy Association similarly asked for regulatory amendments to enable physiotherapists to order diagnostic imaging.

An individual who wrote to the Committee suggested the Province consider funding certain alternative treatments, which she said could present cost-saving opportunities.²⁰

Health Human Resources and Staffing

Several witnesses spoke about the development of sector-specific health human resource strategies, while a number of organizations also asked the Province to develop a comprehensive, multi-sector health human resources strategy.²¹ Witnesses emphasized staffing pressures and challenges that pre-existed, but were exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, including difficulties with recruitment and retention across health care sectors.

The Ontario Nurses' Association called for the development of a provincial nursing recruitment strategy, including elements such as increasing nursing seats in colleges and universities and providing additional financial support for nursing students.²²

The Nursing Undergraduate Society sought expansion of the Employed Student Nursing and Ontario Nursing Graduate Guarantee programs to support the training of nursing students and reduce barriers to entry into the profession. They also advocated investment in the creation of tuition-free nursing programs and institutional partnerships that would expedite the hiring and retention of new nurses.

Some hospital witnesses spoke about the reliance on agency nursing to fill staffing gaps. West Nipissing General Hospital urged the Province to provide legislative support in addressing hospital costs for agency nursing and physician remuneration, particularly for small rural and remote hospitals.

Home and Community Care

The Committee heard that, whenever possible, Ontarians want to receive the care they need in their own home. Effective home and community care can prevent unnecessary hospitalizations and reduce the need for long-term care. Witnesses expressed concerns that current funding levels were insufficient to meet the growing demand for service and respond to inflationary pressures.

The Ontario Community Support Association asked the Province to invest an additional \$215 million into home and community care to meet growing client needs, address the impact of inflation, and support health system innovation. Hutton House requested base budget increases of 7% for all community-based care providers in the province.

²⁰ Diane Elms.

²¹ These witnesses included, for example, the Catholic Health Association of Ontario and Home Care Ontario.

²² The Registered Nurses' Association of Ontario, Region 10 Ottawa presented to the Committee and made similar recommendations for increased RN, RPN, and NP seats.

Care Watch Ontario advocated for the adoption of a five-year plan increasing funding for home and community care to maximize access to these services by older Ontarians and decrease reliance on institutional care. They said this should include giving priority to community-based non-profit agencies to deliver services.

Home Care Ontario and Spectrum Health Care asked the Province to fast-track existing funding commitments for home care over the next two years and invest funds towards increasing contract rates for service provider organizations.

The Huntington Society of Canada, Barrie Chapter asked for increased access to home and community care services to support family care givers. An individual wrote to the Committee requesting greater access to Adult Day Programs, noting such programs reduce the burden on Ontario's health care system and contribute to the health of family caregivers by preventing burnout and allowing caregivers to remain in the workforce and contribute to Ontario's economy.²³

Hospitals

The Committee heard that the COVID-19 pandemic placed additional pressures on already struggling Ontario hospitals and hospital workers. Witnesses asked for significant investments in hospitals.²⁴ The Ontario Council of Hospital Unions/CUPE asked for a per capita funding increase to meet the Canadian average.²⁵

Specific requests for capital investments included

- \$25 million for the Stage 3 work towards building the new Windsor-Essex Regional Acute Care Hospital (Citizens for Healthcare Windsor-Essex); and
- \$7 million capital planning grant and Stage 1 approval for a new acute care hospital (Orillia Soldiers' Memorial Hospital).

The Peterborough Regional Health Centre asked for official approval of its regional program expansion project to move the project into functional programming.

Kingston Health Sciences Centre (KHSC) explained that a previously approved plan from 2017 no longer aligned with KHSC's situation as a regional anchor hospital. They asked that the Province work with them to create a new redevelopment plan to address aging hospital facilities and meet critical capacity needs.

A number of health care and labour organizations cautioned against expanding the role of private surgical clinics, stating this would exacerbate existing hospital staff shortages and wait times.²⁶ They asked that the Province invest funds in building

²³ Sophia Williams.

²⁴ For example, Kingston Health Sciences Centre, Red Lake Margaret Cochenour Memorial Hospital, and West Nipissing General Hospital.

²⁵ June Weiss and Shirley Roebuck wrote to the Committee with similar recommendations.

²⁶ These witnesses included the Ontario Council of Hospital Unions/CUPE, UNIFOR Local 195, and the Ontario Health Coalition: Chatham Kent Health Coalition, Wallaceburg-Walpole Island Health Coalition, Sarnia Lambton Health Coalition.

capacity for medically necessary services provided in hospitals. The Windsor Regional Hospital expressed support for partnerships between hospitals and private surgical centres. They said such partnerships should involve clear collaboration to ensure surgical centres do not remove staff from hospitals. For example, they said that all ophthalmologists and anesthesiologists who work at the Windsor Surgical Centre are also required to work at Windsor Regional Hospital.

Medical Licensing

The Ontario Medical Association (OMA) expressed support for the recently announced plan to introduce a practice-ready assessment program to determine whether internationally educated physicians who have practiced abroad have the skills to work in Ontario without completing re-education. They urged additional investment to implement the program sooner and assess a greater number of physicians. The OMA, Northeast District said that such a program, coupled with a targeted mentorship initiative, could be a “game-changer” for building a lasting supply of physicians in northern and rural communities.²⁷

Mental Health and Addiction

Canadian Mental Health Association branches across the province asked for an 8% increase in base funding to meet increased costs of operation and growing demand for services.²⁸ A number of branches urged the government to develop an integrated, cross-sectoral provincial drug strategy to address opioid addiction.

Municipal representatives also asked the Province to increase investment in mental health and addiction services in their communities. For example, the Committee heard that the City of Kingston had declared a mental health and addictions crisis in the city, with unanimous support from City Council.

A number of witnesses asked for investments in safer-supply and supervised consumption sites.²⁹ The Ontario Aboriginal HIV/AIDS Strategy highlighted the need for consumption-treatment services in communities across central and northern Ontario and asked that all existing community treatment services applications be expedited. Street Haven called for increased investments in women’s addictions treatment services.

²⁷ The presenter for the OMA, Northeast District was also joined by the OMA chair for the Northwest District.

²⁸ Canadian Mental Health Association, Cochrane-Timiskaming; Canadian Mental Health Association, Kenora Branch; Canadian Mental Health Association, Windsor-Essex; Canadian Mental Health Association, Sudbury-Manitoulin; Canadian Mental Health Association, Algoma; and Canadian Mental Health Association, Ontario Division with the Canadian Mental Health Association, Toronto Branch and Canadian Mental Health Association, Peel-Dufferin.

²⁹ For example, the Kenora Seniors Coalition and Providence Centre for Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation.

The Ontario Association of Social Workers asked the government to undertake a cross-ministerial effort to expand access to mental health and addictions services to ensure Ontarians can access timely supports in the most appropriate setting. The Ontario Society of Occupational Therapists suggested expanding use of all mental health professionals, including occupational therapists, to decrease waitlists.

Ontario Shores Centre for Mental Health Sciences requested a planning grant to support the development of an emergency psychiatric assessment, treatment, and healing (EmPATH) unit. They explained such units are exclusively devoted to mental health. Patients are seen by a psychiatrist “immediately” and actively treated with pharmacotherapy and psychotherapy for up to 23 hours and 59 minutes.

The Rural Ottawa Youth Mental Health Collective requested stable funding to increase youth access to mental health supports in their communities. The Canadian Institute for Advancements in Mental Health (formerly the Schizophrenia Society of Ontario) requested funding for digital and non-digital mental health innovation within the community sector, including a focus on peer-to-peer supports and services for complex mental illnesses in rural and remote areas.

Palliative Care

Hospice Palliative Care Ontario asked that the Province fully fund all clinical costs in existing and developing hospice residences starting with an additional annual investment of \$43.2 million. They requested further investments to improve In-Home Visiting Hospice Services and to expand grief and bereavement care noting that the COVID-19 pandemic “shone a spotlight” on the need for grief and bereavement supports. They said that good grief and bereavement services keep people out of the medical system and functioning well through a difficult phase of life.

The Ontario Medical Association asked the Province to create and fund 500 additional hospice beds, as well as to increase capacity to provide end-of-life palliative care in the home, including equitable access to on-call palliative specialists.

Primary Care

The Committee heard that Ontario is experiencing a serious shortage of primary care providers, a situation that has been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic and physician retirements, which are likely to continue in coming years. The Ontario College of Family Physicians asked for expanded access to family health teams and team-based care across the province and said this could be supported by hiring an additional 1,000 allied health care professionals, such as social workers, nurses, and pharmacists.

The Alliance for Healthier Communities, which represents community health centres and other community-governed primary health teams, asked for an investment of \$795 million, which would include an 8% base budget increase for community-governed primary health care organizations, as well as funding towards expansion of

primary health teams, and support for equity initiatives.³⁰ East Toronto Health Partners requested annual funding of \$875,000 to provide comprehensive primary care and integrated services through Health Access Taylor Massey and the Taylor Massey Neighbourhood Hub. They said the neighbourhood has high rates of emergency department use, which could be reduced through increased access to a primary care hub.

Nurse practitioner led clinics said that with increased funding they could expand services and operation to help address Ontario's shortage of primary care providers.³¹

The Indigenous Primary Health Care Council requested funding for a provincial Indigenous integrated health hub as part of the ongoing rollout of Ontario Health Teams. They also asked the Province to invest \$75 million annualized over five years to build a comprehensive network of Indigenous primary health care organizations. The Southwest Ontario Aboriginal Health Access Centre requested funding to increase the physician complement in their Owen Sound clinic from one-half to two physicians.

An individual who wrote to the Committee suggested Ontario should change the way family doctors are compensated to encourage more doctors to enter and stay in family medicine.³²

Public Health

Ottawa Public Health asked the Province to revert to a funding formula of 75% provincial and 25% municipal contributions for public health units.

Medavie advised the Committee that they have been working to support Ontario's pandemic response since 2021 by providing a mobile vaccination service. They urged the Province to continue to fund the program through 2023 and to consider creating a long-term mobile service to ensure the ability to adjust/scale the vaccination services as required. With an expanded scope these mobile programs could be used in settings such as schools, long-term care homes, and prisons.

Supportive Housing

Supportive Housing requires a physical unit as well as funding for the supports that allow individuals to live independently. The Committee heard that there is a need for substantial investment in both. March of Dimes Canada asked for investments in

³⁰ The Committee also heard from the Centre de santé communautaire de l'Estrie, Centretown Community Health Centre, Guelph Community Health Centre, Stonegate Community Health Centre, South East Grey Community Health Centre. The Peterborough Ontario Health Team requested funding for a Community Health Centre in Peterborough to improve access to primary care.

³¹ Sudbury District Nurse Practitioner Clinics, Capreol Nurse Practitioner-Led Clinic.

³² Mary Kirby Gall.

integrated supportive housing system planning to enable more people with disabilities to access the housing and services they need.³³

The Cochrane District Social Services Administration Board requested that the Province support the DSSAB's partnership with Mushkegowuk Council by providing funding for the construction and ongoing operation of 54 supportive housing units in the City of Timmins.

Indigenous Affairs

The Committee recognizes the importance of ensuring that First Nations, Inuit, and Métis people are considered in the development of the Budget. Witnesses asked the Committee to advance reconciliation and to support programs and services developed for and by Indigenous communities, including in areas of health, education, and social services. Recommendations are included under the relevant ministries in other sections of this report.

Infrastructure

General Infrastructure Investments and Policies

The Cement Association of Canada and Concrete Ontario recommended continued commitment to infrastructure investment over the next 10 years. The Cement Association of Canada also suggested introducing financial and regulatory incentives for Carbon Capture, Utilization and Storage (CCUS) to match other Canadian and U.S. jurisdictions and secure competitiveness for Ontario.

Progressive Contractors Association of Canada raised concerns about Project Labour Agreements (PLAs) and contended that they reduced competition in public infrastructure procurement. They requested that the Province provide guidance to Infrastructure Ontario to establish clear rules in all procurement processes that would include prohibiting PLAs. Some other witnesses asked that the Province take steps to facilitate the process of joining a union.³⁴

The Association of Consulting Engineering Companies - Ontario were complimentary of Infrastructure Ontario providing project "pipeline" information and requested that other government agencies and ministries share more information on their upcoming infrastructure projects as well. They argued that this would allow engineering firms to effectively respond to government RFPs and in turn increase the number of quality bids government receives on projects.

Municipal Infrastructure

Several municipalities came before the Committee seeking support for infrastructure projects within their communities. The City of Kenora described the challenges they

³³ Canadian Mental Health Association branches and Ontario's Big City Mayors were also among the presenters who spoke in favour of increased investments in supportive housing.

³⁴ This included the Quinte Labour Council and United Steelworkers.

faced with the high costs of construction in northwestern Ontario. They explained that they were appreciative of one-time grants but needed sustained infrastructure funding to maintain their municipal infrastructure.

The Local Services Board of Foleyet talked about the requirement for more infrastructure funding for their rural area. In particular, they described the need for an emergency exit that could be used to evacuate residents in case of emergencies such as flooding or a train derailment.

Labour, Immigration, Training and Skills Development

Employment Standards

Many witnesses presented arguments for increasing the minimum wage, with several witnesses proposing that it be raised specifically to \$20 an hour.³⁵ The Windsor Essex Regional Chamber of Commerce argued against any increase, stating that many employers were still struggling, for example, to absorb increased costs of doing business resulting from supply chain shortages and increased materials costs.

Witnesses also asked for the provision of paid sick days to be expanded, with several suggesting a legislated requirement for 10 paid sick days.³⁶ The Income Security Advocacy Centre said this should increase to 14 paid days during declared public health emergencies. The Canadian Federation of Independent Business questioned who would be responsible for costs in the event of Ontario legislating expanded paid sick days.

Immigration

Many witnesses pointed to immigration as a means to fill gaps in the labour market. The Ottawa Board of Trade listed a series of recommendations including recognizing foreign credentials, considering additional pathways to permanent residency for public post-secondary students, and working with the federal government to increase Ontario's allocation of immigrants.

The Ontario Council of Agencies Serving Immigrants described how settlement services and language training provide important supports for newcomers. They said costs for these programs have increased beyond the average inflation rate, while funding levels have remained the same. They requested that funding for the Newcomer Settlement Program (NSP) and Language Training Program increase by at least 5% to meet increased demand for services and account for inflation.

³⁵ Such as Income Security Advocacy Centre, Ontario Federation of Labour, Ontario Public Service Employees Union, and Quinte Labour Council.

³⁶ Including AMAPCEO and Ontario Nurses' Association. The Ontario Federation of Labour also said paid sick days should be expanded.

Skills Development

Many witnesses discussed skill gaps in the labour market and proposals for developing employees' abilities in different areas. The Automotive Industries Association of Canada made the case for providing more programs for the automotive aftermarket to "upskill" and increase employees' abilities to service electric and connected vehicles. The witness commended the Province's Skills Development Fund, in particular for its role in supporting an upskilling program provided by the Automotive Industries Association of Canada and St. Lawrence College; however, they explained how the skills training currently offered for their sector is not flexible and responsive enough to keep pace with emerging technology.

The Council of Ontario Construction Associations advocated for accelerating the development of Ontario's new skilled trades and apprenticeship system to address the needs of the province's labour market. They specified that this should focus on in-demand trades and include financial support for apprentices and sponsors. The Heating, Refrigeration and Air Conditioning Institute of Canada recommended investing \$5 million to support a heating, ventilation, air conditioning, and refrigeration (HVACR) workforce development plan that ensures an adequate supply of appropriately qualified industry personnel to meet emerging needs resulting from the shift to a low carbon economy. Queen's University asked for greater flexibility in enrolment corridors for universities to grow in-demand programs and ensure Ontario has the skilled workforce it needs to meet industry demands.

Blue Branch, a social enterprise created in 2017, highlighted issues with labour mobility in Ontario. They recommended that the Province create a labour mobility and recruitment strategy and support the organization's application to the Skills Development Fund (SDF) to continue and expand their research on labour mobility. WoodGreen Community Services also commented on the SDF and suggested providing \$3 million over three years through the fund to build financial empowerment into Toronto region Employment Ontario services.

Developing Young Leaders of Tomorrow, Today, an organization that delivers a variety of youth programs to develop leadership skills, requested that the Province invest \$2.5 million over three years to create an innovation hub in Windsor that would offer training or "upskilling" for Black youth and young professionals who are not able to find employment in the local economy.

Collège La Cité recommended that the Ministry of Labour, Immigration, Training and Skills Development expand its Apprenticeship Capital Grant and apply a Francophone lens to decision-making on apprenticeship seat allocation.

Long-Term Care

The Committee heard that individuals and families need the Province's help to shift long-term care from an institutional model to one that provides smaller and more home-like environments, centred on the needs and preferences of residents. The Champlain Region Family Council Network asked for the establishment of a Long-

Term Care Quality Centre within the Ministry to drive this change. They also asked the Province to create and fund a long-term care human resource plan to attract and retain a sufficient workforce of qualified staff to support Ontario's long-term care homes.

The Ontario Long Term Care Association requested increased funding for resident accommodation and services and asked that the Ministry manage the winding down of funding for ward-style rooms in a way that ensures stability for homes that are looking to secure financing for redevelopment.

The Council on Aging of Ottawa maintained that the target of four hours of direct care per resident per day under the *Fixing Long-Term Care Act, 2021* should be implemented immediately and made a minimum requirement for every home. They also asked the Province to require 60 additional minutes per day from allied professional staff.

The CSA Group (CSA) advocated that the Province mandate the use of existing CSA standards on operation and infection prevention and control in long-term care homes, developed in light of the "lessons learned" during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Alzheimer Society of Ontario asked for roughly \$22 million to fund transitional supports to improve the experience of newly admitted long-term care residents living with dementia across the province and help reduce unnecessary hospitalizations.

Mines

Community Involvement and Benefit from Mining

Many witnesses told the Committee about the potential economic benefits of mining to surrounding communities. Frontier Lithium suggested funding to expand the negotiation and implementation of resource revenue sharing agreements between the Province and Indigenous peoples to ensure Indigenous communities benefit from resource development on their traditional lands.

Ring of Fire Metals, the successor to Noront Resources, discussed a model where communities play a leading role as proponents in advancing the road network into the "Ring of Fire." They advocated for this model to be continued and maximized by involving communities in the permitting, construction, and management of those roads.

Investment in Mining

The Committee heard from many representatives from the Province's mining sector. They emphasised the growing demand for critical minerals and the potential opportunities for Ontario to develop this area of the economy. In this context, several witnesses described the challenges of raising capital to fund mining projects. PearTree Financial Services recommended that the Province introduce an Ontario

Critical Mineral Exploration Tax Credit of 25% and increase the existing Ontario Focused Flow-Through Share Tax Credit from 5% to 25%.

The Canada Nickel Company also suggested increasing tax incentives for mining and processing of critical minerals. They also recommended significantly expanding research and development funding opportunities for critical mineral projects such as the recently announced Critical Minerals Innovation Fund. Northern Graphite expressed support for the Province's Critical Minerals Innovation Fund (CMIF) and wanted to see it expanded to incentivize the adoption of innovative and clean technologies in Ontario's critical minerals sector.

MIRARCO Mining Innovation, a not-for-profit research arm of Laurentian University, requested that the Province invest \$7 million to support the construction of a Centre for Mine Waste Biotechnology, together with federal, municipal, and private sector funding. They explained that the centre is intended to accelerate proof-of-concept technologies into best practices for the mining sector.

Municipal Affairs and Housing

Development Charges

The recently passed Bill 23, *More Homes Built Faster Act, 2022*, was raised throughout the Committee's pre-budget consultation hearings. In particular, witnesses commented on the changes to the *Development Charges Act, 1997*. A number of witnesses expressed uncertainty about the financial impact of the changes on municipal budgets. Some witnesses asked that the Province ensure financial support for municipalities to mitigate potential negative outcomes.³⁷ Others speculated about possible property tax increases on the part of municipalities, with consequences such as increased rents for tenants.³⁸

Housing Affordability and Supply

Housing affordability was identified as a critical need throughout the Committee hearings. Witnesses presented varied approaches to addressing the issue. The Greater Ottawa Home Builders' Association suggested eliminating the provincial portion of the HST on new home sales to make housing more affordable for first time buyers. They suggested that the lost revenue from this initiative could be recouped by instituting a new flat tax on all home sales. One individual concerned with housing affordability suggested a way to address it would be to broaden the application of Ontario's Non-Resident Speculation Tax to also include agricultural land and larger, multi-unit residential buildings.³⁹

³⁷ These witnesses included the Association of Municipal Managers, Clerks and Treasurers of Ontario and Association of Municipalities Ontario.

³⁸ The Advocacy Centre for Tenants Ontario presented on this topic.

³⁹ Nina Deeb.

The Providence Centre for Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation argued that the Province should allocate more money to municipalities for affordable housing. In particular, they suggested the implementation of a province-wide program based on Toronto's Multi-Unit Residential Acquisition Program (MURA), where non-profit housing providers can access funds for down payments and other supports to buy affordable rental units. The Advocacy Centre for Tenants Ontario also wanted to see more new affordable housing developed with public funds, and further, that it remains affordable over the long-term. They suggested prioritizing projects that are owned and managed by non-profit community housing organizations.

Several witnesses highlighted access to housing as a primary social determinant of health. Among those that made this connection was the Catholic Health Association of Ontario, which suggested creating a Housing Secretariat to pool operating and capital funds from all ministries and combine them into a single, more accessible fund. The Region of Waterloo asked the Province to provide long-term funding to municipalities for homelessness programs with a permanent replacement of the Social Services Relief Fund (SSRF) which was launched as a temporary measure to deliver critical services, create longer-term housing solutions, and keep people safe during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Some witnesses requested Ontario's support to streamline and expediate processes in housing development. The Timmins Chamber of Commerce discussed the challenges involved with long delays in response time for locate requests to Ontario One Call. They told the Committee that contractors and developers who submit a locate request in Timmins may have to wait up to three months for the initial assessment process to allow the dig to move forward. They explained that this delay is particularly problematic in their part of the province where there is a narrow construction window. They suggested working with Ontario One Call to address the backlog of requests for locates and requested the Province consider using P3 partnerships with independent contractors to provide locate services.

Ontario's Big City Mayors, an organization representing 29 municipalities, asked for a second round of the Streamline Development Approval Fund (SDAF), or a similar program, to continue to streamline housing approvals.

Municipal Affairs

A theme of some witnesses' content was the appeal for more meaningful consultations between the Province and municipalities.⁴⁰ The Association of Municipalities Ontario advocated for increased funding for Ontario municipalities and indicated that per capita funding should be increased to meet the Canadian average. They sought to be a "full partner" in future housing initiatives and asked the Province to fully offset the costs of implementing annual housing supply action plans.

⁴⁰ For example, the Municipal Finance Officers' Association of Ontario presented on this topic.

The Ontario Sewer and Watermain Construction Association suggested making funding available to municipalities seeking to retrofit or rehabilitate water and wastewater infrastructure in order to accommodate a move towards system regionalization. They argued this would significantly improve the economies of scale for small water systems.

Rental Market

Witnesses presented their views about pressures within the province's rental market. Several witnesses recommended ending vacancy decontrol and extending rent control to units built after 2018, which they felt would help to make market rentals more affordable.⁴¹ The Interfaith Social Assistance Reform Coalition suggested increasing rental support for low-income households. Specifically, they asked that the Province work with the federal government to expand the reach of the Ontario-Canada Housing Benefit by implementing a homelessness prevention and housing benefit as proposed by the Canadian Alliance to End Homelessness. An individual recommended subsidizing rent costs to cover 51% of the cost, regardless of whether the rental unit is an apartment, condo unit, or house.⁴²

Natural Resources and Forestry

Invasive Species

The Invasive Species Centre described invasive species as an underrecognized threat to Ontario's economy. They requested that the Province make a five-year investment of roughly \$20 million per year that would support municipalities, Indigenous communities, and community groups dealing with the issue of invasive species management.

Forest Roads

Representatives from the forestry industry underlined the importance of the network of 290,000 kilometres of forest roads to their businesses. They also highlighted the broader use of these roads by other businesses, anglers, hunters, cottagers, emergency services, and citizens broadly.

The Ontario Forest Industries Association referred to Ministry survey data indicating that significant maintenance of forest roads will be required within the next 10 years. They recommended that the Province increase annual funding of the Forest Roads Funding Program by \$10 million to a total of \$64 million to keep pace with inflation.

Resolute Forest Products Canada recommended continued strategic investments in the provincial forest access roads program and similarly asked that the Province consider funding increases to account for inflation in fuel prices and the cost of living. Weyerhaeuser also called for increased investment in forest roads, saying that such

⁴¹ These witnesses included Advocacy Centre for Tenants Ontario and Mennonite Central Committee.

⁴² Randall Pancer.

investment would make the northwest region “open for business” for the forest industry, the mining industry, First Nations communities, hunters, trappers, anglers, recreationalists, and tourism operators.

Seniors and Accessibility

Elder Abuse Prevention Ontario pointed to the experiences and treatment of older adults during the COVID-19 pandemic and explained that incidents of elder abuse continue to grow in Ontario, including financial fraud targeting older adults. They requested an inflationary funding increase of 6.2% to support programming for elder abuse prevention and recommended other targeted investments. They further urged the Province to apply an elder abuse prevention lens to policy, legislation, and programming when addressing care of older Ontarians.

The Committee also heard about the importance of socialization to support the physical and mental health of older Ontarians. Life After Fifty requested stable base funding for organizations throughout the province that deliver social programming for older adults.

Ability Members Group recommended changes to the Seniors' Home Safety Tax Credit, including reducing the eligible age to 55. They said this could help make the credit more accessible for caregivers and encourage seniors to plan ahead.

Regarding accessibility, CNIB asked the Province to invest \$250,000 in CNIB UX Labs to provide usability and accessibility testing for municipalities, transit authorities, and infrastructure design firms. An individual who wrote to the Committee recommended improving accessible design for residential homes to enable people to stay at home longer.⁴³

Solicitor General

The Committee heard that northwestern communities have some of the highest per-household policing costs in Ontario. The City of Dryden requested a provincial operating grant equal to 35% of the annual estimated Ontario Provincial Police billing amount for a period of at least three years to help offset these costs. In making his presentation, the Mayor of Dryden said that the increases in policing costs in Dryden were linked with what he described as “an illegal drug epidemic,” resulting in increases in gang activities and violent crime.

Tourism, Culture and Sport

Cultural Capital Funding

Several organizations discussed the importance of capital funding to build infrastructure for arts and cultural activities. Orchestras Canada cited Statistics Canada data from 2020 which indicated that about one-third of publicly owned

⁴³ Kate Chung.

performance spaces in Ontario were in “very poor to fair” condition. They advocated for increased investments in “safe, flexible, ready-for-digital” cultural infrastructure. They also asked the Province to maintain Ontario Arts Council funding.

The Dance Ontario Association conveyed support for programs such as the Ontario Trillium Foundation Capital Grant to invest in affordable spaces for dance and arts organizations. Hugh’s Room Live requested that the Ontario government provide a capital grant of \$2.5 million to enable the purchase of a permanent venue to be used as a performance space and artist development facility.

Libraries

The Committee heard from local libraries, as well as from the Federation of Ontario Public Libraries, describing libraries as community spaces that provide essential services. Libraries offer free internet, help with navigating government programs, and provide safe places for individuals to stay warm or cool in extreme temperatures.

These organizations indicated that funding has not kept pace with the demand for library services or with inflationary pressures and urged that Ontario maintain existing provincial operating funding. They also asked that First Nations libraries receive an additional \$2 million annually to support operations and increase front-line library staff salaries.

The library branches that presented to the Committee acknowledged provincial investments in broadband connectivity for public libraries but said that many libraries struggle to afford high quality e-resources. They therefore asked that the Province leverage its purchasing power to create and invest in an Ontario digital public library, at an estimated cost of about \$9 million a year.⁴⁴

Sport

Ontario’s After School Program (OASP) offers activities for children and youth in priority neighbourhoods. Programs are delivered by non-profit organizations. BGC Canada asked for additional investment in OASP to ensure sustainable, high-quality programming to respond to increasing child, youth, and community needs.⁴⁵ The Multicultural Association of Northwestern Ontario and Regional Multicultural Youth Council made similar recommendations, noting that OASP provides quality programming to vulnerable communities and helps working parents.

Play On! Canada asked for an investment of \$6 million over two years to fund 18 mass-participation street-sports events to be held in different locations across the province between 2023 and 2025, including on Indigenous territory.

⁴⁴ The Cochrane Public Library Board, Greater Sudbury Public Library, and Kingston Frontenac Public Library also presented to the Committee.

⁴⁵ BGC Cornwall/SDG and the Malvern Family Resource Centre supported this recommendation.

The Municipality of Red Lake requested an \$8 million provincial contribution towards a new arena (representing one-third of the estimated \$24 million total cost). They explained that the existing Cochenour Arena—the only arena in the Red Lake area—was built by volunteers in 1962 and has been in operation beyond its useful life for 50 years. They said that the arena has lost all of its recreation and social value due to its continued deterioration.

Tourism

Tourism sector representatives acknowledged support from the Province, including the Ontario Staycation Tax Credit, Ontario Tourism Recovery Program, and small business grants; however, the Committee heard that recovery for the sector continues to be challenging. The Tourism Industry Association of Ontario asked that the Province develop a comprehensive tourism growth strategy to enable the industry to recover and remain globally competitive.

Organizations asked the Province to support winter tourism and help make Ontario a premier winter sport tourism destination. To this end, the Ontario Federation of Snowmobile Clubs requested an increased commitment of up to \$2 million to help complete the most vital trail infrastructure projects for the 2023-24 riding season. The Ontario Snow Resorts Association sought support to develop the workforce at resorts across the province. They told the Committee that, due to the closure of ski hills during the pandemic, many employees were laid off and sought employment in other industries. They also urged the Province to advertise Ontario as a winter ski destination leading up to and during the winter months.

North Bay Pride highlighted the social and economic opportunities available in “pink tourism” and encouraged provincial investment in awareness campaigns to improve understanding of the LGBT and other marginalized communities. They said that this kind of investment can help make communities safer for LGBT and other marginalized community members, resulting in many benefits, including supporting Ontario Pride-related tourism.

Transportation

Public Transit

The Greater Toronto Airports Authority recommended connecting the Eglinton Crosstown West Extension (ECWE) to Pearson Airport. To accomplish this, they suggested working with the federal government on a cost sharing arrangement for the capital funding so that construction can begin without delay when studies are completed in 2025. The Ontario Public Transit Association requested increased funding to offset public transit operating shortfalls.

Roadways

Municipalities discussed the need for funding to address critical transportation infrastructure in their communities. The City of Windsor wanted the Province to provide assurances to fund a cloverleaf interchange located where the Lauzon Parkway extension meets Highway 401. They noted that the interchange would attract further investment into the region.

The City of Timmins discussed the pressures municipalities encounter in maintaining transportation infrastructure, particularly noting 86.8 kilometres of highway previously transferred from the Province to the municipality that they said would require replacing within the next five to ten years. They asked that a special purpose grant be made available to the City of Timmins and the Town of Iroquois Falls to jointly maintain the municipal road that connects the City of Timmins and Highway 101 to Highway 11 and the Town of Iroquois Falls.

The Ontario Good Roads Association also discussed rural roads and told the Committee that roads and road safety issues are the largest source of municipal liability claims. They proposed a practice of road safety auditing to reduce the number of injuries and fatalities on roadways.

Driver Licensing

The Committee also heard from industry representatives about challenges related to Ontario's process for credentialing foreign truck drivers. This was presented as an opportunity to further reduce "red tape" and strengthen economic opportunities. A forestry industry representative recounted a story of a Ukrainian truck driver who had applied to their company; however, due to delays in obtaining an Ontario driver's licence, the witness said the driver had ultimately settled in Manitoba.⁴⁶

Treasury Board Secretariat

The President of the Treasury Board is responsible for the administration of Bill 124, the *Protecting a Sustainable Public Sector for Future Generations Act, 2019*. Labour groups and witnesses speaking on behalf of affected public sector and broader public sector organizations called for an end to Ontario's appeal of the recent court decision regarding Bill 124.⁴⁷ Some pointed out that the bill disproportionately affected women-concentrated fields that support women, girls, and gender diverse people, such as transitional housing and shelter employees, child care workers, and nurses.⁴⁸ Many witnesses across the various sectors the Committee heard from said the bill exacerbated difficulties in recruiting and retaining staff and offering competitive wages, particularly considering compounding factors including burnout

⁴⁶ Resolute Forest Products Canada. The Ontario Forest Industries Association also presented on this topic.

⁴⁷ Witnesses whose main recommendation related to Bill 124 included AMAPCEO, the Canadian Union of Public Employees Ontario, and United Steelworkers. Many witnesses discussed Bill 124 as part of their submissions.

⁴⁸ For example, this was discussed by YWCA Ontario.

resulting from the challenges experienced by front-line workers during the COVID-19 pandemic.⁴⁹

Compensation was a frequent issue raised by witnesses. Many highlighted staff vacancy rates in their sectors, such as witnesses in the violence against women, mental health, developmental services, long-term care, home and community care, and child care sectors.⁵⁰ They expressed their position that vacancies were, at least in part, related to staff choosing to pursue similar positions in other sectors that offer higher compensation. For example, witnesses noted that some sectors, such as hospitals, offer higher wages than others, such as long-term care, which in turn offers higher wages than home and community care, for similar work. They suggested that wage parity between sectors would improve staff retention and ultimately service delivery.

The Ontario Public Service Employees Union suggested increasing the number of full-time employment opportunities in the Ontario Public Service, the broader public sector, and Ontario's public colleges to address issues of burnout they said were related to an overall lack of staffing in the public sector.

⁴⁹ The Ontario Nurses Association, for example, explained that private nursing agencies are not bound by the legislation and are therefore able to pay nurses more competitively than the public sector.

⁵⁰ For example, the Ontario Community Support Association told the Committee vacancy rates in the home and community care sector were as high as 30-35%. Community Living Essex County discussed how disability support workers were hired and trained only to leave for higher-paying jobs in settings like hospitals and schools. Branches of the Canadian Mental Health Association shared that they were experiencing an average 5% staff vacancy rate. The Cochrane-Timiskaming Branch noted an even higher vacancy rate of about 17% and told the Committee that staff would leave for higher paying positions in the mining sector which was a large employer in their community.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs submits the following recommendations to the Minister of Finance to inform the 2023-24 Budget:

1. Focus on a responsible, targeted approach, implementing a plan to build the vital infrastructure and services that people rely on while laying a strong fiscal foundation for future generations.
2. Work with every level of government, communities, and industry partners to get shovels in the ground, on housing, infrastructure, and transit that will get Ontario moving and build a stronger economy for everyone.
3. Attract investments and jobs across Ontario by making the province a competitive place to do business and investing in communities and people.
4. Continue to keep costs down for those that need it the most.
5. Make it easier for job seekers, newcomers, and students to get the training, apprenticeships, and, opportunities to provide more people access to high-quality jobs and get skilled workers into the places that Ontario needs, in trades, healthcare, or anywhere.
6. Address key barriers to build highways, transit, and other critical infrastructure projects, reduce red tape, and invest in industry capacity to help deliver projects faster and better.
7. Focus on innovative policies while continuing to work with municipalities, other levels of government, builders, and the construction industry to address the housing supply shortage in order to make housing more affordable.
8. Explore new areas to reduce red tape and burdensome regulations, in order to improve Ontario's competitiveness.
9. Support the government's mental health and addictions investments in services that will allow for early intervention, reduce wait times, and increase access to care, while recognizing and addressing the unique challenges in Ontario's rural, remote, isolated, and Indigenous communities.
10. Continue building Ontario's economy for today and tomorrow by advancing plans for the Ring of Fire and critical minerals strategy, reinforcing Ontario's clean energy advantage. and driving further investments in EV, battery technologies, clean steel, and other advanced manufacturing industries.

WITNESS LIST

Organization/Individual	Date of Appearance
Ability Members Group	February 14, 2023, written submission
Advocacy Centre for Tenants Ontario	February 13, 2023, written submission
Algoma University	January 31, 2023, written submission
Alliance for a Tobacco Free Ontario	written submission
Alliance for Healthier Communities	February 14, 2023, written submission
Alzheimer Society of Ontario	January 30, 2023, written submission
AMAPCEO	written submission
Assemblée de la francophonie de l'Ontario	February 2, 2023, written submission
Association of Consulting Engineering Companies - Ontario	written submission
Association of Day Care Operators of Ontario	written submission
Association of Municipal Managers, Clerks and Treasurers of Ontario	written submission
Association of Municipalities Ontario	February 13, 2023, written submission
Automotive Industries Association of Canada	February 6, 2023
Beef Farmers of Ontario	February 6, 2023, written submission
BGC Canada	written submission
BGC Cornwall/SDG	written submission

Organization/Individual	Date of Appearance
Blue Branch	January 23, 2023, written submission
Bone Conduction Advisory Group	written submission
Canada Nickel Company	February 2, 2023
Canadian Association of Direct Relationship Insurers	written submission
Canadian Automotive Museum	written submission
Canadian Bankers Association	February 14, 2023, written submission
Canadian Cancer Society	February 13, 2023, written submission
Canadian Celiac Association	February 13, 2023, written submission
Canadian Federation of Independent Business	written submission
Canadian Fuels Association	February 6, 2023, written submission
Canadian Institute for Advancements in Mental Health	written submission
Canadian Lung Association	written submission
Canadian Mental Health Association, Algoma	January 31, 2023
Canadian Mental Health Association, Cochrane-Timiskaming	February 2, 2023, written submission
Canadian Mental Health Association, Kenora Branch	January 9, 2023
Canadian Mental Health Association, Ontario Division; Canadian Mental Health Association, Toronto Branch; Canadian Mental Health Association, Peel-Dufferin	February 14, 2023
Canadian Mental Health Association, Sudbury-Manitoulin	January 30, 2023
Canadian Mental Health Association, Windsor-Essex	January 23, 2023
Canadian Union of Public Employees Ontario	February 7, 2023, written submission

Organization/Individual	Date of Appearance
Capreol Nurse Practitioner-Led Clinic	January 30, 2023, written submission
Care Watch Ontario	written submission
Catholic Health Association of Ontario	written submission
Cement Association of Canada	written submission
Centre de santé communautaire de l'Estrie	written submission
Centretown Community Health Centre	February 6, 2023
Champlain Region Family Council Network	February 6, 2023, written submission
Chemistry Industry Association of Canada	written submission
Child and Family Services of Grand Erie	written submission
Child Care Providers Resource Network	written submission
Citizens for Healthcare Windsor-Essex	January 23, 2023
City of Dryden	January 9, 2023, written submission
City of Kenora	January 9, 2023
City of Kingston	February 7, 2023
City of Timmins	February 2, 2023, written submission
City of Windsor	January 23, 2023
CNIB	written submission
Coalition of Concerned Manufacturers and Businesses of Canada	February 14, 2023, written submission
Cochrane District Social Services Administration Board	February 2, 2023, written submission
Cochrane Public Library Board	February 2, 2023

Organization/Individual	Date of Appearance
Collège La Cité	written submission
Community Commonwealth Association	written submission
Community Living Essex County	January 23, 2023, written submission
Concrete Ontario	written submission
Conservation Ontario	February 13, 2023, written submission
Convenience Industry Council of Canada	February 6, 2023
Council of Canadian Innovators	written submission
Council of Ontario Construction Associations	written submission
Council of Ontario Universities	written submission
Council on Aging of Ottawa	written submission
CSA Group	February 14, 2023, written submission
Dance Ontario Association	written submission
Desjardins Group	written submission
Developing Young Leaders of Tomorrow, Today	January 24, 2023, written submission
Diane Elms	written submission
Diocese of Toronto, Anglican Church of Canada	written submission
District of Kenora Unincorporated Areas Ratepayers Association	January 9, 2023, written submission
Doug Jones	written submission
East Toronto Health Partners	written submission
Easter Seals Ontario	written submission
Edwards Lifesciences (Canada)	written submission

Organization/Individual	Date of Appearance
Elder Abuse Prevention Ontario	written submission
Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario	February 13, 2023, written submission
ETFO Thames Valley Teacher Local	written submission
FAIR Association of Victims for Accident Insurance Reform	written submission
Fédération de la jeunesse franco-ontarienne	written submission
Federation of Canadian Secondary Students	written submission
Federation of Ontario Public Libraries	February 13, 2023, written submission
FilmOntario	written submission
Fix Our Schools	written submission
Frontier Lithium	February 6, 2023
Grain Farmers of Ontario	January 23, 2023
Grape Growers of Ontario, Ontario Craft Wineries, and Wine Growers Ontario	written submission
Greater Ottawa Home Builders' Association	February 6, 2023
Greater Sudbury Public Library	January 30, 2023
Greater Toronto Airports Authority	written submission
Guelph Community Health Centre	written submission
Heart and Stroke Foundation	February 13, 2023, written submission
Heating, Refrigeration and Air Conditioning Institute of Canada	written submission
Hiatus House	January 23, 2023, written submission
Home Care Ontario	written submission

Organization/Individual	Date of Appearance
Home Child Care Association of Ontario	written submission
Hospice Palliative Care Ontario	February 14, 2023, written submission
Hugh's Room Live	written submission
Huntington Society of Canada, Barrie Chapter	February 13, 2023
Huron County Economic Development	written submission
Hutton House	written submission
Imperial Tobacco Canada	written submission
Income Security Advocacy Centre	February 13, 2023, written submission
Indigenous Primary Health Care Council	January 30, 2023, written submission
Indivior Canada	written submission
Interfaith Social Assistance Reform Coalition	February 13, 2023, written submission
Invasive Species Centre	January 31, 2023, written submission
Invest WindsorEssex	January 23, 2023, written submission
June Weiss	written submission
Kate Chung	written submission
Kenora District Services Board	January 9, 2023, written submission
Kenora Seniors Coalition	January 9, 2023, written submission
Kingston Frontenac Public Library	February 7, 2023
Kingston Health Sciences Centre	February 7, 2023, written submission

Organization/Individual	Date of Appearance
L'Arche Sudbury	January 30, 2023, written submission
Lansdowne Children's Centre	February 14, 2023, written submission
Legal Assistance of Windsor and Community Legal Aid	January 23, 2023
Life After Fifty	January 23, 2023, written submission
Life Sciences Ontario and Ontario Bioscience Innovation Organization	written submission
Local Services Board of Foleyet	February 2, 2023
Low-Income Energy Network	written submission
Malvern Family Resource Centre	written submission
March of Dimes Canada	February 6, 2023, written submission
Mary Kirby Gall	written submission
Medavie	written submission
Mennonite Central Committee	written submission
Microboards Ontario	written submission
MINT Memory Clinic	written submission
MIRARCO Mining Innovation	January 30, 2023, written submission
Mouvement d'implication francophone d'Orléans	February 6, 2023, written submission
Multicultural Association of Northwestern Ontario and Regional Multicultural Youth Council	written submission
Municipal Finance Officers' Association of Ontario	written submission
Municipality of Red Lake	January 9, 2023

Organization/Individual	Date of Appearance
Muskoka Lakes Association	written submission
National Coalition Against Contraband Tobacco	February 13, 2023
National Coalition Against Poverty Canada - Ontario Chapter	written submission
Nina Deeb	February 7, 2023, written submission
North Bay Pride	February 13, 2023
Northern Graphite	written submission
Northwest Business Centre, Kenora and Rainy River	January 9, 2023, written submission
NOSM University	written submission
Nursing Undergraduate Society	written submission
ODSP Action Coalition	written submission
Ontario 211 Services	written submission
Ontario Aboriginal HIV/AIDS Strategy	February 13, 2023, written submission
Ontario Agencies Supporting Individuals with Special Needs	written submission
Ontario Association of Cardiologists	written submission
Ontario Association of Interval and Transition Houses	February 13, 2023, written submission
Ontario Association of Prosthetics and Orthotics	January 30, 2023, written submission
Ontario Association of Social Workers	written submission
Ontario Bioscience Innovation Organization	written submission
Ontario Catholic School Trustees' Association	written submission
Ontario Chiropractic Association	written submission

Organization/Individual	Date of Appearance
Ontario Coalition for Better Child Care	February 14, 2023, written submission
Ontario College of Family Physicians	January 23, 2023, written submission
Ontario College of Family Physicians	February 6, 2023, written submission
Ontario College Student Associations for International Tuition Equity Coalition	written submission
Ontario Community Support Association	February 13, 2023, written submission
Ontario Confederation of University Faculty Associations	written submission
Ontario Convenience Stores Association	January 23, 2023, written submission
Ontario Council of Agencies Serving Immigrants	written submission
Ontario Council of Hospital Unions/CUPE	February 6, 2023, written submission
Ontario Craft Brewers	February 14, 2023, written submission
Ontario Dental Association	February 13, 2023, written submission
Ontario English Catholic Teachers' Association	February 14, 2023, written submission
Ontario Federation of Agriculture	February 2, 2023, written submission
Ontario Federation of Indigenous Friendship Centres	February 14, 2023, written submission
Ontario Federation of Labour	February 14, 2023, written submission
Ontario Federation of Snowmobile Clubs	February 13, 2023, written submission

Organization/Individual	Date of Appearance
Ontario Forest Industries Association	February 2, 2023, written submission
Ontario Fruit and Vegetable Growers' Association	February 14, 2023
Ontario Good Roads Association	January 23, 2023
Ontario Health Coalition: Chatham Kent Health Coalition, Wallaceburg-Walpole Island Health Coalition, Sarnia Lambton Health Coalition	January 23, 2023
Ontario Historical Society	written submission
Ontario Home Medical Equipment Providers Association	written submission
Ontario Home Respiratory Services Association	written submission
Ontario Institute for Regenerative Medicine	February 7, 2023
Ontario Long Term Care Association	written submission
Ontario Medical Association	written submission
Ontario Medical Association, Northeast District	January 31, 2023
Ontario Nonprofit Network	February 14, 2023, written submission
Ontario Nurses' Association	February 6, 2023, written submission
Ontario Physiotherapy Association	written submission
Ontario Public School Boards' Association	January 31, 2023, written submission
Ontario Public Service Employees Union	February 14, 2023, written submission
Ontario Public Transit Association	written submission
Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation	February 14, 2023, written submission
Ontario Sewer and Watermain Construction Association	written submission

Organization/Individual	Date of Appearance
Ontario Sheep Farmers	February 13, 2023
Ontario Shores Centre for Mental Health Sciences	February 7, 2023, written submission
Ontario Snow Resorts Association	February 13, 2023, written submission
Ontario Society of Occupational Therapists	written submission
Ontario SPCA and Humane Society	written submission
Ontario Trial Lawyers Association	February 6, 2023, written submission
Ontario Undergraduate Student Alliance	written submission
Ontario's Big City Mayors	February 14, 2023
Orchestras Canada	written submission
Orillia Soldiers' Memorial Hospital	February 13, 2023, written submission
Oshki-Pimache-O-Win: The Wenjack Education Institute	January 31, 2023, written submission
Ottawa Board of Trade	February 6, 2023
Ottawa Public Health	February 6, 2023
Ottawa-Carleton District School Board	February 6, 2023, written submission
PearTree Financial Services	February 2, 2023, written submission
Peterborough Ontario Health Team	February 7, 2023, written submission
Peterborough Regional Health Centre	February 7, 2023, written submission
Pillar Nonprofit Network	written submission

Organization/Individual	Date of Appearance
Play On! Canada	January 30, 2023, written submission
Progressive Contractors Association of Canada	written submission
Providence Centre for Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation	February 7, 2023
Queen's University	written submission
Quinte Labour Council	February 7, 2023
Randall Pancer	written submission
Red Lake Margaret Cochenour Memorial Hospital	January 9, 2023, written submission
Region of Waterloo	written submission
Registered Nurses' Association of Ontario, Region 10 Ottawa	February 6, 2023
Resolute Forest Products Canada	January 9, 2023
Responsible Gambling Council	written submission
Ring of Fire Metals	February 14, 2023
Ronald McDonald House Ottawa	written submission
Rothmans, Benson & Hedges	February 6, 2023, written submission
Rural Ottawa Youth Mental Health Collective	February 6, 2023
Sandford Borins	written submission
School Bus Ontario	February 14, 2023, written submission
Seven Generations Education Institute	January 9, 2023, written submission
Sexual Assault Centre Kingston	February 7, 2023
Shirley Roebuck	written submission

Organization/Individual	Date of Appearance
Small Business Centres Ontario	written submission
Sophia Williams	written submission
South East Grey Community Health Centre	written submission
South Eastern Production Accelerator Fund	February 7, 2023, written submission
Southwest Ontario Aboriginal Health Access Centre	January 23, 2023, written submission
SPACE Coalition	written submission
Spectrum Health Care	written submission
Spirits Canada	January 23, 2023
Stonegate Community Health Centre	written submission
Street Haven	written submission
Sudbury District Nurse Practitioner Clinics	January 30, 2023, written submission
TakingITGlobal	written submission
Thunder Bay Chamber of Commerce	written submission
Timmins Chamber of Commerce	February 2, 2023
Toronto's Downtown Business Improvement Areas	written submission
Tourism Industry Association of Ontario	February 14, 2023, written submission
triOS College	January 23, 2023
UNIFOR Local 195	January 23, 2023
United Steelworkers	February 7, 2023
Université de Sudbury	January 30, 2023, written submission
Wade Hoople	written submission

Organization/Individual	Date of Appearance
West Nipissing General Hospital	January 30, 2023, written submission
Weyerhaeuser	January 9, 2023, written submission
Windsor Essex Regional Chamber of Commerce	January 23, 2023
Windsor Regional Hospital	January 23, 2023
WoodGreen Community Services	written submission
YMCA of Eastern Ontario	February 7, 2023
YMCA of Northeastern Ontario	January 30, 2023
YMCA Ontario	written submission
York University	written submission
YWCA Ontario	written submission

**APPENDIX A – DISSENTING OPINION OF THE NEW DEMOCRATIC PARTY
MEMBERS OF THE COMMITTEE**

Introduction

The Official Opposition would like to thank the witnesses who have provided oral or written submissions to the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs. We are filing this dissenting report regarding the 2023 Pre-Budget Consultations as we do not believe the committee's report fully reflects the voices of Ontarians.

We were happy to receive feedback from across the province, however we are concerned that the hearings were significantly oversubscribed. With no pre-budget hearings between Toronto and Windsor, eight of Ontario's ten most populated cities were all competing for 21 witness spots in Toronto.

The committee heard overwhelming evidence about significant funding gaps for human resources and other upstream investments that would reduce costs for the health, education and justice systems. Almost every sector expressed concerns about the impact of Bill 124 *Protecting a Sustainable Public Sector for Future Generations Act, 2019* on the retention of qualified and experienced workers, yet the report's recommendations fail to address this wage suppression legislation.

Additionally, New Democrats find it concerning that a report designed to inform the budget process fails to address key budgetary pressures and inflationary concerns. The Official Opposition encourages the government to act upon the advice provided by witnesses to the committee, and appropriately addresses the challenges faced by Ontarians.

Key Recommendations

Through its upcoming budget, the government should:

- Invest in proactive solutions to Ontario's public healthcare system and provide immediate support for mental health programs and services
- Abandon its appeal of Bill 124 and make meaningful investments in order to combat the devastating impact of burnout for impacted workers
- Invest in local community infrastructure projects
- Address the burdens on municipal finances under Bill 23 *More Homes Built Faster Act, 2022*
- Build affordable housing
- Invest in our public education system and hire more teachers and education workers
- Address cruel social assistance and ODSP rates
- Protect and invest in Ontario's libraries

Repeal Bill 124

Across the province, nearly every sector impacted by Bill 124 outlined challenges with the retention of qualified and experienced workers. With business confidence in the province's economy at an all-time low, a key challenge outlined was labour shortages and skills gaps.¹

The Ontario College of Family Physicians highlighted that we have underutilized surgical suites due to the pressures of the nursing shortage, exacerbated by Bill 124.² The Ontario Council of

¹ Ontario Chamber of Commerce, "2023 Ontario Economic Report"

² Doug Gruner, *Ontario College of Family Physicians SCFEA*, February 6 2023

Hospital Unions stated that Bill 124 has had a “humiliating impact” on healthcare workers, leading to a retention crisis for nurses who are already burnt out.³ Nurses reported that numerous colleagues left the profession because of Bill 124.⁴ Other sectors are experiencing similar challenges, including Meals on Wheels which will see a 35% reduction due to labour pressures under Bill 124.⁵ Witnesses emphasized the challenge of retention, stating that without the ability to raise wages to a competitive level we are “bleeding talent”.⁶

Bill 124 is having a devastating impact on the mental health of front-line staff and is reported to be a large contributing factor to the challenges of retention. Witnesses stated that agency nurses, who are not impacted by Bill 124, make four times the salary of a traditionally employed nurse and it is impacting morale, culture, patient satisfaction and safety.⁷ Similar impacts were expressed in the education sector, where wage disparities persist.

In order to address the challenges heard from witnesses at the committee, this government should immediately abandon its appeal of Bill 124 and work towards a solution.

Healthcare

Beyond Bill 124, witnesses presented pragmatic solutions to challenges in our healthcare system. The Ontario College of Family Physicians says that funding for up to 19 hours per week of admin help would add capacity equivalent to nearly 2,000 new family doctors serving two million more patients.⁸ This is vital with 1.8 million Ontarians having no access to a family doctor.⁹

Funding for wrap-around community-based healthcare, like the proposed Peterborough Community Health Centre, facilitates the treatment of complex health needs and ensures people can keep their jobs, children can focus on learning in school, and families can spend more time together when someone is sick.¹⁰

The Canadian Cancer Society recommended that OHIP cover life-saving take-home cancer drugs, which would free up valuable hospital resources and better support patients with cancer.¹¹

The RNAO outlined the importance of nurse-practitioner-led clinics, which would prove critical in the effort to ensure Ontarians have access to primary care.¹²

Mental health funding was an ongoing challenge outlined by front-line services and municipalities. The Kenora branch of the Canadian Mental Health Association explained that the funding model for their sector has been broken for decades. Their branch, for example, has received just a single 2% base budget increase over the past 22 years.¹³ The need for their services has substantially increased, but due to funding challenges and Bill 124 their staff resources have decreased. The Canadian Mental Health Coalition noted that they are seeing vacancy rates of 17% and a turnover rate of 50%.¹⁴ Mayor Paterson from Kingston stated that they are experiencing an opioid and

³ Doug Allan, *Ontario Council of Hospital Unions/CUPE*, SCFEA February 6 2023

⁴ Laura Crich, *Registered Nurses Association of Ontario*, SCFEA February 6 2023

⁵ Deborah Simon, *Ontario Community Support Association*, SCFEA February 12 2023

⁶ Annette Katajamki, *Canadian Mental Health Association*, SCFEA, January 31, 2023

⁷ Allison Church, *Red Lake Margaret Cochenour Memorial Hospital*, SCFEA January 9, 2023

⁸ Dr. Jen Bondy, *Ontario College of Family Physicians* SCFEA, February 6 2023

⁹ Ontario Medical Association “pre-budget submission 2023”

¹⁰ Dr. Jim Shipley, *Peterborough Community Health Centre*, SCFEA, February 7 2023

¹¹ Hillary Buchan-Terrell, *Canadian Cancer Society*, SCFEA, February 13 2023

¹² Laura Crich, *Registered Nurses Association of Ontario*, SCFEA February 6 2023

¹³ Sara Dias, *Canadian Mental Health Association Kenora Branch*, SCFEA, January 9 2023

¹⁴ Patty MacDonald, *Canadian Mental Health Association*, SCFEA, January 23 2023

mental health crisis.¹⁵ Witnesses consistently reported seeing increasing numbers of people struggling with mental health and opioid dependency.¹⁶

During the pre-budget hearings and in their report, the government has failed to address the impact of Bill 60 *Your Health Act, 2023* on the finances of the province, as it is understood that this legislation will deliver less care at a higher cost. It is critical that the government use the 2023 budget to ensure that funding is utilized to address the crisis in our healthcare system and provide support to people struggling with mental health challenges. The Official Opposition encourages the government to use the budget as an opportunity to implement pragmatic solutions to the healthcare pressures that witnesses outlined.

Infrastructure

Infrastructure lays the foundation for building and provides significant opportunities for economic growth, competitiveness, and improved quality of life. The government should provide funding for community infrastructure projects, such as a new community centre and arena in Red Lake.¹⁷ This mining community has been requesting provincial support for more than 10 years because they know the value of recreation in attracting more residents and keeping their community healthy. The FAO reported that the Ontario government underspent by \$644 million on infrastructure programs, and as of December 31st has only spent 8% of its \$1.9 billion budget.¹⁸

Housing and Municipal Finance

The government also failed to acknowledge the detrimental impact of Bill 23 on growing the housing supply. Every community outlined the challenges they faced with affordable housing. The Province Centre from Kingston told the committee “The housing strategy specifically fails to provide the type of affordable housing Kingstonians and Ontarians need.... Developers have not built and will not build housing that people living on low and fixed incomes can afford, so we need the province to be a funding partner here.”¹⁹ The need to build affordable housing was echoed by the Ontario Chamber of Commerce, which stated that the lack of affordable housing options has become a top competitiveness concern, impacting their ability to attract and retain a diverse and talented workforce.²⁰

In a written submission, the Association of Municipalities of Ontario (AMO) stated: “The provincial government’s assertion that the housing supply crisis can be solved by limiting municipal access to infrastructure financing, eliminating environmental protections or changes to municipal governance is unsound.” AMO explained that housing cannot be built without the associated critical infrastructure required. Bill 23 has created an estimated \$1 billion dollar annual shortfall for Municipalities.²¹

The profound connection between housing and healthcare is a theme that came up repeatedly. We heard from the Canadian Mental Health Association that housing *is* healthcare and that the housing crisis harms people and families and limits the economic prospects of our communities.

¹⁵ Bryan Paterson, City of Kingston, SCFEA, February 7 2023

¹⁶ Jennifer Clement, Sudbury District Nurse Practitioner Clinics, SCFEA, January 30 2023

¹⁷ City of Kenora Municipality of Red Lake, SCFEA, January 9 2023

¹⁸ FAO, “Expenditure Monitor 2022-23: Q3”

¹⁹ Jeremy Milloy, Providence Centre, SCFEA, February 7 2023

²⁰ Ontario Chamber of Commerce, “2023 Provincial Budget Submission”

²¹ Association of Municipalities Ontario “Building Ontario Together: 2023 Pre-Budget Submission”

Increased availability of supportive housing would help to free up hospital beds, reduce and mitigate mental health crises, and improve outcomes for people living with addiction.

Education Funding

Concerns over inadequate support for education were raised in several written submissions to the SCFEA. According to the Elementary Teachers Federation of Ontario (ETFO) “The pandemic exacerbated pre-existing concerns about large class sizes, the poor physical condition of schools, the insufficient and inequitable access to in-school supports, and the government’s failure to provide appropriate funding to meet the needs of all students, particularly students with special needs, English Language Learners and those from marginalized communities.”²² The Ontario Secondary School Teachers Federation (OSSTF) expressed similar concerns, highlighting that in the previous budget year funding for education was underspent by \$1.4 billion.²³ They explained that every \$1.00 removed from education spending produces \$1.30 in negative economic impacts. In Ottawa, a local school board indicated they are unlikely to meet the 2025 deadline for full accessibility under the *Ontarians with Disabilities Act* because capital funding has fallen short. Repairing our public schools must be a priority in this year’s budget.

The budget must make critical investments to address large class sizes, the lack of mental health support for struggling students and educators, and the persistent school infrastructure backlog.

Ontario Works (OW) and Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP)

Every Ontarian deserves a great life, with access to robust social services when they need it most. Recipients of OW and ODSP live in legislated deep poverty. The ODSP Action Committee explained that the minor changes to ODSP introduced in 2022 fall woefully short.²⁴ The upcoming budget should address the cruel OW and ODSP rates by doubling them and ensuring they keep up with the cost of living in years to come.

Libraries

Public libraries are one of Ontario’s furthest reaching and most cost-effective public resources. The Cochrane Public Library in Timmins shared with the committee how their community uses the library for vital services including accessing the internet to find housing and apply for jobs. We recommend that the government provide stable funding for all of Ontario’s public libraries. Additional funding support to boost the Ontario Digital library would help pool resources between urban, rural and northern libraries to save funds and make sure every Ontarian has equal access to important online resources.

²² ETFO, “Submission to the standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs: 2023 Pre-Budget Hearings”

²³ OSSTF/FEESO, “Submission to the Standing Committee of Finance and Economic Affairs: Pre-Budget Hearings February 2023”

²⁴ ODSP Action Coalition, “2023 Ontario Pre-Budget Submission”

**APPENDIX B – DISSENTING OPINION OF THE LIBERAL PARTY MEMBER OF THE
COMMITTEE**

The Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs (SCFEA) travelled across our province to listen to recommendations for the government's upcoming budget. I want to thank all those who presented live or via video, as well as all those who made written submissions for taking the time to provide their views and expertise to SCFEA.

While each region faces their own unique issues, there was one common theme that is a glaring omission from the majority's recommendations: the harmful impacts of Bill 124 on workers, and the resulting harmful lack of services available, particularly in the health, mental health, childcare, and education sectors. At every single location without exception, whether it was Kenora, Windsor, Sudbury, Sault Ste. Marie, Timmins, Ottawa, Kingston, Barrie, or Toronto, we heard the same fact: Bill 124 has had a devastating effect on the workers, and the ability of citizens to access the care and services they need in our province. It is disappointing that the majority's recommendations do not reflect this nor the healthcare crisis, and education challenges that many witnesses described.

Bill 124 was struck down as unconstitutional because it violates the Charter right to collective bargaining. Unfortunately, the government is persisting in its commitment to wage suppression and has chosen to spend significant taxpayer dollars in appealing the decision. With worsening working conditions, and an effective wage cut due to Bill 124 and inflation, it is regrettable but not surprising that we have seen an attrition of healthcare workers. While we endorse the majority's recommendations on training and accrediting new nurses, it does not provide recommendations on how to retain nurses. Our position, based upon the recommendations of those who testified to the committee, is clear: **the government must cease its appeal of Bill 124 and engage in good-faith wage negotiations, so that we can retain healthcare and other public sector workers who are needed to provide the services Ontarians rely on.** I urge the government to learn from the expert witnesses and drop its court appeal and make things right with the public sector and get Ontarians the services they need.

In total, the Standing Committee heard from more than two dozen entities who opposed Bill 124, requested that the government cease appealing the decision against the law, or otherwise spoke on how Bill 124 has negatively affected their employees and their ability to provide service. Yet the majority's recommendations do not mention the Bill, nor do they include a reference to the healthcare crisis these organizations took such great care to describe. These organizations are the Red Lake Margaret Cochenour Memorial Hospital, the Canadian Mental Health Association of Kenora, the Windsor Regional Hospital, the Canadian Mental Health Association of Windsor-Essex, the Chatham-Kent Health Coalition, Unifor Local 195, the West Nipissing General Hospital, the YMCA of Northeastern Ontario, the Canadian Mental Health Association of Sudbury/Manitoulin, the Sudbury District Nurse Practitioner Clinics, the Canadian Mental Health Association of Algoma, the Canadian Mental Health Association of Cochrane-Timiskaming, the Ottawa-Carleton District School Board, the Ottawa Registered Nurses' Association of Ontario, the Ontario Nurses Association, the Ontario Council of Hospital Unions, the Centretown Community Health Centre, the Canadian Union of Public Employees, the YMCA of Eastern Ontario, United Steelworkers Local 2010, the Peterborough Regional Health Centre, the Quinte Labour Council, the Ontario Community Support Association, the Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation, the Ontario English Catholic Teachers' Association, the Ontario Public Sector Employees Union, and the Ontario Federation of Labour. In addition to this, written submissions to the Standing Committee that advocated against Bill 124 were also received, including from March of Dimes Canada, the Association of Management, Administrative and Professional Crown Employees of Ontario, the Christian Labour Association of Canada, the Interfaith Social Assistance Reform Coalition, amongst others.

In addition to our stance on Bill 124, the Ontario Liberal Party has further, non-exhaustive recommendations based on what we heard from the people of this province:

1. In the 2019 Budget, the Conservative Government made a 30% reduction to funding allocated for Legal Aid Ontario. That \$133 million cut left a disastrous impact on vulnerable people in our province seeking access to justice. Again, this year, witnesses expressed concerns about their ability to access legal aid and recommended the province restore and enhance legal aid funding. Shortages of staff due to funding cuts have created significant case backlogs which can lead to “justice denied”, especially to vulnerable groups.
2. Nurse practitioner led clinic witnesses said that with increased funding they could expand services and operation to help address Ontario’s shortage of primary care providers. The Indigenous Primary Health Care Council requested funding for a provincial Indigenous integrated health hub as part of the ongoing rollout of Ontario Health Teams. They also asked the province to invest \$75 million annualized over five years to build a comprehensive network of Indigenous primary health care. We support these recommendations.
3. The government must invest in order to create the necessary number of childcare spaces in this province. Just to match inflation, there needs to be an increase of \$240 million, per the Ontario Coalition for Better Child Care. We also support the recommendation for a strategy to train and recruit early childhood educators.
4. We support the requests of the elementary and secondary teachers groups like EFTO, OECTA and OSSTF to cap class sizes, for example, Elementary Teachers’ Federation of Ontario’s call for a class size cap of 24 for pupils in grades four to eight; providing sustained funding for programs to reduce violence in schools; and increased funding for school boards to hire additional counsellors, social workers, and school nurses that would specifically assist families and students from Black, racialized, and Indigenous communities, as well as students living in low-income communities. We also support investing an additional \$1.6 billion annually to repair publicly funded schools and address school infrastructure problems.
5. We encourage the government to invest improving French education in our schools and expanding French post-secondary education, including funding the Université de Sudbury, so that both current residents and Francophone immigrants can receive the best education possible and support Franco-Ontarien culture and communities.
6. Municipalities large and small expressed their concerns about Bill 23, both regarding new difficulties in protecting the environment and the financial shortfall that it creates. The budget must make sure that our municipalities are able to continue to provide the services the people of this province rely on.
7. We recommend the government provide the 8% increase for base funding requested by the Canadian Association of Mental Health’s branches.
8. Palliative care is health care and providing funding for hospice and home care helps patients and families, as well as keeps people out of hospital. Hospice Palliative Care Ontario asked for additional annual funding of \$43.2 million and further investments to increase grief and bereavement services.