

Legislative  
Assembly  
of Ontario



Assemblée  
législative  
de l'Ontario

# STANDING COMMITTEE OF FINANCE AND ECONOMIC AFFAIRS

**PRE-BUDGET CONSULTATION 2024**

1<sup>st</sup> Session, 43<sup>rd</sup> 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  
March 2024



# STANDING COMMITTEE ON FINANCE AND ECONOMIC AFFAIRS

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

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## INTRODUCTION

The Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs conducted its pre-Budget hearings in the following locations during the Winter of 2023/24: Oshawa (December 12); Markham (December 13); Mississauga (December 14); Oakville (January 9); Hamilton (January 10); Welland (January 11); Chatham (January 16); London (January 17); Cambridge (January 18); Brockville (January 23); Downtown Ottawa (January 24); Cornwall (January 25); Sudbury (January 30); Thunder Bay (January 31); and Dryden (February 1).

The pre-Budget consultation provides an opportunity for citizens, stakeholders, and local government partners to discuss their social, economic, and program-related priorities and concerns with elected representatives, and to make recommendations to provincial ministries.

In total, 256 witnesses appeared before the Committee. In addition, approximately 100 written submissions were received from individuals and groups who did not appear before the Committee.

The report is organized by ministry, although several themes and subjects discussed were common across many sectors. The Committee heard that inflation has impacted the day-to-day lives of Ontarians, the organizations that deliver services to them, and the businesses that employ them. The need for more housing—especially more affordable housing—was heard in every city the Committee visited. Witnesses asked that the Province make investments in public services, improve wages, and make administrative changes to simplify interactions with government services.

This report is an overview of the main issues raised by presenters during the pre-Budget consultation. Comments are abbreviated and arguments summarized; witnesses may not be explicitly named. 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

Representatives from the agricultural sector spoke about pressures facing their industry while also emphasizing the sector's importance to the wider provincial economy. Organizations from various farming sub-sectors described substantial inflation impacting their costs and the sustainability of the businesses they represent.<sup>1</sup> Given the market volatility experienced, many presenters asked for increased investment in the Risk Management Program (RMP), an insurance program designed to protect farmers in the grains, horticulture, and livestock sectors. The Ontario Fruit and Vegetable Growers' Association was among those that called for increased investment in the RMP. They pointed out that the Self-Directed Risk Management (SDRM) program under the RMP was particularly helpful to the province's fruit and vegetable growers to survive current historically high production costs and stagnant market returns.

Several witnesses referenced the Province's agri-food strategy, Grow Ontario, and posed their recommendations as ways to help achieve the objectives of the strategy.<sup>2</sup> The National Farmers Union local 351 asked for investments into infrastructure such as regional cold chain systems, as well as promotion and marketing of Ontario-grown food.<sup>3</sup> The Ontario Fruit and Vegetable Growers' Association also requested continued investments in infrastructure and specifically infrastructure that supports efficient access to resources and high-speed internet connectivity to support modern farm businesses. The Ontario Federation of Agriculture echoed the calls for better connectivity stating that high-speed Internet access and reliable cellular coverage were needed to remain competitive in the global agriculture marketplace.

### *Veterinary Services*

Several witnesses discussed the importance of increasing the number of veterinarians and registered veterinary technicians practicing in rural, remote, and northern Ontario communities. The Ontario SPCA recommended providing more financial incentives for veterinarians to take companion animal practice positions with non-profit organizations providing veterinary services throughout Ontario. The North Ontario Farm Innovation Alliance (NOIFA) also had concerns about veterinary services in the province and proposed a pilot program they called Increasing Veterinary Capacity to Service Northern Ontario. NOIFA believes this pilot program could enable the development of a self-sustaining veterinary services model and cited the *Examining Need, Capacity, and Barriers to Assessing Food Animal Veterinary Services in Underserved Areas of Rural Ontario* report commissioned by the Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs as part of the rationale for this recommendation.

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<sup>1</sup> For example, the Grain Farmers of Ontario.

<sup>2</sup> For example, the Ontario Fruit and Vegetable Growers' Association.

<sup>3</sup> A "cold chain system" is the equipment and logistics for refrigerated production, storage, and distribution to preserve food and perishables at desired low-temperatures.

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## Attorney General

### *Alcohol*

The Committee heard from stakeholders about the sale of alcohol. Spirits Canada expressed support for efforts to modernize the retail model for alcoholic beverages. They urged Ontario to permit spirit sales in retail settings outside the LCBO, and to reduce taxation of Ontario-produced spirits.

The Ontario Craft Brewers Association asked the Province to take a number of steps to lower taxes for local small brewers, including by eliminating the beer can tax, which they said was introduced at a time when most beer produced in Canada was sold in bottles and is now outdated. They explained that the impact of the tax increased during the pandemic as brewers shifted away from draft beer to selling close to 100% of their product in cans. The Association stressed that brewers continue to struggle with pandemic recovery and face increased inflationary costs.<sup>4</sup>

### *Courts and Tribunals*

The Ontario Trial Lawyers Association told the Committee that immediate action is needed to eliminate the significant backlog of cases in the civil justice system. To this end, they recommended restricting civil juries to only those cases which trigger a public interest and engage community values or a person's character, such as defamation, medical negligence, or institutional sexual abuse.

Representatives from the John Howard Society requested a base funding increase for delivery of Bail Verification and Supervision Programs (BVSP). They said that BVSP staff are key justice partners that support the operation of bail courts and contribute to public protection.<sup>5</sup> The Committee heard from an individual who asked for stronger penalties for those committing violent crimes, specifically for example, that pre-trial time served not be deducted from custodial sentences.

The Child Witness Centre of Waterloo Region told the Committee that the gap between their funding and the growing demand for advocates and caseworkers to support child witnesses has forced their organization to implement a waitlist for the first time in their 42-year history. They asked the Province to increase investment through a per capita funding model that would cover half their program costs.

The Advocacy Centre for Tenants Ontario spoke about a "digital divide" for those without ready access to technology created by the move to remote hearings at the Landlord and Tenant Board. They urged that the Board move to increase in-person hearings to address this issue. Neighbourhood Legal Services London and Middlesex acknowledged the 2023 tariff increase for legal aid certificates, but said that significant additional investments in both certificates and community legal clinics are required to meet the demands placed on courts and administrative tribunals by unrepresented individuals.

### *Smoking and Vaping*

The Committee heard from witnesses concerned with the distribution of contraband tobacco, which they said increases youth access and results in lost tax revenue for the Province. They recommended amendments to the *Tobacco Tax Act* to support tobacco enforcement and

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<sup>4</sup> Clifford Brewing Company made a similar presentation to the Committee.

<sup>5</sup> John Howard Society of Kingston and District; John Howard Society of Ontario.

cautioned that increased tobacco taxes could risk pricing people out of the legal market.<sup>6</sup> Alliance for a Tobacco Free Ontario was among witnesses who were concerned with tobacco use contributing to premature death and other health complications. They recommended a cost recovery fee for the tobacco industry to fund Ontario's tobacco control, cessation, and enforcement programs and expressed support for Ontario's introduction of a vape tax under the *Vaping Product Taxation Coordination Act, 2023*. Rights 4 Vapers claimed that vaping can be an important tool for smoking cessation. They urged the Province not to move forward with a tax on vapour products.<sup>7</sup>

## **Children, Community and Social Services**

### *Child Welfare and Child Protection Services*

An individual with employment experience as a child protection worker spoke about the challenges parents and child welfare agencies face in supporting children and youth with complex needs. In addition to recommending funding child welfare agencies to cover the cost of complex youth placements, the witness also emphasized the importance of collaboration with front-line staff and child and family service partners on child welfare system redesign.<sup>8</sup>

Recommendations from Grand Council Treaty #3 included a request for provincial investment in a Youth in Transition Technical Table to support First Nations youth transitioning out of the child welfare system by addressing youth needs and finding solutions in traditional ways.<sup>9</sup>

The Ontario College of Social Workers and Social Service Workers requested an amendment to the confidentiality provisions of the *Social Work and Social Service Work Act, 1998* to facilitate information sharing where necessary to protect children.<sup>10</sup>

### *Developmental Services and Intervenor Services*

Transfer payment agencies in the developmental services sector provide a range of supports, including residential and community programming for people with intellectual disabilities and respite for caregivers. Agencies acknowledged provincial support during the COVID-19 pandemic, but told the Committee that with rising operating costs and increasing demand for services, further investment is needed to ensure sustainability of the sector and prevent cuts to services. To this end, they asked for an immediate 5% increase to base funding, as well as increases to Passport Program and Special Services at Home funding to help people with intellectual disabilities and their families continue to access community-based services. Agencies also asked the Province to make additional investments in wage enhancement and training incentives for developmental services workers (DSWs)—similar to training incentives for personal support workers (PSWs)—to help address staff recruitment and retention challenges, and to create an inter-ministerial task force to develop a sustainable funding model for the

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<sup>6</sup> These witnesses included Imperial Tobacco Canada and Rothmans, Benson and Hedges.

<sup>7</sup> An individual made similar submissions.

<sup>8</sup> Another individual spoke to the Committee about working in the children's aid sector and made similar recommendations. Witnesses also told the Committee that the child welfare sector is experiencing challenges with recruitment and retention of engaged staff.

<sup>9</sup> The witness told the Committee about growing up in care as part of the Sixties Scoop and emphasized that a transition table could help Indigenous youth come back to their communities, explaining that many youth going through this transition are disconnected from traditions and cultural support.

<sup>10</sup> They suggested mirroring confidentiality provisions under the *Regulated Health Professions Act, 1991*.

sector.<sup>11</sup>

L'Arche Ottawa, a designated French-language service provider, asked that the budget for their residential program be “topped up,” telling the Committee they had recently had to close one of their six residential facilities. The organization told the Committee that they rely on temporary foreign workers for much of their staffing due, they felt, to wage disparity between the developmental services sector and higher paying health and education sectors. The Kenora Rainy River Developmental Services Executive Directors Group spoke about the challenges of serving a vast geographical area, including remote Indigenous communities; they said that without funding increases, the adults they support will experience less choice and less inclusion.

Ontario's Passport Program provides direct funding for various services and supports, including community participation, person-directed planning, and caregiver respite. Durham Association for Family Resources and Support asked the Province to support family caregivers by ensuring that families who provide unpaid caregiving and care coordination to a loved one with a developmental disability continue to receive the respite portion of Passport funding, and urged additional funding for non-crisis care coordinated by families, in partnership with a transfer payment agency. The Kenora Rainy River Developmental Service Executive Directors Group also asked the Province to remove the “red tape” of requiring families of children with developmental disabilities to reapply for Passport Program funding once the individual turns 18. They indicated that no one ages out of a developmental disability.

Intervenor services support people who have a combined loss of both hearing and vision. Intervenors provide information and facilitate communication to help individuals participate in their communities and maintain independence. DeafBlind Ontario Services asked the Province to update the funding model for intervenor services to account for inflation, increased travel costs, ongoing training needs, and to enable competitive and equitable wages for their sector—which has a predominantly female workforce—to help address retention challenges.

### *Non-profit Sector*

Stakeholders representing Ontario's non-profit sector spoke about the many roles their organizations play in serving communities across the province. They described their sector as being “at a tipping point” due to increased demand for services, inflationary pressures, and significant staffing and volunteer recruitment and retention challenges.<sup>12</sup> The Ontario Nonprofit Network proposed creating a “home in government” for the sector through a dedicated Associate Minister-level appointment, supported by a deputy or assistant deputy minister (ADM) in an office representing non-profits, charities, and social innovation.<sup>13</sup>

Organizations also asked the Province to allocate funds to support the development of a sector-wide labour strategy and workforce development plan that would include promoting careers in the sector, creating opportunities for workers to attain in-demand skills, and funds for increased

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<sup>11</sup> On the topic of the developmental services sector, agencies the Committee heard from included Community Living Essex County; Community Living London; Community Living Oshawa/Clarington; Community Living Toronto; Karis Disability Services; Ontario Agencies Supporting Individuals with Special Needs; Ongwanada; Ottawa Carleton Association for Persons with Developmental Disabilities; and Total Communication Environment.

<sup>12</sup> The North Superior Workforce Planning Board was among witnesses who told the Committee that the sector often relies on volunteers but that the number of volunteers decreased significantly during the COVID-19 pandemic and has not returned to previous levels. Among other requests, they asked the Province for support promoting volunteerism in the non-profit sector.

<sup>13</sup> They suggested this appointment could be made within the Ministry of Economic Development, Job Creation and Trade.

wages to help prevent workers leaving for higher paying positions in other sectors.<sup>14</sup>

### *Social Assistance*

The Hamilton Roundtable for Poverty Reduction was among numerous witnesses who requested substantial increases to the Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP) and Ontario Works (OW) rates.<sup>15</sup> The Income Security Advocacy Centre called for a doubling of ODSP and OW rates, and indexing OW rates to inflation (as the Province has done for ODSP).<sup>16</sup> The ODSP Action Coalition called for combining basic needs and shelter allowance components into one amount, irrespective of clients' living arrangements. Feed Ontario spoke about the increased numbers of Ontarians relying on foodbanks. They made recommendations directed at investing in vulnerable Ontarians, including increasing the monthly earnings exemption for OW to match the increase provided for ODSP.<sup>17</sup> An individual told the Committee that persons with disabilities live in a state of constant worry about how to provide for themselves and their families. In addition to requesting a doubling of ODSP rates, the witness asked Ontario to ensure that payments under the new Canada Disability Benefit are treated as exempt and not deducted from ODSP benefits.

### *Student Nutrition Programs*

Witnesses spoke about the importance of universally accessible healthy school food programs they said contribute to student learning outcomes, support working parents who are struggling with increased food costs, and provide economic stimulus for the local agrifood sector. The Coalition for Healthy School Food commended Ontario's standards that require student nutrition programs to be universally accessible, which they said helps eliminate stigma for students who use the programs. They were among those who asked that the Province double its current investment in school-based nutrition programs, including increased funding to advance Indigenous-led school food initiatives.<sup>18</sup> Organizations also spoke about a need for funding to cover transportation and delivery costs, and to purchase equipment.<sup>19</sup> Student Nutrition Ontario, made up of representatives from 14 lead agencies who administer provincial grant funds, also asked for increased operating funding for their organization, and new base funding to on-board additional needed programs. The Committee also heard that school-based nutrition programs have experienced a significant reduction in the number of volunteers.<sup>20</sup>

An academic group presented a project proposal to conduct an in-depth cost-benefit analysis of a universal, fully-funded Ontario school food program.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> These witnesses included Community Development Halton.

<sup>15</sup> The witness discussed personal experience as an ODSP recipient undergoing cancer treatment and told the Committee that income is a key aspect of the social determinants of health.

<sup>16</sup> The Hamilton Social Work Action Committee; Poverty Free Thunder Bay; and West Scarborough Community Legal Services echoed this request.

<sup>17</sup> Taking increasing food prices and heavy demand on food banks into consideration, the ODSP Action Coalition asked the Province to make the maximum Special Diet Allowance mandatory for all social assistance recipients.

<sup>18</sup> Sustain Ontario; Niagara Nutrition Partners; and the Food Sharing Project were among witnesses who echoed this request.

<sup>19</sup> For example, VON Canada emphasized a need for investment in equipment such as fridges and freezers, as well as transportation and delivery costs, which they said would support centralized distribution and delivery processes to enable efficiencies.

<sup>20</sup> For example, Sudbury Better Beginnings Better Futures said that prior to the pandemic, there were many volunteers in the schools, but that is no longer the case.

<sup>21</sup> Western University (Brescia University College).



The organization summerlunch+ said that children experiencing food insecurity typically stay on track with their peers during the school year because of school nutrition programs, but said that such children often fall behind when those programs are paused. They recommended a dedicated funding stream for the summer months and requested investment to expand their programming.

### *Victim and Intimate-Partner Violence Services*

Representatives from victim and intimate-partner violence service organizations requested core funding increases to support prevention, crisis intervention, emergency shelter and outreach programs, standardized and increased wages to help address staff burnout and retention issues, and ongoing infection control.<sup>22</sup> The Ontario Association of Interval and Transition Houses emphasized the need for workforce stabilization in the sector, noting that competition from higher paying sectors has been a long-standing barrier to staff retention.

YWCA Toronto spoke about the need for increased investment in wraparound, trauma-informed supports for those fleeing gender-based violence. They said they were encouraged to see Ontario's funding commitments as part of the National Action Plan to end Gender-Based Violence and urged further collaboration with federal and municipal partners to prioritize the needs of women, girls, and gender-diverse people in Ontario. Western University, Centre for School Mental Health noted the importance of preventing gender-based violence through the expansion of prevention programs and explained that healthy relationship skills can be taught effectively in schools.

The Canadian Centre to End Human Trafficking said that access to emergency shelters, transitional housing, and secure and affordable long-term housing can often determine a person's ability to leave their trafficking situation. They requested funding for human trafficking-specific shelters and transitional housing, as well as training for front-line service workers and program staff to better understand the needs of trafficking survivors.

### *Youth Mentorship*

The Committee heard that targeted investments in youth programming and mentorship can support youth who might otherwise fall behind their peers. Big Brothers Big Sisters of Niagara requested a multi-year investment in their program to expand their reach and enhance supports. YWCA Toronto recommended dedicated funding for girls and gender diverse youth to enable organizations to continue providing responsive, trauma-informed supports that help build healthy coping and self-regulation skills (such as those offered at the organization's Girls' Centre).

## **Citizenship and Multiculturalism**

Architectural Conservancy Ontario requested investments in properties with cultural and heritage value and spoke about the benefits of maintaining or "reusing" existing buildings. They proposed a Heritage Building Grant as a way to encourage conservation and help owners fund restoration. They suggested such a grant could also support housing development—including affordable and supportive housing—by giving priority to building owners maintaining or providing housing.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> These witnesses included Bethesda House and Victim Services of Durham Region. Anova requested an increase to base funding for their women shelters and sexual assault centre, telling the Committee that due to increased demand and rising costs, they had to turn away women seeking shelter.

<sup>23</sup> An individual who is a member of Architectural Conservancy Ontario made similar submissions.

## Colleges and Universities

### *Affordability for Students*

Several organizations representing university students spoke to the Committee about financial pressures current students and recent graduates are facing. The University Students' Council at Western University stated that student debt represented a significant barrier to socioeconomic mobility for young graduates. The Council requested that the Province remove interest on Ontario Student Assistance Program (OSAP) loans for new graduates. The Conestoga Students organization wanted the Province to review OSAP assessment processes and policies to increase grants for low-income students. The University of Toronto Students' Union requested a freeze in international student tuition to protect these students from unnecessary fees and what they described as "runaway operational inefficiencies."

### *Post-Secondary Institution Funding and Finances*

Many post-secondary institutions and organizations representing their interests spoke of financial challenges facing colleges and universities, and drew attention to the recommendations from the Blue-Ribbon Panel on Postsecondary Education Financial Sustainability's *Ensuring Financial Sustainability for Ontario's Postsecondary Sector* report. Many asked for increases to operating grants provided by the Province.<sup>24</sup>

The Ontario Undergraduate Student Alliance suggested that operating grants should be increased to the point that they would account for one-third of total operating budgets to reduce the burden placed on universities to generate revenue through high tuition fees, particularly from international students.

The Ontario Confederation of University Faculty Associations asked that provincial per-domestic student funding be raised to a level comparable to the national average. They suggested that investments in post-secondary education promote economic growth and are particularly important in Northern Ontario where colleges and universities provide a source of stimulation for local communities. Lakehead University asked the Province to increase the Northern Grant, tie it to inflation, and transform it into a comprehensive operating grant. Confederation College requested a distinct tuition policy for public colleges to address what they saw as long-standing inequities between college and university education funding.

Collège La Cité requested that the Ministry of Colleges and Universities work to review funding mechanisms to adapt to flexible program delivery models. They described how the current funding model provides a lower funding value for part-time students, inhibiting novel approaches like their micro-credential programs and MobiliCité model, which are aimed at changing enrolment patterns.

Several witnesses flagged the recent announcement of a cap on international study permits by Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada. Confederation College laid out the impact this may have on the financial viability of their institution. As a measure to address expected financial pressure from the cap, as well as ongoing inflation, they asked the Province to allow increases in public college tuition fees.

### *Specific Courses, Programs, and Services*

The Committee also received funding requests related to specific programs and institutions.

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<sup>24</sup> For example, Western University and the Council of Ontario Universities made this request.

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Computeck College requested funding for proposed training programs to graduate additional personal support workers and cybersecurity professionals. They said these training programs would aim to address the present need for more individuals in these professions.

NOSM University requested a new, long-term funding model for their institution to account for what they described as NOSM's unique position in Ontario's post-secondary landscape as part of the strategy to address the health care needs of Northern Ontario. The Assemblée de la francophonie de l'Ontario asked the Province to support the Franco-Ontarian community by fully integrating Université de Sudbury—previously federated with Laurentian University—as a standalone public French language post-secondary institution.

An individual suggested additional funding be provided to post-secondary institutions to support expanding on-campus student wellness services. They explained that these services could play a crucial role in alleviating broader pressures experienced by the provincial health care system.

## **Economic Development, Job Creation and Trade**

Several witnesses spoke about concerns in their respective sectors and proposed measures for economic development which are addressed in other sections of this report under the ministries they align with. In addition to those recommendations, the Chemistry Industry Association of Canada encouraged the Province to make the chemistry and plastics industry a priority within broader economic development strategies and to develop related investment-attraction initiatives.

### *Regional Innovation Centres*

Several witnesses described the work of the Regional Innovation Centre (RIC) network which provides support and services to innovators across the province. Many, such as Communitech, spoke about the value of RICs in supporting entrepreneurial growth at the regional level by helping founders access talent and reach international markets. ventureLAB Innovation Centre made similar comments and requested continued investments, especially for RICs that support the hardware technology sector. TechAlliance of Southwestern Ontario made recommendations regarding the funding structure for RICs. They asked for an “equitable redistribution” of the existing funding to result in increased annual investments. They suggested that this would allow them to help more technology companies, create better jobs for Ontarians, and provide more robust sector development.

## **Education**

### *Child Care*

The Committee heard that significant investments are needed to support Ontario's child care sector, including operators who have opted to participate in the Canada-wide Early Learning and Child Care (CWELCC) system.

YMCA Ontario and regional YMCAs urged the Province to develop a new child care funding formula, built on full cost recovery.<sup>25</sup> Witnesses also told the Committee that workforce shortages make it difficult to keep current child care programs running. They welcomed the release of Ontario's Child Care Workforce Strategy, including enhanced pay for registered early childhood educators, and recommended further steps such as naming early childhood education as an in-demand profession and providing greater investment in training programs

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<sup>25</sup> The YWCA Ontario Coalition also made this recommendation and urged immediate increases to operating funding for the sector.

and compensation for early childhood educator assistants.<sup>26</sup>

The Association of Day Care Operators of Ontario recommended increased investment in the Ontario Childcare Access and Relief from Expenses (CARE) Tax Credit and in fee subsidies for families who choose child care centres that do not participate in the CWELCC.

Andrew Fleck Children's Services requested capital investment and support for a child care centre that would be co-located together with a Perley Health long-term care home and seniors' village. They said that such inter-generational models benefit children and older adults alike and stressed the need for funding that aligns with actual construction costs.

### *Elementary and Secondary Schools*

The Committee heard from a variety of education stakeholders about fiscal challenges facing schools, including significant inflationary pressures. Common themes included a need for increased mental health supports for students and teachers, educator retention challenges, and pressures school boards face in filling sick leave and short-term disability vacancies.

Representatives explained that ongoing focus on the recovery of schools and student learning has brought heightened attention to long-standing issues related to equity, supports for students with special education needs, student and staff safety, class sizes and classroom supports, and school infrastructure and technology. Witnesses also made recommendations related to staff and executive compensation. Specific recommendations included

- allowing increases in compensation for executives within the broader public sector, including directors of education and superintendents of education (Council of Ontario Directors of Education);
- increasing compensation and improving working conditions for education workers and engaging in active recruitment campaigns to attract qualified teachers and education workers to fill vacancies in classrooms and schools (Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation);
- increasing funding for replacement workers who fill the positions of school board staff on sick leave or short-term disability plans to reflect the actual cost born by school boards for the necessary replacement of these workers (Ottawa-Carleton District School Board);<sup>27</sup>
- increasing funding to account for federal statutory increases to CPP and EI, which have not been funded by the Ministry of Education (Ontario Catholic School Trustees' Association);<sup>28</sup>
- allocating funding to reduce class size and establish a class size cap of 24 students for grades four to eight, and a cap of 26 students for kindergarten classes (Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario);
- collaborating with Nishnawbe Aski Nation (NAN) to deliver culturally appropriate education programming that enhances educational achievement among NAN youth (Nishnawbe Aski Nation);

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<sup>26</sup> YMCA of Northeastern Ontario and YMCA of Three Rivers were among the regional YMCAs who presented this recommendation to the Committee. YMCA of Oakville asked the Province to reduce the administrative burden on child care operators by providing clear and precise parameters when releasing child care guidelines to municipal service managers, and streamlining municipal reporting requirements.

<sup>27</sup> This was a common request among school board representatives who presented to the Committee.

<sup>28</sup> Council of Ontario Directors of Education; Ontario Public School Boards' Association; and Toronto District School Board were also among witnesses that made this recommendation.

- working with the French-language school system to maximize resources and support, and to accelerate the implementation of initiatives to alleviate shortages of qualified teaching staff (Association des directions et des directions adjointes des écoles franco-ontariennes);
- investing in education technology to ensure that all students, particularly those in rural areas, have ready access to devices for educational use and access to high-speed Internet (Federation of Canadian Secondary Students);
- providing annual investments over three years to Connected North to deliver a range of virtual educational and mental wellbeing resources for students living in northern and remote communities (TakingITGlobal);
- lowering the ratio of students to educational assistants (EAs) and ensuring that students' Individual Education Plans (IEPs) are followed, and that IEPs are provided to EAs who work directly with students (Canadian National Autism Foundation); and
- investing in the non-profit sector to alleviate pressures on elementary and secondary schools (Ottawa Network for Education).

The above recommendations were accompanied by requests for significant investments in public education, and recommendations for broader changes to education funding. For example, the Ontario English Catholic Teachers' Association was among witnesses who told the Committee that the funding formula for special education does not provide sufficient funding to meet the needs of all students. Similarly, a number of witnesses asked Ontario to increase grants for student transportation and to make changes to the transportation funding formula to account for inflation and total costs.<sup>29</sup> Witnesses also asked for increases in funding for school maintenance and improvements, including for improved ventilation, accessibility upgrades, and capital funding for school construction and repairs.<sup>30</sup>

The Ontario Catholic School Trustees' Association recommended increased and multi-year funding in support of student learning recovery, faith formation, and well-being. They emphasized the need for additional focus on student mental health and asked that the Province review student mental health funding and ensure it is adequate and equitable. Witnesses also spoke about a need for targeted funding to support students from Black, Indigenous, and racialized communities, as well as students living in low-income communities.<sup>31</sup>

The Ontario Public School Boards' Association recommended funding that recognizes the local context of every community and school board, with a focus on equity, diversity, and inclusion; Indigenous education; local school board governance; mental health supports; student transportation; and skilled trades and apprenticeships.<sup>32</sup> They requested resources and professional learning for school board staff to assist in monitoring and addressing racism and discrimination, and an Indigenous Languages Strategy, developed in partnership with

<sup>29</sup> Witnesses such as the Council of Ontario Directors of Education also emphasized a need for increased funding for special purpose vehicles and to increase driver compensation.

<sup>30</sup> These witnesses included the Toronto District School Board and the Ottawa-Carleton District School Board. Various witnesses stressed that capital costs related to school construction have increased due to inflation, increased labour costs, and other realities.

<sup>31</sup> For example, the Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario asked the Province to fund additional counsellors, social workers, and school nurses to specifically assist these students and their families. The Ontario Association of Social Workers also recommended dedicated funding for school boards to hire registered social workers, which they said would help achieve the targets of Ontario's Learning Recovery Action Plan.

<sup>32</sup> The Ontario Public School Boards' Association, Central East made a similar presentation. They told the Committee that their local board was experiencing significant gaps between costs and funding, particularly in the areas of transportation and special education.

Indigenous education stakeholders, to support Indigenous languages revitalization.

Organizations representing secondary and elementary teachers requested dedicated resources to address health and safety, and particularly workplace violence in schools.<sup>33</sup>

## Energy

As with other sectors impacted by inflation, affordability was a notable topic regarding energy. The Canadian Propane Association proposed that the Province establish a rural propane retrofit program that would incentivize Ontarians to switch to the use of propane. They said that with the rising popularity of heat pumps, propane could be used as a backup heating source in periods of cold weather.

Witnesses also proposed ways to promote energy efficiency and conservation, often based on environmental concerns. The Atmospheric Fund recommended increased investment in the Conservation and Demand Management (CDM) program to support energy efficiency programs delivered by the Independent Electricity System Operator. This program is aimed at helping consumers reduce their electricity consumption to lower their bills. They said they were also in support of government investment in heat pumps for homes, noting “heat pumps are a way to build homes faster.” An individual also expressed concerns about climate change, describing it as a “health emergency” whose effects were already occurring. They asked that the Province prioritize investments to increase renewable energy.

## Environment, Conservation and Parks

### *Climate Change and the Environment*

The impacts of climate change were a common concern for many who presented before the Committee. To reduce factors contributing to climate change, Nith Valley Ecoboosters urged the Province to incentivize a reduction in fossil fuel usage. They suggested a number of specific measures including incentivizing the installation of electric vehicle (EV) charging stations at homes, businesses, and transit hubs.<sup>34</sup>

The Nishnawbe Aski Nation (NAN) told the Committee that Indigenous communities are often remote and particularly vulnerable to the impacts of climate change. They requested targeted investments in NAN territory through programs and other environmental policy initiatives, such as Green Bonds.

Carbon Removal Canada encouraged strategic provincial investments to support the market for carbon removal in Ontario. For example, they said that biomass (such as forest debris from the forest sector) use for fuel is a developing method of carbon removal that could be supported. They suggested a government carbon procurement program to advance carbon removal projects.

An individual urged the Province to make investments in flood mitigation and green infrastructure. The Small Change Fund told the Committee that natural ecosystems contribute to climate resiliency by providing water and carbon retention, water and air quality improvements, and other ecological goods. Consequently, the Fund advised allocating funding for the

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<sup>33</sup> For example, the Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation recommended a specific education sector regulation under the *Occupational Health and Safety Act*.

<sup>34</sup> Grand River Environmental Network made a similar recommendation of incentivizing and providing provincial rebates for the purchase of EVs.

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acquisition and restoration of natural infrastructure in Ontario's Greenbelt. Bruce Trail Conservancy similarly discussed ecological benefits provided by the natural land they oversee in the Niagara Escarpment. They asked for an investment from the Province in the Greenlands Conservation Partnership, to be matched by private donors, land trusts, and other levels of government with the ultimate goal of aiding in land acquisition. Ontario Nature proposed a new "Wild Ontario Accelerator Fund," intended to identify innovative and cooperative approaches to new protected and conserved areas.

### *Ministry Oversight and Funding Projects*

The Ontario Association of Cemetery and Funeral Professionals called for an immediate pause on enforcement of heating and monitoring requirements for crematoriums. They further asked Ontario to implement emissions and pre-heating requirements that reflect an evidence-based approach.

The Canadian Beverage Association recommended that the Province continue the consultation process through the Ministry's Deposit-Return Stakeholder Working Group. They expressed their support for a deposit-return system in Ontario for plastic, aluminum, and glass beverage containers.

The City of Cornwall requested Ministry support to assist in expediting the design and construction of a secondary water intake, described as a critical infrastructure project for the city. They told the Committee that the intake pipe that supplies the city's water is reaching the end of its useful life, and that a recent environmental assessment recommended construction of a new water intake.

## **Finance**

### *Budget Process and General Recommendations*

In addition to specific policy and program recommendations, some witnesses made suggestions for the overall approach and focus of the Budget itself. Grand(m)others Act to Save the Planet urged that Ontario prioritize a healthy environment by using a climate lens to evaluate every budget decision. A high school student also concerned with climate change and other issues asked the Province to consider how decisions will impact future generations when considering 2024 budget priorities. The Community Commonwealth Association proposed an alternative government financing model and a "Public Service Scorecard" for voters to evaluate the performance of government programs, based on their experience.

The Committee heard from several public sector unions and labour organizations who called for greater investments in the public sector generally.<sup>35</sup> The Ontario Public Service Employees Union suggested that ensuring a strong public service sector was a way to address the pressures brought on by an ongoing "affordability crisis." The Ontario Federation of Labour advocated for increased public sector spending with a focus on centering equity concerns in the design, delivery, and expansion of services. The Canadian Union of Public Employees recommended increasing per capita public sector spending to meet or exceed the average for the rest of Canada. The London and District Labour Council also advocated for more public spending and ensuring that corporations and wealthy individuals pay their "fair share" of taxes.

The Canadian Federation of Independent Business described an economic climate of increased costs and a lack of domestic demand. They stated that many businesses are carrying large debt

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<sup>35</sup> For example, Thunder Bay and District Labour Council wrote that Ontario has an "obligation" to provide properly funded public services that are universal and accessible to all.

burdens and asked the Province to prioritize lowering the cost of doing business. Canadian Manufacturers and Exporters was another group that also asked for the Province to lower costs for businesses and specifically suggested expanding the eligibility for the Ontario Made Manufacturing Investment Tax Credit and supplementing it with an on-the-job training incentive.

### *Insurance*

The Ministry of Finance is responsible for administration of the *Insurance Act*. The Committee heard several recommendations related to this Act and the insurance sector more broadly. The Canadian Association of Direct Relationship Insurers made the case that offering a consumer the choice to use their credit score information as an automotive insurance variable would better allow insurers to provide Ontario drivers with quotes that are rooted in the individual's risk profile. They raised a commitment made in the 2019 Budget to review Regulation 664 under the *Insurance Act*, which sets out prohibited factors for rating classification in automotive insurance and recommended that the Ministry remove credit scores from the list of prohibited factors. FAIR Association of Victims for Accident Insurance Reform urged Ontario to discourage "bad actors" by increasing administrative monetary penalties, and particularly those associated with the Unfair or Deceptive Acts or Practices provisions of the *Insurance Act*.

### *Investment Management*

Policies and programs related to the investment and financial services sector were a concern for several witnesses. AIMA Canada spoke about the rapid consolidation of asset managers globally and recommended Ontario create an emerging manager program.<sup>36</sup> They felt that such a program would benefit Ontario with enhanced productivity, capital formation, job growth, and innovation.

Angel Investors Ontario requested program funding to support operational costs, such as staff salaries and rent, to support their work of facilitating high-risk capital investment in Ontario's start-up ecosystem. They said this sector was a driver of economic growth, development, and job creation and promoted it as a way to commercialize a larger percentage of the amounts of research funding the Province was already providing to colleges and universities. The Ontario Bioscience Innovation Organization was also interested in angel investors and specifically suggested creating an angel investor tax credit to incentivize private investment in the life sciences sector.

### *Taxation*

As with previous pre-budget hearings, there were many recommendations from witnesses seeking specific changes to tax policies and legislation. The Canadian Federation of Independent Business made several recommendations directed at lowering the tax burden for small businesses, including increasing the small business deduction threshold and indexing to inflation. The Ontario Caucus of Habitat for Humanity suggested removing the Harmonized Sales Tax for affordable ownership units, delivered by non-profit providers to help support these builders and promote the creation of additional units. An individual proposed the introduction of community income tax credits to create a more balanced economy. Another individual suggested amendments to the *Taxation Act, 2007*, and other provincial legislation to enshrine the federal Taxpayer Bill of Rights into Ontario law.

The Canadian Bankers Association advocated for a general avoidance of sector-specific taxes,

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<sup>36</sup> They defined emerging managers as asset managers with less than \$1 billion in assets under management.



which they said conflicted with goals of increasing productivity and attracting international capital investments.<sup>37</sup>

The Canadian Energy Marketers Association suggested the creation of a study to determine the total lost provincial tax revenue resulting from illicit activity related to the sale of fuel, alcohol, cannabis, and tobacco.

## Francophone Affairs

Assemblée de la francophonie de l'Ontario spoke about the importance of broad investments in French-language services, including the need for a linguistic variable “in every provincial data capture,” such as the Ontario health card, to ensure service providers are aware of language needs. They made recommendations spanning multiple ministries, including calling for investments in education—from French-language child care spaces, through to post-secondary instruction in French. Their main recommendations included additional investment in the Francophone Community Grants Program to account for inflation and increasing demand for services, as well as supporting the recruitment and training of French-speaking and bilingual staff. Francophone organizations made recommendations related to a variety of program and policy areas, which are found under the relevant ministries in other sections of this report.

## Health

### *Broad Recommendations for Investments and Staffing*

The Committee heard from local health coalitions who urged the Province to make significant investments in publicly delivered health care services. They described a health care system in crisis and raised concerns about privately delivered health care, suggesting these services are less cost-effective. They also raised concerns about hospital unit closures and the use of for-profit surgical clinics.<sup>38</sup> Other organizations and individuals made similar observations, with one individual writing to the Committee to explain that Haliburton Highlands Health Services' permanent closure of the Minden emergency department exemplifies the challenges facing the health care system and ask for a comprehensive approach to prevent further closures.

Another common request for investment heard by the Committee related to health human resources. The Committee heard gratitude for recent wage enhancements, but witnesses raised concerns about those professions that did not qualify and about the ongoing legal challenges to Bill 124, the *Protecting a Sustainable Public Sector for Future Generations Act, 2019*. Many of these witnesses asked for a health human resources strategy focused on recruitment and retention that would also deliver wage parity. Several witnesses suggested that current wage differences resulted in some employers—notably in home and community care and primary care—losing staff to other better paying sectors.<sup>39</sup> A few witnesses shared a November 2023 Eckler report that reviewed wages across sectors.

The Registered Nurses Association of Ontario, WeRPN (Registered Practical Nurses Association of Ontario), and the Ontario Nurses' Association asked for nursing-patient ratios in

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<sup>37</sup> For example, they named the federal Financial Institutions (FI) Tax and the Canada Recovery Dividend (CRD).

<sup>38</sup> These coalitions included the London Health Coalition; Ottawa Health Coalition; Thunder Bay Health Coalition; and the Waterloo Region Health Coalition.

<sup>39</sup> Witnesses who discussed the importance of wage parity between sectors included: AdvantAge Ontario; Alliance for Healthier Communities; Children's Mental Health Ontario; Home Care Ontario; Ontario Community Support Association; WeRPN (Registered Practical Nurses Association of Ontario); and various Canadian Mental Health Associations.

various parts of the health care sector; with the Ontario Nurses' Association further requesting that the government investigate the use of agency nurses, raising concerns about costs as well as continuity and quality of care.

Other specific recommendations relating to human resources were made by the Medical Laboratory Professionals' Association of Ontario, the Eastern Ontario Regional Laboratory Association, and the Ontario Society of Occupational Therapists which asked for investments to expand access to clinical placements. The Ontario Physiotherapy Association asked that regulatory amendments be made to expand their scope of practice to allow physiotherapists to order x-rays and laboratory tests.

### *Disease Diagnosis, Management and Treatment*

The Committee heard from witnesses who asked for investments in the management and treatment of diseases facing Ontarians. This included funding to:

- expand the Charles H. Best Diabetes Centre which provides support for self-management to individuals suffering from Type 1 diabetes and their families (The Charles H. Best Diabetes Centre);
- support the FAST signs of stroke public awareness campaign (Heart and Stroke);
- create an annual tax credit that would support families undergoing infertility treatments (Conceivable Dreams, FH Health);
- support the Rapid Access Clinic for Rheumatology (Rheum-RAC) pilot project to improve diagnoses and access to care (Arthritis Society Canada);
- support LevelJump Healthcare to deploy mobile diagnostic imaging services (CT and MRI) in Northern Ontario (LevelJump Healthcare);
- support AI-enabled health solutions through investments within the framework of the Smart Health Initiative (Vector Institute);
- improve access to lung function testing (spirometry) to ensure effective diagnosis and management of Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (Lung Health Foundation);
- provide digital tools that support efficient care pathways and improve the patient experience (Lumina DX); and
- support outpatient cardiac care including independent outpatient facilities by, for example, providing funding to cover overhead costs (Ontario Association of Cardiologists).

The Committee heard from the ALS Society of Canada as well as several local chapters who described the devastating impact of the disease on those diagnosed and their families. These witnesses asked the Committee to recommend investment in multidisciplinary clinics to standardize and enhance care, as well as in equipment and community support programs to maintain independence. The organization further requested that a Secretariat be established to provide oversight and coordination of ALS care, and that a regional strategy be developed to ensure services closer to home for northern and rural residents.<sup>40</sup>

The Alzheimer Society of Ontario explained that promising new treatments are being developed

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<sup>40</sup> These chapters included the ALS Society of Canada, Central and Central East Ontario; ALS Society of Canada, Central East and South East Regions; ALS Society of Canada, Central West Mississauga; ALS Society of Canada, Champlain; ALS Society of Canada, Hamilton, Niagara, Haldimand, Brant.

and will soon be available to Ontario patients. They asked that the Province be prepared as these treatments become available by renewing its dementia strategy and creating a central body, either in Ontario Health or at the Ministry of Health, with funding control that would provide strategic direction to dementia care. They also asked for funding for a community-based program they operate, First Link, which supports those living with dementia and their care partners.

### *Drugs, Devices and Coverage*

The Ontario Health Insurance Plan (OHIP) covers the costs of essential health care and diagnostic services in Ontario. The Committee heard that OHIP coverage should be extended to cover:

- prostate-specific antigen testing for early detection of prostate cancer (Canadian Cancer Society; Hamilton, Burlington and Oakville Chapter of the Congress of Union Retirees of Canada);
- positron emission topography (PET) scans, cerebrospinal fluid analysis, and corresponding lumbar punctures for the purpose of diagnosing mild cognitive impairment and Alzheimer's disease (Alzheimer Society of Ontario);
- Natriuretic Peptide (NP) testing in community laboratories on a permanent basis for patients with suspected or established congestive heart failure (Ontario Association of Cardiologists); and
- the Respiratory Syncytial Virus (RSV) vaccine for Ontarians who have been diagnosed with chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) (Lung Health Foundation).

In addition, the Province provides prescription drug coverage through a number of public drug plans for millions of eligible Ontarians. The largest of such programs, the Ontario Drug Benefit (ODB) program, provides access to eligible Ontarians which includes seniors, recipients of social assistance, and children under the age of 24 without private insurance. Food Allergy Canada asked that ODB coverage be extended to include specialized infant formula for those whose medical diagnosis requires it. The organization noted that there are other jurisdictions already providing some coverage and that this type of formula is expensive for the families who need it and for whom there is no other medically safe alternative.

The Committee heard from the Canadian Cancer Society that explained that many Ontarians are asked to pay out-of-pocket or pay high copayments and deductibles for take-home cancer treatment pharmaceuticals if they do not have adequate private insurance. The Society recommended the Province provide coverage for these drugs for all patients.

AbbVie Canada asked that the Province make the reimbursement process for all drug therapies more collaborative and transparent, noting that industry can be partners in promoting innovation in the health care sector. The organization further requested that funding be increased to the Life Sciences Council and that their recommendations be implemented.

The Ontario Dental Association said that Ontario's various dental programs including Healthy Smiles Ontario and the Ontario Seniors Dental Care Program do not adequately reimburse dentists. The Association asked for additional investments in dental care for low-income Ontarians, noting that the Province will need to coordinate its programs with the new Canada Dental Benefit.

The Canadian Pulmonary Fibrosis Foundation asked that the medical criteria and testing

requirements for access to oxygen therapy be revised and that all costs for all patients receiving home oxygen therapy be fully reimbursed.

### *Home and Community Care*

Witnesses welcomed recent efforts to further integrate home and community care services with other parts of the health care system. However, many raised concerns about the sector's ability to continue to help the elderly, ill, and disabled to live comfortably in their homes without significant investment.<sup>41</sup> An individual living in Dryden spoke to the Committee about difficulties accessing home and community care for a spouse who suffered a stroke and noted that the support received was inconsistent and inadequate and offered little respite.

The Ontario Community Support Association explained that personal support workers and others working in home and community care are paid less than those working in long-term care and hospitals. They said this disparity makes staff recruitment and retention difficult and does not reflect the acuity of clients and the complexity of providing treatment at home. The organization requested increased operational funding for service providers; increased funding for retroactive pay increases required following legal decisions relating to Bill 124; and a permanent wage enhancement to address wage disparities between sectors. Other organizations<sup>42</sup> echoed these concerns including Community Care Durham which noted that the care their organization provides offers immeasurable benefits for persons who would otherwise be isolated from their community. PHSS - Medical and Complex Care in Community asked the government to ensure the availability of one-time funding to trusted partners as they seek to develop their electronic record and cybersecurity capabilities.

Home Care Ontario asked for increases in annual funding to support the Province's rapidly growing seniors population. The organization suggested that investments be targeted to base funding increases, workforce investments, education and training, and digital modernization. The organization also asked that the Province work with its federal counterpart to eliminate the requirement for a 'disability certificate' to claim part-time attendant care through the Ontario Seniors Care at Home Tax Credit. A senior-led, volunteer driven organization, Care Watch Ontario, made similar recommendations, asking the Province to increase service providers' operational budgets and personal support worker wages, and also fund three pilot projects to explore new models of home care delivery in buildings or neighbourhoods with high concentrations of older adults.

### *Hospitals*

While hospitals were described as being efficiently managed, the Committee heard they are facing severe cost pressures related to labour, non-labour inflation costs, and service needs which are growing due to immigration and an aging population.<sup>43</sup> Ontarians visiting hospitals continue to experience long wait times for assessment, long wait times when admission is required, and treatment in unconventional spaces such as hallways. Witnesses told the Committee that a lack of primary care, home care, supportive housing, and other community

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<sup>41</sup> For example, PHSS - Medical and Complex Care in Community asked the Province to address the financial pressures being experienced in the health and social care sectors with an adjusted increase reflective of current costs and a commitment to providing similar funding levels on an on-going basis.

<sup>42</sup> These organizations included VON Middlesex-Elgin Community Corporation and WoodGreen Community Services.

<sup>43</sup> Hospitals that offered testimony to the Committee included: Brockville General Hospital; Hamilton Health Sciences; and Kingston Health Sciences Centre.

care services has resulted in an inappropriate use of hospital resources.

The Ontario Council of Hospital Unions/CUPE explained that while Ontario employs hospital staff engaged in research and education and community health services at appropriate rates, the province lags when compared to other jurisdictions in more traditional areas of hospital work such as emergency care, diagnostic services, medical imaging and intensive care—with the most significant deficit being in nursing and inpatient services. The Council asked that the Province increase staffing in hospitals to address existing vacancies, increase staffing, and build capacity to respond to a growing and ageing population. They also asked that existing positions be made more attractive by improving wages and working conditions.

Dryden Regional Health Centre described the importance of small, rural, and northern hospitals as medical centres which provide a wide array of services and are a central point of entry into the local health care system. The Centre asked for more support for these hospitals. This request was echoed by Services de santé de Chapleau Health Services which further asked for additional funding for Elder Care Capital Assistance Program (ELDCAP) beds generally and funding specifically for an ELDCAP bed that is already operational but not yet receiving Ministry funding.

The Committee was also asked to recommend the government:

- provide a planning grant to the Peterborough Regional Health Centre's expansion project to commence functional programming (Peterborough Regional Health Centre);
- provide a capital planning grant to expand the Brockville General Hospital (Brockville General Hospital);
- provide a capital planning grant to build an emergency department that uses the Emergency Psychiatric Assessment Treatment and Healing model, (EmPATH) and would treat people experiencing mental health crises (Ontario Shores Centre for Mental Health Sciences); and
- establish a critical pathway to allow children and youth with serious mental illness to move seamlessly between hospital and secure treatment facilities (Kinark Child and Family Services).

### *Mental Health and Addictions*

The COVID-19 pandemic led to a heightened need for mental health, psychiatric, and addiction services which continues to persist. Funding is provided to community-based mental health and addiction agencies to offer mental health and addictions services. The Committee heard from local representatives of various Canadian Mental Health Associations who expressed gratitude for increased funding to this sector in the previous budget. However, they noted that the sector continues to be under-resourced relative to the demand for services and that long waitlists persist. They asked for a further 7% increase for their sector to enhance services and address operational challenges such as the recruitment and retention of quality staff, and create a new three-year community supportive housing innovation fund providing capital and operating dollars for innovative and evidence-based models of care with housing supports.<sup>44</sup>

Children's Mental Health Ontario similarly commended the government on recent investments, but requested additional multi-year funding to stabilize, sustain, and build the sector. The

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<sup>44</sup> Local associations included the Canadian Mental Health Association, Champlain East; Canadian Mental Health Association, Durham; Canadian Mental Health Association, Niagara Branch; Canadian Mental Health Association, Lambton Kent; and Canadian Mental Health Association, Thames Valley Addiction and Mental Health Services.

organization explained investments would enable the sector to close the pay gap and retain staff in order to expand specialized services and treatments, and asked that the Province maximize the impact of all new investments by partnering with the sector to develop equity and data strategies. Children's Aid Society of London and Middlesex noted a gap in services for those with challenging mental health illnesses who are not eligible for secure treatment programs and do not require acute hospitalization programs. The Society asked for investments in children's mental health live-in treatment, therapeutic and support services, and budget relief for the children's aid societies who are providing this care and support in the interim.

Other requests included that the Province:

- fund an evidence-based, trauma-informed children's mental health and crime prevention program called Stop Now And Plan (SNAP) (Child Development Institute);
- revise the funding model and increase funding to peer support programs that offer low-barrier services and activities in the community, run by and for people with lived experience of a mental health or addiction issue (PeerWorks); and
- provide ongoing, annual funding for Counselling Connect which offers same-day or next-day in-person, phone or video counselling in a variety of languages (Ottawa Health Team).

Réseau ACCESS Network described how safe consumption sites save lives by preventing overdoses and creating a safe space for a vulnerable population to access medical services. The Network asked that the Province accept their application for funding which they submitted in August 2021, noting that without this funding they will be forced to close, leaving a gap in services in the North.

### *Palliative Care*

Hospice Palliative Care Ontario explained that hospices in Ontario support thousands of individuals each year, but that more beds are needed to meet growing demands for care. The organization asked that the Province continue to build capacity in the sector by increasing funding for grief and bereavement services, providing more funding for in-home visiting services, and by providing capital and operational funding to support an additional 500 beds by 2030. The organization also asked that "one time funding" provided since 2020 be made permanent and annual. The witness further told the Committee that up to 50% of hospice residence costs are covered by community donations.

Hill House Hospice asked for operational and capital funding to create new palliative care beds in Richmond Hill.

### *Primary Care*

In Ontario, primary care providers offer a wide range of healthcare services, including routine care, diagnostics, and referrals to specialists. Effective primary care can prevent more serious illness and reduce the strain on other parts of the health care system.

The Alliance for Healthier Communities and a number of its member organizations described the importance of community-governed, interprofessional, primary care services. These witnesses explained that their organizations provide cost-effective care, often for vulnerable and marginalized Ontarians. However, they indicated that poor compensation relative to those working in other sectors creates challenges attracting and retaining staff, and that the need for team-based care exceeds the resources available. They asked that the Province increase the salaries of professionals working in these teams, provide base budget increases to existing

organizations, and expand access to team-based care especially in rural and northern communities as well as in areas serving disadvantaged and racialized groups. The group also asked for investments in the establishment of a Provincial Indigenous Integrated Health Hub.<sup>45</sup> The Indigenous Primary Health Care Council provided further details on this hub, noting that it would build capacity and supports for coordinated Indigenous-led health system transformation efforts.

The Ontario College of Family Physicians and the Ontario Medical Association (OMA) also recommended more investments in team-based primary care and further requested that the Province reduce the time that physicians spend on administrative tasks. On the latter point, the OMA specifically suggested investments in a centralized intake and referral system, streamlining forms and reducing the need for sick notes and referral letters, funding the use of artificial intelligence scribes, and improving the way physicians receive electronic patient reports. The Ontario Medical Association - North-West District echoed these recommendations adding that the need to implement them is most acute in northern Ontario where problems accessing primary care are most severe. The Ontario Association of Social Workers emphasised that interprofessional primary care teams should include registered social workers.

Locally-focused requests for investments were heard from: the Seniors Health Innovations Hub which asked that a clinic with nurse practitioners providing team-based primary care to seniors be funded in Ottawa; and the Southwest Ontario Aboriginal Health Access Centre which asked that its staffing be increased to two full-time positions (from one half-time physician) at its Owen Sound clinic serving the Grey-Bruce area.

### *Public Health*

The Committee heard from the Middlesex-London Health Unit who said local public health agencies are experiencing serious fiscal challenges that are affecting their operations and the services they can provide to the community. The Unit asked for increases in funding, taking into account inflationary pressures and population growth, to conduct necessary work under the Ontario Public Health Standards. The Unit also asked for increased funding to support increased demand for the Ontario Seniors Dental Care Program and noted the importance of the Healthy Babies Healthy Children initiative which is funded by the Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services and for which need exceeds the resources available.

The Canadian Association of Retired Persons asked that public health funding be allocated to provide the latest vaccines to older adults and increase the uptake of vaccinations for illnesses such as pneumococcal disease, RSV, shingles, and COVID through broad public awareness activities. Merck asked that the Province update pediatric and adult vaccination programs with innovative vaccines as they become available and asked that the Province improve the vaccination rates against human papillomavirus (HPV) to prevent future cancers.

### *Supportive Housing*

Supportive housing programs help Ontarians, including seniors and those with brain injuries, physical disabilities, chronic illnesses, and mental health or addiction issues live independently

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<sup>45</sup> Several members of the Alliance also presented to the Committee: Belleville and Quinte West Community Health Centre; Capreol Nurse Practitioner-Led Clinic; Centretown Community Health Centre; Centre de santé communautaire CHIGAMIK Community Health Centre; Country Roads Community Health Centre; Health Zone Nurse Practitioner-Led Clinic; Norfolk Family Health Team; Seaway Valley Community Health Centre; Thames Valley Family Health Team; and Windsor Essex Community Health Centre. The Hamilton Family Health Team does not appear to be a member of the Alliance but made similar recommendations.

in the community. Several witnesses explained that these programs are necessary to reduce homelessness, but long waitlists exist. Without supportive housing, persons in crisis will turn to their local, already overburdened, emergency departments. The Committee heard supportive housing could be a cost-effective way to reduce pressure on other parts of the health care system.

Numerous witnesses asked for significant investments in supportive housing.<sup>46</sup> Specific requests were heard from the Shelter Health Network which asked the Province to increase access to low-barrier supportive housing and the Hamilton Alliance for Tiny Shelters which asked the Province to support a proposed village of tiny homes serving those who would otherwise be homeless until more permanent housing becomes available. The Committee also heard from a coalition of community housing providers, Hamilton is Home, which asked the Province to fund more than 400 supportive housing units in eight projects.

The Brain Injury Services of Northern Ontario asked for capital and ongoing operational funding to support the development of a community-based assisted living facility, including 12 "Schedule 1" beds.

The Catholic Health Association of Ontario urged the government to pool the operating and capital funding envelopes it offers across various ministries into a single funding source that offers multi-year commitments. IRIS Residential Inns and Services asked the Province to address a gap between the funding it receives for its supportive housing program and the true cost of delivering services.

## **Indigenous Affairs**

The Committee recognizes the importance of ensuring that First Nations, Inuit, and Métis people are considered and consulted 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, environment, social services, and capacity-building for sustainable economic development supported by First Nations. Recommendations are included under the relevant ministries in other sections of this report.

## **Infrastructure**

### *General Infrastructure Requests*

The Committee heard many proposals for infrastructure funding in various sectors as detailed elsewhere in this report. The Committee also received more general suggestions for infrastructure spending. Concrete Ontario and the Cement Association of Canada both expressed continued support for infrastructure spending as a driver of the wider provincial economy.

The Ontario Federation of Agriculture described a need for further investment in rural and "social" infrastructure.<sup>47</sup> For rural infrastructure, they emphasized a need for roads and bridges, reliable broadband and cell coverage, and access to reliable energy. The Mayor of Kenora

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<sup>46</sup> These included: Catholic Health Association of Ontario; Canadian Centre to End Human Trafficking; Feed Ontario; Hamilton Community Benefits Network; IRIS Residential Inns and Services; Ottawa Mission; Peel Region; and various Canadian Mental Health Associations.

<sup>47</sup> They said that social infrastructure included health care, mental health, and support for the veterinary sector.



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spoke to the Committee about the infrastructure challenges facing northern communities, including high project costs, limited resources, short construction seasons, and infrastructure deficits. To address this, the City of Kenora asked for investments in an effective northern infrastructure program.

Taykwa Tagamou Nation emphasised the need for First Nations ownership in critical infrastructure in traditional territories for the success of those projects. In particular, they spoke about the plans for an infrastructure project to build a 230-kilovolt transmission line connecting the Wawa Transformer Station and the Porcupine Transformer Station in northeastern Ontario.

### *Infrastructure Practices*

The Committee also heard suggestions for how infrastructure projects should be carried out in the province. The Progressive Contractors Association called for Ontario to prohibit project labour agreements (PLAs) for major infrastructure projects. They said such agreements between an owner of a construction project and selected trade unions exclude local non-union workers. Community Benefits Ontario requested that Community Benefits Agreements be embedded in all public infrastructure projects to create inclusive and equitable economic development.

The Association of Consulting Engineering Companies Ontario recommended adopting the early integration of engineering and design for all projects. They referenced a 2021 study published by the Construction and Design Alliance of Ontario that argued public sector clients need to incorporate greater pre-project planning at the Request for Proposal (RFP) and design stages.

### *Ontario Community Infrastructure Fund*

The Municipality of Greenstone conveyed to the Committee their appreciation for support they have received through the Ontario Community Infrastructure Fund (OCIF) and other provincial programs. They requested additional application-based programs supporting infrastructure and expanded eligibility for existing programs. The Corporation of the Town of Gananoque recommended greater predictability for the OCIF. In particular, they asked the Province to commit to release OCIF figures before the end of the municipal fiscal year to allow municipalities to account for the funds in the municipal budgeting process. The City of Brockville requested increased funding for OCIF to reflect the current rate of inflation.

### *Ontario Infrastructure Bank*

In the 2023 Fall Economic Statement, a new Ontario Infrastructure Bank was announced. The proposed arms-length, board-governed agency is intended to enable public-sector pension plans and other institutional investors to further participate in large-scale infrastructure projects across the province. Some witnesses expressed support for the proposal, seeing it as a way to attract trusted Canadian institutional investors to help fund critical infrastructure projects.<sup>48</sup> Others expressed concerns about the concept and questioned its value, also highlighting criticisms of the Canada Infrastructure Bank.<sup>49</sup> Parks and Recreation Ontario advocated for including recreation facilities in the definition of “community infrastructure” and receiving dedicated investment through the Ontario Infrastructure Bank to support renovation or replacement of existing community recreation facilities, which they described as having a substantial backlog.

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<sup>48</sup> For example, the Canadian Bankers Association.

<sup>49</sup> For example, the Canadian Union of Public Employees.

## **Labour, Immigration, Training and Skills Development**

The Committee heard about an array of labour-related issues such as inequitable wage distribution, labour shortages, and staffing retention issues. Much of this discussion is captured elsewhere in this report.

### *Employment Standards and Accommodations*

Some witnesses made recommendations related to employee time off and work arrangements. The Canadian Cancer Society implored the Province to provide job-protected leave for individuals undergoing cancer treatment. They explained that the three days of job-protected leave currently provided under the *Employment Standards Act* is insufficient as the typical treatment period for cancer patients is up to 37 weeks for the most commonly diagnosed forms of cancer. The Ontario Federation of Labour and others called for the provincial minimum wage to be increased.<sup>50</sup> AMAPCEO called for the creation of a comprehensive Alternative Work Arrangement policy for the Ontario Public Service, highlighting that their membership overwhelmingly preferred either hybrid or remote work arrangements.

### *Ontario Immigration Programs and Services*

The Ontario Council of Agencies Serving Immigrants recommended increased investment in the Newcomer Settlement Program and Language Training Program to meet higher costs due to inflation and to expand the programs. The Thunder Bay Chamber of Commerce described labour shortages in their community and shared a projection which suggested they would need a significant number of newcomers in the future to address these shortages. They recommended several measures, including ensuring that the Ontario Immigrant Nominee Program allocate more nominee spaces to Northern Ontario.

### *Skilled Trades and the Skills Development Fund*

Shortages in skilled workers was a common theme throughout the Committee's pre-Budget hearings. The Skills Development Fund (SDF) was discussed in some of the sessions.

MIRARCO Mining Innovation described their aim to develop and promote technologies that will extract valuable metals from mine waste. They discussed the economic and environmental potential of this technology and sought support for an existing application to the Skills Development Fund Capital Stream grant to build a new Centre for Mine Waste. The Centre would be located in Sudbury. Literacy Link South Central and Literacy Network of Durham Region requested increased core funding for Ontario's Literacy and Basic Skills (LBS) Program of SDF. They told the Committee this program supports training to assist Ontarians in successfully gaining and maintaining employment.

The Council of Ontario Construction Associations discussed the lack of skilled workers in the construction industry. They stressed the need to accelerate the development of Ontario's new Skilled Trades and Apprenticeship System and to admit more immigrants into Ontario that have skilled trades qualifications and experience.

### *Workplace Health and Safety*

SMART Canada, a union representing sheet metal, air, rail, and transportation workers, noted that during this period of significant infrastructure development, support is needed for the health and safety of construction workers. They requested that the Province protect workers by

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<sup>50</sup> For example, The Ottawa Mission and Poverty Free Thunder Bay.

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investing in training, recruiting and retaining additional occupational health and safety inspectors; providing sustained funding to the Infrastructure Health and Safety Association (IHSA); and launching consultations on working conditions on job sites.

The Thunder Bay and District Injured Workers Support Group raised concerns about the social costs of workplace injuries and corresponding pressure on government finances. The Ontario Network of Injured Workers Groups was similarly concerned and described what they viewed as a “cost shifting” away from the Workplace Safety and Insurance Board (WSIB). They argued that costs traditionally covered under the WSIB were now burdening the provincial budget. They suggested conducting a study to calculate the scale of this cost-shifting and the long-term societal and economic impacts.

## Long-Term Care

The Ontario Long Term Care Association commended the Province for its historic funding commitments to rebuild old homes and build new ones, as well as the recent legislative changes that increase the hours of direct care provided to residents. However, the Association explained that long-term care homes continue to face increased operational costs as a result of inflationary pressures, high patient acuity, and increased staffing costs. They requested: increased funding for staffing, resident accommodation and services including the introduction of an annual operating grant for small, rural and northern homes; increased capital funding to support the rebuilding and modernization of long-term care homes; and growing the workforce to achieve targets for increased hours of direct care by, for example, enabling people to work their full scope of practice.

On the topic of operating funding, the Committee heard that increases to the funding envelopes are required and/or that the funding envelopes should be merged to provide flexibility to home operators.<sup>51</sup> The Champlain Region Family Council Network emphasized the need to improve staffing in long-term care, highlighting issues relating to compensation and working conditions, similar to those raised in home and community care services and developmental services.

On the topic of capital investments, the Committee heard that more investments are needed to support non-profit operators. A witness explained that the Canada Revenue Agency regulations limit the ability of non-profits to accumulate reserves and finance large capital projects and that non-profits tend to spend all available funding on bedside care.<sup>52</sup> AdvantAge Ontario suggested that the Province double the planning grant, increase the base per-diem top up, and provide zero interest rate construction financing through the Ontario Infrastructure Bank.

Several representatives from the Osgoode Care Centre, a long-term care home in a rural area outside Ottawa, asked the Province to address urgent capital needs such as the replacement of a deteriorating septic tank, noting that this was necessary to avoid closure and expand the number of beds it offers. Thrive Group also described capital needs at two older long-term care homes operated by their member organizations and suggested the Province create a fund that would help cover major capital upgrades required by older non-profit homes. Perley Health explained they submitted a proposal to the Ministry for specialized long-term care services using a “small-homes model.”

The City of Dryden and the City of Kenora explained that long-term care homes in their municipalities also serve residents in unincorporated areas; however, these areas do not support long-term care homes through taxation. The cities asked the Province to change the

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<sup>51</sup> These points were raised by AdvantAge Ontario and Perley Health.

<sup>52</sup> The witness was Perley Health.

policy for provincial land tax revenues to address this discrepancy.

Pallium Canada applauded the government for recent legislative changes that enshrined a commitment to the integration of a palliative care philosophy in long-term care homes. For this to be successful, however, Pallium Canada explained that staff should receive training and offered to deliver this training to half of all long-term care homes over the next three years with government investment.

## **Mines**

Witnesses told the Committee about the potential economic benefits of mining to surrounding communities.<sup>53</sup> Frontier Lithium discussed recent major developments in Electric Vehicle (EV) production in Ontario and promoted the idea of establishing a regional EV supply chain that would shift focus to “upstream” processors and materials producers that supply the inputs required by EV battery and EV manufacturers. They recommended targeted investments in ministry programs and infrastructure, and emphasized the economic inclusion of First Nations communities to accomplish this.

## **Municipal Affairs and Housing**

### *Affordable Housing*

The Committee heard from non-profit housing stakeholders about the need for increased funding avenues for non-market housing to improve affordability and fill a need not provided by the private market.<sup>54</sup> For example, witnesses recommended that government establish or underwrite fixed interest loans for non-market housing developers, secured through assets owned by non-profit providers and provide non-profits with upfront equity through a revolving equity fund.<sup>55</sup> Another witness recommended that exemptions or reductions in land transfer taxes be made for the transfer of existing, private market housing to non-profit housing providers.<sup>56</sup> The Co-operative Housing Federation of Canada asked that the Province support co-ops in negotiations with municipalities as they reach the end-of-mortgage period for their assets, in order to retain existing affordable units.

The Committee heard that Ontario should take a more active role in acquiring, building, or maintaining affordable housing, including through its funding to municipalities.<sup>57</sup> For example, the Kenora District Services Board requested that funding for affordable, social, and community housing be more predictable.<sup>58</sup> A joint submission from Ontario United Ways suggested that the Province launch a non-profit rental acquisition program to reduce the net loss of affordable housing units, while also giving non-profits the opportunity to build on government-owned surplus or under-utilized lands to add new housing units.

Stoney Creek Community Homes explained how high and increasing insurance costs are hampering the organization’s ability to provide affordable housing. It recommended the government place reasonable limits on slip, trip and fall tort liability and create a fund for non-

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<sup>53</sup> For example, Thunder Bay Chamber of Commerce and Canada Nickel Company.

<sup>54</sup> For example, the Advocacy Centre for Tenants Ontario; Feed Ontario; and Hamilton Community Benefits Network.

<sup>55</sup> Hamilton East Kiwanis Non-Profit Homes and WoodGreen Community Services, respectively.

<sup>56</sup> Ottawa Community Land Trust.

<sup>57</sup> Witnesses included Housing Assessment Resource Tools Project; Ontario Council of Agencies Serving Immigrants; a United Way joint submission; and a realtor who presented as an individual.

<sup>58</sup> The witness noted how construction costs exceed the market value of housing in Northern Ontario, so government support is needed to meet the demand.

profits that would allow them to reduce hazards.

### *Homelessness Prevention*

Witnesses highlighted the need for improved supports for individuals experiencing homelessness. For example, the Ottawa Mission noted that municipalities are facing additional pressure on shelter services from refugees and asylum-seekers, and recommended that provincial Homeless Prevention Program funding be increased. Street Level Women at Risk was among witnesses recommending that the Province adopt a “housing first” approach by providing individuals with immediate access to permanent housing and flexible, community-based services. This view was echoed by the Alliance to End Homelessness Ottawa, which further recommended a move away from homelessness “management” through the shelter system in favour of other kinds of supports, like rent subsidies.

### *Municipal Affairs*

Municipalities and related organizations told the Committee about the fiscal challenges they face due to inflation, limited revenue tools, and recent statutory development charges exemptions. The Association of Municipalities of Ontario called on the Province to review its relationship with municipalities, and to develop a new framework for municipal revenue.<sup>59</sup>

Bill 23, the *More Homes Built Faster Act, 2022*, was raised throughout the hearings. Witnesses called on the Province to make municipalities “whole” (i.e., make up revenue shortfalls) from reduced development charges enacted by the Bill, or to reverse certain development charge-related amendments altogether, so that municipalities can continue to build infrastructure required to support housing.<sup>60</sup> Other witnesses had specific recommendations related to Bill 23. For example, Peel Region recommended that a fund be created to compensate municipalities for development charge reductions, while the Mayors and Regional Chairs of Ontario asked that housing-specific inflation be factored into development charges. The Committee heard that the municipalities’ fiscal position could also be improved by undertaking updated property assessments to ensure that taxes are distributed in accordance with property values.<sup>61</sup>

The Town of Moosonee discussed its unique situation as a hub for Northern Ontario, including serving five surrounding First Nations communities. They requested investments to support infrastructure improvements and other local priorities, including the construction of a new health campus, major improvements to water and sewer infrastructure, a new fire hall and emergency preparedness centre, and increased passenger and freight train services through Ontario Northland.

### *Planning and Development*

The Committee heard recommendations for how Ontario’s planning regime could be improved to support housing development and increase supply, in particular by reducing administrative burden.<sup>62</sup> Witnesses from the real estate sector called for the elimination of exclusionary zoning,

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<sup>59</sup> The Regional Municipality of Waterloo; the City of Greater Sudbury; the City of Kitchener; and the United Counties of Prescott and Russell echoed this view.

<sup>60</sup> Witnesses included Association of Municipalities of Ontario; Mayors and Regional Chairs of Ontario (MARCO); Ontario’s Big City Mayors; and Peel Region.

<sup>61</sup> The Corporation of the Town of Gananoque urged the Province to increase the school tax levy to mitigate inflationary pressures municipalities face resulting from Municipal Property Assessment Corporation (MPAC) assessment deferrals.

<sup>62</sup> Powell Holdings.

and that Ontario Land Tribunal hearings be streamlined.<sup>63</sup> The Ottawa Real Estate Board told the Committee that four units per lot should be allowed “as of right” across the province.

The Greater Toronto Airports Authority asked that Ontario airports be consulted on planning matters around their lands, and in particular that the employment lands around Toronto Pearson International Airport be protected. Another witness asked that development be focused in built-up areas to preserve farmland. An individual told the Committee that new housing should be built to universal design standards to facilitate home care and related services.

### *Rental Housing*

The importance of rental units to the province’s housing mix was another common theme in the hearings. The Committee was told that Ontario’s rental housing supply could be increased through loan guarantees for purpose-built and affordable rental units.<sup>64</sup>

In particular, witnesses asked for strengthening of the Province’s rent control regime and supports. For example, witnesses recommended eliminating vacancy decontrol (i.e., allowing landlords to reset the rent when a tenant vacates a unit) and extending rent control to all units in Ontario.<sup>65</sup> The Ottawa Mission told the Committee that the Canada-Ontario Housing Benefit should be increased to support more rent supplements for low-income tenants.<sup>66</sup>

### *Specific Projects*

The Committee heard funding requests for specific infrastructure and housing projects. These included:

- an increase in provincial funding for the City of Brockville’s William Street overpass refurbishment project to reflect increased construction costs (City of Brockville);
- support for the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul London Particular Council for its affordable housing project to help maximize a recent sizable private donation (Society of Saint Vincent de Paul London Particular Council);
- funding for the YMCA of the National Capital Region to renovate and retrofit their aging transitional housing infrastructure (YMCA of the National Capital Region); and
- funding for the YWCA of St. Thomas-Elgin’s Project Tiny Hope, which would build 40 small homes owned and operated by the YWCA to be made available at affordable rental rates with specific allocations for women and Indigenous peoples (YWCA St. Thomas-Elgin).

## **Natural Resources and Forestry**

### *Aggregate Resources Sector*

Several witnesses expressed concerns about the management of the province’s aggregate resources. Reform Gravel Mining Coalition highlighted the Office of the Auditor General of Ontario’s recent value-for-money audit that reviewed aggregate extraction operations. They requested additional funding for the Ministry to carry out its responsibilities in the oversight,

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<sup>63</sup> These witnesses included Cornwall and District Real Estate Board; London and St. Thomas Association of REALTORS; and Ottawa Real Estate Board.

<sup>64</sup> For example, London and St. Thomas Association of REALTORS.

<sup>65</sup> These witnesses included Advocacy Centre for Tenants Ontario; Anglican Diocese of Toronto; and Interfaith Social Assistance Reform Coalition (ISARC).

<sup>66</sup> This view was echoed by the Cambridge Shelter Corporation.

licensing, and permitting of the sector. Protecting Escarpment Rural Land made similar recommendations and suggested increasing levies on the industry to fully fund inspections and enable the Ministry to more effectively enforce the *Aggregate Resources Act*. They contended that inappropriate resource extraction has a disproportionate impact on rural communities by, for example and especially, affecting the quantity and quality of well water. An individual made similar recommendations to address what they described as an “out-of-control” industry.

### *Forestry Sector*

An individual spoke to the Committee about various challenges facing Ontario’s forestry sector, including difficulty attracting investment contributing to mill closures. They asked the Province to identify and address key issues that are holding the sector back so that the sector and its workers can be situated as part of the future sustainable bioeconomy.

Weyerhaeuser discussed the forest industry’s contributions to Ontario’s economy. They made several requests for the Province to support the industry, including increased public investment into forest roads. Resolute FP Canada were also in favour of more funding for forest roads, describing them as a public asset used by First Nations communities, as well as by many other industries like mining, tourism, and recreation.

## **Northern Development**

The Committee acknowledges the importance of the unique views and considerations of Northern Ontario in the development of the Budget. The Committee traveled to several cities in Northern Ontario during the pre-Budget consultations and heard the concerns of these communities which are represented throughout this report. The Committee also specifically received recommendations related to Northern development.

### *Northern Ontario Heritage Fund Corporation*

Science North, a science museum located in Sudbury, told the Committee they receive important funding through the Northern Ontario Heritage Fund Corporation (NOHFC). They presented several recommendations they stated were aligned with NOHFC priorities. This included requests to increase internship opportunities and to consider alternative pathways to employment, suggesting these actions could help remove barriers to employment for Indigenous youth and promote leadership skills across Northern Ontario. The Canada Nickel Company recommended increased funding for NOHFC and targeting funds for critical mineral extraction. They further requested that the funding structure provide greater flexibility on criteria to meet industry needs.

AgriTech North spoke to the Committee about their concerns with the funding application processes for small businesses through the NOHFC. They recommended involving a local representative in judging applications as such a person would provide a greater understanding of the local community. AgriTech North further suggested that helping small businesses develop and grow would create a greater future tax base.

## **Public and Business Service Delivery**

Canadians for Properly Built Homes requested that Ontario provide the necessary resources to establish and operate a “Consumer Watchdog” office, as proposed in Bill 122, the *Ontario Consumer Watchdog Act, 2023*. They said there was a need for such a watchdog organization to protect customers and ensure new homes are built to the standards of the Ontario Building Code. The organization suggested funding this by reallocating some of the fees collected by the Ministry of Public and Business Service Delivery.

## **Seniors and Accessibility**

The Ontario Association of Councils on Aging and the Age-Friendly Niagara Council provided their perspective on how the budget should be prepared to address the issues facing older Ontarians. Like other witnesses already highlighted in this report, these organizations emphasized the importance of investments in primary care, home and community care, long-term care, hospitals, and public health. They also described the importance of providing a range of supports that would allow older adults to age in place.

Elder Abuse Prevention Ontario told the Committee that incidents of elder abuse and neglect are growing, with significant investment needed to protect this fastest growing demographic in the province. They recommended investment in abuse prevention programming and funding to support the coordination and expansion of volunteer Elder Abuse Prevention Networks.

Regarding accessibility, the Abilities Centre requested funding to maintain and expand their services providing assistance to people with disabilities who face barriers to employment and to educate prospective employers on workplace inclusion and its financial benefits. An individual recommended additional investment in Budget 2024 to achieve the goal of the *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005* for an accessible Ontario by January 1, 2025.

## **Solicitor General**

Emergency communications centres across Ontario are in the process of transitioning their networks from analog to digital, as required by the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission (CRTC). An individual spoke about a personal experience calling 9-1-1 due to serious concerns about a family member in another jurisdiction, and being told that the call could not be transferred to the relevant emergency services to assist and check on the family member. The witness urged the Province to ensure 9-1-1 emergency calls can be transferred between regions, while leading up to implementation of the Next Generation 9-1-1 system.

## **Tourism, Culture and Sport**

### *Arts and Culture*

The Committee heard requests for investment in arts and performing arts organizations, including capital funding. The Shaw Festival asked for capital investment to rebuild the Royal George Theatre and to establish an artist village and education centre. They emphasized their festival's role as a significant employer in the area, and as a tourism hub. The Just For Laughs Toronto Festival requested direct funding to support their outdoor festival.

An individual spoke about the impact on local communities and local economies when performing arts venues are lost. They recommended that the Province develop a fund, similar to a stream of the federal Canada Cultural Investment Fund, to support "endangered arts organizations" at risk of closure. The witness also requested increased investment in the Ontario Arts Council. Assemblée de la francophonie de l'Ontario supported provincial investment in Place des Arts du Grand Sudbury as an important cultural gathering place for francophones and non-francophones in the Sudbury community.

### *Film and Television*

FilmOntario spoke about the importance of direct investment to ensure Ontario's film and television industry remains competitive, requesting an annual increase to the Ontario Creates



Film Fund to support feature films by a diverse group of Ontario and Indigenous producers and additional investment in early-stage development for film and television. They also asked the Province to maintain Ontario's "competitive and effective" film and television tax credits and to continue to improve the credits.

### *Libraries*

The Committee heard from local libraries, as well as from the Federation of Ontario Public Libraries and Ontario Library Association, describing libraries as community spaces that provide essential services, including connecting to government resources, applying for jobs, completing online tutoring and language courses, and accessing high quality information. These organizations indicated that funding has not kept pace with inflationary pressures or with the demand for library services and asked for increased provincial operating funding, noting that they have seen no increase in the provincial library operating grant in 25 years. They also called for additional annual funding for First Nations libraries to support operations and increase front-line library staff salaries.

Libraries 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 asked that the Province leverage its purchasing power to establish and fund an Ontario digital public library.<sup>67</sup>

### *Sport*

Ontario's After School Program (OASP) offers activities for children and youth in priority neighbourhoods, with programs delivered by non-profit organizations. BGC Canada asked for additional investment in OASP, noting inflationary pressures, rising program costs, increased wages, and increasing rental fees in schools and community locations.

Students from Red Lake District High School and other Red Lake community members asked for infrastructure funding for a regional events, arts and culture hub that would include a new arena and a walking track. They said the facility would be of benefit to youth and elders, including a positive impact on mental health.<sup>68</sup>

Mohawk Sports Park - Sports Council requested investment in recreation infrastructure renewal and replacement. They told the Committee they are currently undertaking a feasibility study and working with the City of Hamilton regarding use of city-owned land for a community hub facility that would allow year-round recreation; they plan to seek provincial support as the project advances.

### *Tourism*

The Committee heard that the tourism industry in Ontario is continuing to recover from the COVID-19 pandemic. Stakeholders spoke about the benefits of a thriving tourism sector for local businesses and Ontario's economy. The Tourism Industry Association of Ontario (TIAO) stressed that the sector needs continuing support and asked the Province to collaborate with TIAO and their members on a provincial tourism growth plan, including strategic regional

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<sup>67</sup> The Ajax Public Library; Brampton Library; Burlington Public Library; Hamilton Public Library; London Public Library; Mississippi Mills Public Library; Niagara-on-the-Lake Public Library; Ottawa Public Library; and Thunder Bay Public Library also presented to the Committee. The Dryden Public Library said that an Ontario digital public library would especially benefit rural libraries that have smaller budgets for online resources.

<sup>68</sup> The students who presented to the Committee were also joined by the Mayor of Red Lake.

planning; recalibrating existing funding opportunities; better leveraging gateway cities and convention centres; and developing a data strategy to guide local and regional tourism planning.

The Ontario Museum Association told the Committee that museums reflect the diverse communities located throughout the province and bring communities together. They asked that Ontario invest in sustainable base funding for the museum sector to support cultural tourism that attracts visitors who provide important economic stimulus and to maintain museums as local community hubs.

## **Transportation**

The Committee heard from several witnesses interested in the various modes of transportation within the province. Much of the discussion was framed by concerns for the environment, safety, and rising demand.

### *Highways*

The Committee heard recommendations about some specific highway construction projects. A number of organizations and individuals urged the Province not to proceed with the construction of the planned Highway 413. Witnesses suggested redirecting funds dedicated to this highway project to help build high density housing in existing suburban neighbourhoods.<sup>69</sup>

In Thunder Bay, an individual emphasized the need for Highway 11/17 to be twinned, with the ultimate goal of a divided highway the full length of the Trans-Canada. They explained that the Province could make incremental progress towards this goal in the near-term by taking steps such as, widening and paving the full shoulder of the highway or building more passing lanes.

### *Road Safety and Regulations*

Representatives from Good Roads spoke about the high proportion of road fatalities that occur on rural, northern, and remote roads. They proposed a practice of road safety auditing, led by Good Roads in partnership with the Ministry of Transportation, municipalities, First Nations, researchers, and the private sector and asked the Province to fund this initiative to reduce the number of injuries and fatalities on roadways.<sup>70</sup>

An individual suggested the Province reinstate licence plate renewal fees and stickers. They argued that the elimination of fees produced complications for law enforcement and that their reintroduction could create a substantial revenue stream for the provincial government at a time when it is needed for program spending.

### *Transit and Cycling*

The Ontario Public Transit Association told the Committee that (commuter rail excepted) transit ridership has returned to pre-pandemic levels. They asked for an increase in funding for the Dedicated Public Transit Fund to maintain affordability and service levels. The David Suzuki Foundation reinforced this recommendation and suggested empowering municipalities to bring in new revenue tools to support public transit. Ottawa Transit Riders also urged the Province to

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<sup>69</sup> For example, Environmental Defence and Grand(m)others Act to Save the Planet.

<sup>70</sup> Good Roads; Good Roads - Eastern Region of Ontario; and Good Roads - Northern Zone all appeared before the Committee to make this recommendation.

invest in public transit, especially paratransit, highlighting it as a matter of equity.<sup>71</sup>

The Scarborough Community Renewal Organization described challenges in their community with the population expected to continue to grow rapidly over the next decade while residents already experience “punishing” commute times to get to work and school. They advocated for investing in:

- the extension of Eglinton Avenue East light rapid transit from the Kennedy Station to the University of Toronto Scarborough and then to Malvern;
- the “busway” express bus connection along the decommissioned line of the former Scarborough RT; and
- the Sheppard avenue transit extension which would connect the subway at Don Mills to McCowan Road, connecting it with the Scarborough subway extension.

As with other sectors, the Committee heard about staffing retention issues in transportation. An individual asked for an increase in Transportation Enforcement Officer compensation to align with enforcement officer positions in other sectors.

Another individual appeared before the Committee describing the increasing economic challenges faced in their neighbourhood. They recommended investments to support cycling and cycling infrastructure, suggesting such investment would benefit the environment and decrease costs for families by reducing reliance on more expensive vehicles.

## Treasury Board Secretariat

### *Bill 124*

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 various witnesses speaking on behalf of affected public sector and broader public sector organizations and workers continued to discuss the effects of Bill 124, both as a barrier to offering competitive wages in their sectors and as an additional cost pressure due to recent related arbitration decisions and settlements. Several witnesses urged the Province to drop its appeal of the constitutionality of the Bill, describing the appeal as costly and the effects of the legislation as “unjust.”<sup>72</sup> Some other organizations commented on concerns about operation and debt-servicing costs for institutions needing to make retroactive payments to affected workers.<sup>73</sup>

### *Public Procurement*

Supply Ontario is a Crown agency, accountable to the Treasury Board Secretariat, created to provide and support supply chain management and procurement activities for a wide array of provincial public sector bodies. Some witnesses made recommendations regarding the procurement policies of Supply Ontario. The Council of Canadian Innovators asked the government to drive economic development through further support for Supply Ontario and

<sup>71</sup> Paratransit programs generally provide door-to-door service for individuals with restricted physical mobility.

<sup>72</sup> For example, the Ontario Nurses’ Association told the Committee that police and firefighters have seen their wages increase at significantly higher rates than nurses. YWCA Ontario Coalition highlighted that the Bill disproportionately impacts feminized sectors and fields that support women, girls and gender diverse people, such as transitional housing and shelter services, child care, and nursing—stressing these workers were also disproportionately affected by the COVID-19 pandemic.

<sup>73</sup> For example, Hamilton Health Sciences; Kingston Health Sciences Centre; the Ontario Long Term Care Association; and Thrive Group.

proposed creating a “procurement concierge” to guide local innovators through the procurement process.

The Committee also heard recommendations directed at wider government procurement policy. The Canadian Manufacturers and Exporters proposed an “Ontario Made” buying strategy to leverage Ontario’s purchasing power to grow the local economy by setting minimum content requirements for Ontario or Canadian materials, components, technology, and labour.

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## RECOMMENDATIONS

The Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs submits the following recommendations to the Minister of Finance to inform the 2024-25 Budget:

1. Continue to focus on a responsible, targeted approach, implementing a plan to get infrastructure built, increase economic prosperity, and help people with cost of living.
2. Continue to make targeted investments that keep costs down and make life more affordable for the people of Ontario.
3. Continue to support and invest in the healthcare sector and increase access to reliable, quality care for all Ontarians.
4. Build on previous work to address the housing and infrastructure crisis and get shovels in the ground.
5. Continue the work with all levels of government to address key barriers around building more infrastructure and housing and lowering costs for the people of Ontario.
6. Improve transit accessibility, reliability, and safety across the province.
7. Increase people's ability to obtain high-quality jobs, and train more skilled workers for the sectors that Ontario needs, in trades, healthcare, and more.
8. Continue to explore new areas to reduce red tape and burdensome regulations, in order to improve Ontario's competitiveness.
9. Continue to 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. Build on previous work to attract investments and jobs across the province by making Ontario a competitive place to do business and building a stronger economy.
11. Continue building Ontario's economy for today and tomorrow by advancing plans for the numerous sectors including EV, critical minerals, auto, skilled trades and more.

**WITNESS LIST**

| <b>Organization/Individual</b>                             | <b>Date of Appearance</b>                |
|--|--|
| AbbVie Canada  | December 13, 2023,<br>written submission |
| Abilities Centre   | December 12, 2023                        |
| Aditya Rao   | January 24, 2024                         |
| AdvantAge Ontario  | Written submission                       |
| Advocacy Centre for Tenants Ontario (ACTO)                 | January 9, 2024,<br>written submission   |
| Age-Friendly Niagara Council                               | Written submission                       |
| AgriTech North   | February 1, 2024                         |
| AIMA Canada  | January 23, 2024,<br>written submission  |
| Alliance for a Tobacco Free Ontario                        | Written submission                       |
| Alliance for Healthier Communities                         | December 14, 2023,<br>written submission |
| Alliance to End Homelessness Ottawa                        | January 24, 2024                         |
| ALS Society of Canada                                      | December 14, 2023,<br>written submission |
| ALS Society of Canada, Central and Central East Ontario    | December 13, 2023,<br>written submission |
| ALS Society of Canada, Central East and South East Regions | December 12, 2023                        |
| ALS Society of Canada, Central West Mississauga            | Written submission                       |
| ALS Society of Canada, Champlain                           | January 25, 2024                         |
| ALS Society of Canada, Hamilton, Niagara, Haldimand, Brant | January 11, 2024,<br>written submission  |
| Alzheimer Society of Ontario                               | January 17, 2024,<br>written submission  |
| AMAPCEO  | Written submission                       |

| Organization/Individual   | Date of Appearance                       |
|---|--|
| Angel Investors Ontario   | January 9, 2024,<br>written submission   |
| Anglican Diocese of Toronto   | Written submission                       |
| Anova: A Future Without Violence  | January 17, 2024,<br>written submission  |
| Architectural Conservancy Ontario   | February 1, 2024,<br>written submission  |
| Arthritis Society Canada  | December 13, 2023,<br>written submission |
| Assemblée de la francophonie de l'Ontario   | January 30, 2024,<br>written submission  |
| Association des directions et des directions adjointes des écoles franco-ontariennes (ADFO) | January 30, 2024,<br>written submission  |
| Association of Consulting Engineering Companies Ontario (ACEC-Ontario)                      | Written submission                       |
| Association of Municipalities of Ontario  | January 9, 2024                          |
| Aubrey Gonsalves  | January 11, 2024                         |
| Barbara Schumacher  | January 18, 2024                         |
| Belleville and Quinte West Community Health Centre  | Written submission                       |
| Bethesda House  | December 12, 2023,<br>written submission |
| BGC Canada  | Written submission                       |
| Big Brothers Big Sisters of Niagara   | January 18, 2024,<br>written submission  |
| Brain Injury Services of Northern Ontario (BISNO)   | January 31, 2024                         |
| Brampton Library  | December 14, 2023                        |
| Brendon Samuels   | January 17, 2024,<br>written submission  |
| Brockville General Hospital   | January 23, 2024,<br>written submission  |

| Organization/Individual   | Date of Appearance                       |
|---|--|
| Bruce Trail Conservancy   | Written submission                       |
| Burlington Public Library   | January 10, 2024                         |
| Cambridge Shelter Corporation   | January 18, 2024                         |
| Canada Nickel Company   | January 30, 2024,<br>written submission  |
| Canadian Association of Direct Relationship Insurers (CADRI)                              | Written submission                       |
| Canadian Association of Retired Persons (CARP)  | Written submission                       |
| Canadian Bankers Association  | January 17, 2024,<br>written submission  |
| Canadian Beverage Association   | Written submission                       |
| Canadian Cancer Society   | January 18, 2024,<br>written submission  |
| Canadian Centre to End Human Trafficking  | December 14, 2023,<br>written submission |
| Canadian Energy Marketers Association   | Written submission                       |
| Canadian Federation of Independent Business   | January 23, 2024,<br>written submission  |
| Canadian Manufacturers and Exporters  | December 14, 2023,<br>written submission |
| Canadian Mental Health Association, Champlain East  | January 25, 2024,<br>written submission  |
| Canadian Mental Health Association, Durham  | December 12, 2023                        |
| Canadian Mental Health Association, Lambton Kent  | January 16, 2024,<br>written submission  |
| Canadian Mental Health Association, Niagara Branch  | January 11, 2024                         |
| Canadian Mental Health Association, Thames Valley<br>Addiction and Mental Health Services | January 17, 2024,<br>written submission  |
| Canadian National Autism Foundation   | Written submission                       |



| Organization/Individual  | Date of Appearance                       |
|--|--|
| Canadian Propane Association                                   | January 17, 2024                         |
| Canadian Pulmonary Fibrosis Foundation                         | December 14, 2023,<br>written submission |
| Canadians for Properly Built Homes (CPBH)                      | January 25, 2024,<br>written submission  |
| Canadian Union of Public Employees                             | January 16, 2024,<br>written submission  |
| Capreol Nurse Practitioner-Led Clinic                          | January 30, 2024,<br>written submission  |
| Carbon Removal Canada  | January 24, 2024                         |
| Care Watch Ontario   | Written submission                       |
| Catholic Health Association of Ontario                         | December 14, 2023                        |
| Cement Association of Canada                                   | Written submission                       |
| Centre de santé communautaire CHIGAMIK Community Health Centre | January 9, 2024,<br>written submission   |
| Centretown Community Health Centre                             | January 24, 2024                         |
| Champlain Region Family Council Network                        | January 25, 2024,<br>written submission  |
| Chemistry Industry Association of Canada                       | January 11, 2024,<br>written submission  |
| Child Development Institute                                    | Written submission                       |
| Child Witness Centre of Waterloo Region                        | January 16, 2024,<br>written submission  |
| Children's Aid Society of London and Middlesex                 | January 17, 2024                         |
| Children's Mental Health Ontario                               | January 9, 2024,<br>written submission   |
| Christopher Ritsma   | January 10, 2024                         |
| City of Brockville   | January 23, 2024,<br>written submission  |
| City of Cornwall   | January 25, 2024                         |

| Organization/Individual            | Date of Appearance                       |
|------------------------------------|--|
| City of Dryden                     | February 1, 2024,<br>written submission  |
| City of Greater Sudbury            | January 30, 2024,<br>written submission  |
| City of Kenora                     | February 1, 2024,<br>written submission  |
| City of Kitchener                  | January 16, 2024                         |
| Clifford Brewing Company           | January 10, 2024                         |
| Coalition for Healthy School Food  | January 18, 2024,<br>written submission  |
| Collège La Cité                    | Written submission                       |
| Colton Crosby                      | January 24, 2024                         |
| Communitex                         | January 18, 2024,<br>written submission  |
| Community Benefits Ontario         | Written submission                       |
| Community Care Durham              | December 12, 2023,<br>written submission |
| Community Commonwealth Association | Written submission                       |
| Community Development Halton       | January 9, 2024                          |
| Community Living Essex County      | Written submission                       |
| Community Living London            | January 17, 2024,<br>written submission  |
| Community Living Oshawa/Clarington | Written submission                       |
| Community Living Toronto           | January 9, 2024,<br>written submission   |
| Computek College                   | December 13, 2023,<br>written submission |
| Conceivable Dreams                 | January 30, 2024,<br>written submission  |

| <b>Organization/Individual</b>                            | <b>Date of Appearance</b>               |
|---|---|
| Concrete Ontario  | Written submission                      |
| Conestoga Students  | Written submission                      |
| Confederation College                                     | January 31, 2024,<br>written submission |
| Co-operative Housing Federation of Canada                 | January 17, 2024                        |
| Cornwall and District Real Estate Board                   | January 25, 2024,<br>written submission |
| Corporation of the Town of Gananoque                      | January 23, 2024,<br>written submission |
| Council of Canadian Innovators                            | January 18, 2024                        |
| Council of Ontario Construction Associations              | Written submission                      |
| Council of Ontario Directors of Education (CODE)          | December 12, 2023                       |
| Council of Ontario Universities                           | January 9, 2024,<br>written submission  |
| Country Roads Community Health Centre                     | Written submission                      |
| David Suzuki Foundation                                   | January 23, 2024                        |
| DeafBlind Ontario Services                                | Written submission                      |
| Don McLean  | January 11, 2024                        |
| Dryden Regional Health Centre                             | February 1, 2024,<br>written submission |
| Durham Association for Family Resources and Support       | Written submission                      |
| Eastern Ontario Regional Laboratory Association           | Written submission                      |
| Elder Abuse Prevention Ontario (EAPO)                     | Written submission                      |
| Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario                | January 9, 2024,<br>written submission  |
| Environmental Defence                                     | January 10, 2024                        |
| FAIR Association of Victims for Accident Insurance Reform | Written submission                      |

| Organization/Individual   | Date of Appearance                       |
|---|--|
| Federation of Canadian Secondary Students   | January 16, 2024,<br>written submission  |
| Federation of Ontario Public Libraries  | January 10, 2024                         |
| Federation of Ontario Public Libraries, Ontario Library Association, Ajax Public Library                | December 12, 2023                        |
| Federation of Ontario Public Libraries, Ontario Library Association, Dryden Public Library              | February 1, 2024                         |
| Federation of Ontario Public Libraries, Ontario Library Association, Mississippi Mills Public Library   | January 23, 2024                         |
| Federation of Ontario Public Libraries, Ontario Library Association, Niagara-on-the-Lake Public Library | January 11, 2024,<br>written submission  |
| Federation of Ontario Public Libraries, Ontario Library Association, Thunder Bay Public Library         | January 31, 2024                         |
| Feed Ontario  | January 9, 2024                          |
| FH Health   | December 14, 2023,<br>written submission |
| FilmOntario   | December 13, 2023,<br>written submission |
| Food Allergy Canada   | January 30, 2024                         |
| Food Sharing Project  | January 23, 2024,<br>written submission  |
| Frontier Lithium  | January 30, 2024                         |
| George Darouze  | Written submission                       |
| Good Roads  | January 9, 2024,<br>written submission   |
| Good Roads - Eastern Region of Ontario  | January 25, 2024                         |
| Good Roads - Northern Zone  | January 30, 2024                         |
| Gord McNulty  | Written submission                       |
| Grain Farmers of Ontario  | January 16, 2024                         |

| Organization/Individual  | Date of Appearance                   |
|--|--------------------------------------|
| Grand Council Treaty #3  | February 1, 2024, written submission |
| Grand(m)others Act to Save the Planet  | January 9, 2024                      |
| Grand River Environmental Network  | January 18, 2024                     |
| Greater Toronto Airports Authority   | Written submission                   |
| Habitat for Humanity - Ontario Caucus  | Written submission                   |
| Hamilton Alliance for Tiny Shelters  | January 10, 2024, written submission |
| Hamilton, Burlington and Oakville Chapter of the Congress of Union Retirees of Canada (HBO CURC) | January 10, 2024, written submission |
| Hamilton Community Benefits Network  | January 11, 2024                     |
| Hamilton East Kiwanis Non-Profit Homes   | January 10, 2024, written submission |
| Hamilton Family Health Team  | January 10, 2024, written submission |
| Hamilton Health Sciences   | January 11, 2024                     |
| Hamilton is Home   | January 11, 2024, written submission |
| Hamilton Public Library  | January 10, 2024                     |
| Hamilton Roundtable for Poverty Reduction  | January 10, 2024                     |
| Hamilton Social Work Action Committee  | Written submission                   |
| Health Zone Nurse Practitioner-Led Clinic  | Written submission                   |
| Heart and Stroke   | January 10, 2024                     |
| Hill House Hospice   | Written submission                   |
| Home Care Ontario  | Written submission                   |
| Hospice Palliative Care Ontario  | Written submission                   |
| Housing Assessment Resource Tools Project  | Written submission                   |

| Organization/Individual   | Date of Appearance                       |
|---|--|
| Howard Meshake  | February 1, 2024,<br>written submission  |
| Imperial Tobacco Canada   | Written submission                       |
| Income Security Advocacy Centre                                     | Written submission                       |
| Indigenous Primary Health Care Council                              | Written submission                       |
| Interfaith Social Assistance Reform Coalition (ISARC)               | Written submission                       |
| IRIS Residential Inns and Services                                  | January 16, 2024,<br>written submission  |
| Isabella Stefanescu   | January 18, 2024                         |
| Jeff Nicholls   | Written submission                       |
| Jeremy Williams   | January 23, 2024,<br>written submission  |
| John Blais  | January 24, 2024,<br>written submission  |
| John Howard Society of Kingston and District                        | January 23, 2024,<br>written submission  |
| John Howard Society of Ontario                                      | Written submission                       |
| Jon Powers  | January 31, 2024                         |
| Julia McCrea  | December 12, 2023,<br>written submission |
| Just For Laughs Toronto Festival                                    | Written submission                       |
| Kae Elgie   | January 18, 2024,<br>written submission  |
| Karis Disability Services   | January 16, 2024                         |
| Kate Chung  | Written submission                       |
| Kenora District Services Board                                      | February 1, 2024                         |
| Kenora Rainy River Developmental Services Executive Directors Group | February 1, 2024                         |

| <b>Organization/Individual</b>   | <b>Date of Appearance</b>                |
|--|--|
| Kinark Child and Family Services   | January 11, 2024                         |
| Kingston Health Sciences Centre  | January 23, 2024                         |
| Konrad Samsel  | Written submission                       |
| Lakehead University  | January 31, 2024,<br>written submission  |
| L'Arche Ottawa   | January 25, 2024,<br>written submission  |
| LevelJump Healthcare   | January 31, 2024,<br>written submission  |
| Literacy Link South Central  | Written submission                       |
| Literacy Network of Durham Region  | Written submission                       |
| London and District Labour Council   | January 16, 2024                         |
| London and St. Thomas Association of REALTORS                                | January 17, 2024                         |
| London Health Coalition  | January 17, 2024,<br>written submission  |
| London Public Library  | January 17, 2024                         |
| Lori Quenneville   | January 24, 2024                         |
| Lorrie Pepin   | January 9, 2024                          |
| Lumina DX  | January 11, 2024                         |
| Lung Health Foundation   | Written submission                       |
| Lyndsay Dajka  | January 18, 2024                         |
| Marion Burt  | December 13, 2023,<br>written submission |
| Max Moore  | Written submission                       |
| Mayors and Regional Chairs of Ontario (MARCO)                                | Written submission                       |
| Medical Laboratory Professionals' Association of Ontario                     | Written submission                       |
| Medical Laboratory Professionals' Association of Ontario (MLPAO) Board Chair | January 30, 2024,<br>written submission  |

| <b>Organization/Individual</b>                                   | <b>Date of Appearance</b>               |
|--|---|
| Merck  | Written submission                      |
| Michael Wood   | January 24, 2024                        |
| Middlesex-London Health Unit                                     | January 17, 2024,<br>written submission |
| MIRARCO Mining Innovation  | January 30, 2024,<br>written submission |
| Mohawk Sports Park - Sports Council                              | January 10, 2024,<br>written submission |
| Municipality of Greenstone                                       | Written submission                      |
| National Farmers Union local 351, Hamilton, Halton and Brantford | January 10, 2024                        |
| Neighbourhood Legal Services London and Middlesex                | Written submission                      |
| Niagara Nutrition Partners                                       | January 11, 2024                        |
| Nina Deeb  | January 25, 2024,<br>written submission |
| Nishnawbe Aski Nation  | January 31, 2024,<br>written submission |
| Nith Valley EcoBoosters  | January 18, 2024                        |
| Norfolk Family Health Team                                       | Written submission                      |
| North Ontario Farm Innovation Alliance (NOFIA)                   | Written submission                      |
| North Superior Workforce Planning Board (NSWPB)                  | January 31, 2024,<br>written submission |
| NOSM University  | Written submission                      |
| ODSP Action Coalition  | Written submission                      |
| Ongwanada  | Written submission                      |
| Ontario Agencies Supporting Individuals with Special Needs       | Written submission                      |
| Ontario Association of Cardiologists                             | January 25, 2024,<br>written submission |



| Organization/Individual                                       | Date of Appearance                   |
|---|--------------------------------------|
| Ontario Association of Cemetery and Funeral Professionals     | Written submission                   |
| Ontario Association of Councils on Aging (OACA)               | Written submission                   |
| Ontario Association of Interval and Transition Houses (OAITH) | January 9, 2024, written submission  |
| Ontario Association of Social Workers                         | Written submission                   |
| Ontario Bioscience Innovation Organization                    | Written submission                   |
| Ontario Catholic School Trustees' Association                 | January 16, 2024, written submission |
| Ontario College of Family Physicians                          | January 18, 2024, written submission |
| Ontario College of Social Workers and Social Service Workers  | January 11, 2024                     |
| Ontario Community Support Association                         | December 12, 2023                    |
| Ontario Confederation of University Faculty Associations      | January 30, 2024, written submission |
| Ontario Council of Agencies Serving Immigrants                | Written submission                   |
| Ontario Council of Hospital Unions/CUPE                       | January 25, 2024, written submission |
| Ontario Craft Brewers Association                             | January 9, 2024, written submission  |
| Ontario Dental Association                                    | January 17, 2024, written submission |
| Ontario English Catholic Teachers' Association                | Written submission                   |
| Ontario Federation of Agriculture                             | January 18, 2024, written submission |
| Ontario Federation of Labour                                  | January 23, 2024, written submission |
| Ontario Fruit and Vegetable Growers' Association              | January 10, 2024, written submission |

| Organization/Individual                                 | Date of Appearance                       |
|---|--|
| Ontario Library Association                             | January 9, 2024,<br>written submission   |
| Ontario Long Term Care Association                      | January 24, 2024,<br>written submission  |
| Ontario Medical Association (OMA)                       | January 16, 2024,<br>written submission  |
| Ontario Medical Association - North-West District       | February 1, 2024                         |
| Ontario Museum Association                              | December 13, 2023,<br>written submission |
| Ontario Nature  | Written submission                       |
| Ontario Network of Injured Workers Groups               | January 31, 2024,<br>written submission  |
| Ontario Nonprofit Network                               | January 18, 2024,<br>written submission  |
| Ontario Nurses' Association                             | January 10, 2024,<br>written submission  |
| Ontario Physiotherapy Association                       | Written submission                       |
| Ontario Public School Boards' Association (OPSBA)       | December 14, 2023,<br>written submission |
| Ontario Public School Boards' Association, Central East | December 12, 2023                        |
| Ontario Public Service Employees Union                  | January 30, 2024                         |
| Ontario Public Transit Association                      | January 18, 2024,<br>written submission  |
| Ontario's Big City Mayors (OBCM)                        | January 31, 2024,<br>written submission  |
| Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation           | January 23, 2024,<br>written submission  |
| Ontario Shores Centre for Mental Health Sciences        | December 12, 2023,<br>written submission |
| Ontario Society of Occupational Therapists (OSOT)       | Written submission                       |

| Organization/Individual  | Date of Appearance                       |
|--|--|
| Ontario SPCA   | Written submission                       |
| Ontario Trial Lawyers Association  | January 9, 2024,<br>written submission   |
| Ontario Undergraduate Student Alliance                                     | January 10, 2024,<br>written submission  |
| Osgoode Care Centre  | February 1, 2024,<br>written submission  |
| Osgoode Care Centre - Board of Directors                                   | February 1, 2024,<br>written submission  |
| Ottawa Carleton Association for Persons with<br>Developmental Disabilities | January 24, 2024                         |
| Ottawa-Carleton District School Board                                      | January 24, 2024,<br>written submission  |
| Ottawa Community Land Trust  | January 24, 2024                         |
| Ottawa Health Coalition  | January 24, 2024                         |
| Ottawa Health Team   | January 24, 2024,<br>written submission  |
| Ottawa Network for Education   | Written submission                       |
| Ottawa Public Library  | Written submission                       |
| Ottawa Real Estate Board   | January 24, 2024,<br>written submission  |
| Ottawa Transit Riders  | January 24, 2024                         |
| Pallium Canada   | January 25, 2024,<br>written submission  |
| Parks and Recreation Ontario   | January 18, 2024,<br>written submission  |
| Peel Region  | December 14, 2023,<br>written submission |
| PeerWorks  | January 9, 2024                          |
| Peggy Brekveld   | January 31, 2024                         |

| Organization/Individual                                | Date of Appearance                    |
|--|---------------------------------------|
| Perley Health  | January 31, 2024, written submission  |
| Perley Health - Andrew Fleck Children's Services       | February 1, 2024, written submission  |
| Peterborough Regional Health Centre                    | December 12, 2023, written submission |
| Peter Cherwonogrodzky                                  | Written submission                    |
| PHSS - Medical and Complex Care in Community           | January 17, 2024, written submission  |
| Poverty Free Thunder Bay                               | January 31, 2024, written submission  |
| Powell Holdings  | January 17, 2024, written submission  |
| Progressive Contractors Association                    | January 24, 2024, written submission  |
| Protecting Escarpment Rural Land                       | January 10, 2024                      |
| Randal Hare  | January 23, 2024, written submission  |
| Red Lake District High School                          | February 1, 2024, written submission  |
| Reform Gravel Mining Coalition                         | January 18, 2024, written submission  |
| Regional Municipality of Waterloo (Region of Waterloo) | Written submission                    |
| Registered Nurses Association of Ontario               | January 10, 2024                      |
| Réseau ACCESS Network                                  | January 30, 2024, written submission  |
| Resolute FP Canada                                     | January 31, 2024                      |
| Rights 4 Vapers  | December 12, 2023, written submission |
| Rothmans, Benson and Hedges                            | January 25, 2024                      |

| Organization/Individual                                    | Date of Appearance                      |
|--|---|
| Scarborough Community Renewal Organization                 | December 12, 2023                       |
| Science North  | January 30, 2024,<br>written submission |
| Seaway Valley Community Health Centre                      | January 25, 2024,<br>written submission |
| Seniors Health Innovations Hub (SHIH)                      | January 24, 2024,<br>written submission |
| Services de santé de Chapleau Health Services              | January 30, 2024                        |
| Shaw Festival  | January 11, 2024                        |
| Shelter Health Network                                     | January 10, 2024                        |
| Small Change Fund  | January 16, 2024                        |
| SMART Canada   | January 11, 2024                        |
| Society of Saint Vincent de Paul London Particular Council | Written submission                      |
| Southwest Ontario Aboriginal Health Access Centre          | January 17, 2024,<br>written submission |
| Spirits Canada   | January 9, 2024                         |
| Stoney Creek Community Homes                               | Written submission                      |
| Street Level Women at Risk                                 | Written submission                      |
| Student Nutrition Ontario                                  | January 30, 2024,<br>written submission |
| Sudbury Better Beginnings Better Futures                   | January 30, 2024                        |
| summerlunch+   | January 30, 2024,<br>written submission |
| Sustain Ontario  | Written submission                      |
| TakingITGlobal   | Written submission                      |
| Taykwa Tagamou Nation                                      | January 30, 2024                        |
| TechAlliance of Southwestern Ontario                       | January 17, 2024                        |

| <b>Organization/Individual</b>                         | <b>Date of Appearance</b>                |
|--|--|
| Thames Valley Family Health Team                       | January 17, 2024,<br>written submission  |
| The Association of Day Care Operators of Ontario       | Written submission                       |
| The Atmospheric Fund                                   | December 13, 2023,<br>written submission |
| The Charles H. Best Diabetes Centre                    | December 12, 2023                        |
| The Ottawa Mission                                     | January 24, 2024,<br>written submission  |
| Thrive Group   | Written submission                       |
| Thunder Bay and District Injured Workers Support Group | January 31, 2024                         |
| Thunder Bay and District Labour Council                | Written submission                       |
| Thunder Bay Chamber of Commerce                        | January 31, 2024,<br>written submission  |
| Thunder Bay Health Coalition                           | January 31, 2024,<br>written submission  |
| Toronto District School Board                          | December 14, 2023                        |
| Total Communication Environment                        | January 24, 2024                         |
| Tourism Industry Association of Ontario                | January 11, 2024                         |
| Town of Moosonee                                       | January 25, 2024                         |
| Trudi Ford   | Written submission                       |
| United Counties of Prescott and Russell                | Written submission                       |
| United Way Greater Toronto                             | Written Submission                       |
| University of Toronto Students' Union                  | Written submission                       |
| University Students' Council at Western University     | January 16, 2024,<br>written submission  |
| Vector Institute                                       | Written submission                       |
| ventureLAB Innovation Centre                           | January 23, 2024                         |

| Organization/Individual                                    | Date of Appearance                    |
|--|---------------------------------------|
| Victim Services of Durham Region                           | December 12, 2023, written submission |
| VON Canada   | January 16, 2024                      |
| VON Middlesex-Elgin Community Corporation                  | January 17, 2024, written submission  |
| Waterloo Region Health Coalition                           | January 18, 2024, written submission  |
| Wendy Burpee   | Written submission                    |
| WeRPN (Registered Practical Nurses Association of Ontario) | January 23, 2024                      |
| Western University   | Written submission                    |
| Western University (Brescia University College)            | January 23, 2024, written submission  |
| Western University, Centre for School Mental Health        | Written submission                    |
| West Scarborough Community Legal Services                  | Written submission                    |
| Weyerhaeuser   | January 31, 2024                      |
| Windsor Essex Community Health Centre                      | January 16, 2024                      |
| WoodGreen Community Services                               | January 9, 2024, written submission   |
| YMCA of Northeastern Ontario                               | January 30, 2024                      |
| YMCA of Oakville   | January 9, 2024                       |
| YMCA of the National Capital Region                        | January 25, 2024                      |
| YMCA of Three Rivers                                       | January 18, 2024                      |
| YMCA Ontario   | Written submission                    |
| YWCA Ontario Coalition                                     | Written submission                    |
| YWCA St. Thomas-Elgin                                      | January 17, 2024, written submission  |
| YWCA Toronto   | February 1, 2024                      |





**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 before the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs. We are filing this dissenting report regarding the 2024 Pre-Budget Consultations as we do not believe the report fully reflects the voices of Ontarians.

We were pleased to receive feedback from across the province; however, the exclusion of Toronto from the Pre-Budget Consultation process was concerning. While some Toronto organizations were able to present at hearings designated for other regions and submit written testimony, failing to provide an opportunity for these organizations to present in-person in their own community was negligent.

Among those who did have the opportunity to present, each stressed the significant impact of inflationary pressures. Overwhelming evidence was presented to suggest that without immediate investments into human resources and other upstream investments, health, education, and justice systems across the province has reached a critical “tipping point.”

Additionally, many presenters were returning from previous years with similar asks, as their calls for help were not addressed. In fact, many mentioned attending pre-budget consultations year after year but had yet to see the promised funding or were simply ignored. The Official Opposition encourages the government to act on the advice provided by the witnesses to the Committee, and appropriately address the funding challenges faced by Ontarians.

## KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

### *Through its upcoming budget, the government should:*

- Invest in proactive solutions to Ontario’s publicly-funded and publicly-delivered healthcare system and provide immediate support for community mental health programs and services, including covering mental health care under OHIP
- Make meaningful investments in order to combat the devastating impact of worker burnout and stress for workers impacted by under-staffing and under-resourced programs
- Directly invest in the creation of affordable and supportive housing
- Invest in our public education system at consistent and appropriate levels
- Repair the funding formula for post-secondary education to ensure Ontario keeps pace with counterparts across Canada
- Pass the Renfrew County Inquest Recommendations: Declare intimate partner violence an epidemic
- Double ODSP rates
- Protect and invest in Ontario’s libraries, museums, and cultural institutions while recognizing their vital importance as economic drivers

## HEALTH CARE AND THE CARE ECONOMY

### *Primary Care*

Across the province, we heard from healthcare providers who shared practical solutions to the many challenges in our healthcare system. Currently, 2.3 million Ontarians do not have a family physician, and this will swell to 4.4 million by 2026 unless swift action is taken.<sup>1</sup>

The average family physician spends almost 40% of their work week on administrative tasks which pulls them away from patients.<sup>2</sup> While the Committee's report noted the Ontario Medical Association's (OMA) recommendations on efficiency initiatives to help reduce non-clinical work and improve access to care for patients, it did not emphasize the urgency of its needed implementation. According to the OMA, it is essential these solutions are adopted and implemented in the 2024-25 provincial budget to ensure that at least 50 per cent of Ontarians have access to adequate care by March 31, 2026.<sup>3</sup>

For Northern communities, the need is urgent and dire. At a time when healthcare needs in these communities are increasing, half of the physicians working in northern Ontario are expected to retire in the next five years.<sup>4</sup> Meanwhile, many others are adjusting their clinical practices due to the lack of work-life balance, resources, and supports.<sup>5</sup> This means that many northern and rural emergency departments are at risk of closure. To make a lasting impact on physician shortages and understaffed emergency departments, they are asking the province to build a comprehensive physician workforce strategy with four key action areas: retain, recruit, return, and plan for the future.<sup>6</sup> Northern Ontario alone needs an additional 200 family doctors immediately, and these investments would ensure they are trained and retained.<sup>7</sup> As Dr. Viherjoki with the Ontario Medical Association - North-West District said during his presentation, "it is daunting to be the only physician in a community" - these much-needed investments would address that concerning reality.<sup>8</sup>

### *Emergency Rooms*

In 2023, Ontario experienced 203 emergency department closures, largely due to a shortage of nurses.<sup>9</sup> Nurses are leaving the field at unprecedented rates due to burn out and overcapacity struggles.<sup>10</sup> Closures and long wait times caused by this understaffing result in delayed or missed diagnoses, leading patients to return to the emergency department in worse health.<sup>11</sup>

The Registered Nurses Association of Ontario emphasize that implementing staffing ratios, where there is a minimum nurse to patient ratio, is the only way to address retention.<sup>12</sup> If no action is taken, Ontario will suffer a shortage of 30,000 nurses by 2028.<sup>13</sup> Closing the wage gap that nurses experience, closing private clinics (which the Ontario Nurses' Association claimed

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<sup>1</sup> Ontario Medical Association, "Ontario Medication Association"

<sup>2</sup> Ontario Medical Association, "Ontario Medication Association"

<sup>3</sup> Ontario Medical Association, "Ontario Medication Association"

<sup>4</sup> Ontario Medical Association, "Prescription for Ontario: Doctors' Solutions for Immediate Action"

<sup>5</sup> Ontario Medical Association, "Prescription for Ontario: Doctors' Solutions for Immediate Action"

<sup>6</sup> Ontario Medical Association, "Prescription for Ontario: Doctors' Solutions for Immediate Action"

<sup>7</sup> Ontario Medical Association, "Prescription for Ontario: Doctors' Solutions for Immediate Action"

<sup>8</sup> Dr. Stephen Viherjoki, Ontario Medical Association - North-West District, SCFEA February 1, 2024

<sup>9</sup> Ontario Nurses' Association, "Submission on 2024 Pre-Budget Consultations"

<sup>10</sup> Ashley Fry-O'Rourke, Registered Nurses Association of Ontario, SCFEA January 10, 2024

<sup>11</sup> Ontario Nurses' Association, "Submission on 2024 Pre-Budget Consultations"

<sup>12</sup> Ashley Fry-O'Rourke, Registered Nurses Association of Ontario, SCFEA January 10, 2024

<sup>13</sup> Erin Ariss, Ontario Nurses' Association, SCFEA January 10, 2024

undermined public healthcare), and making all nursing placements paid were also recommendations that were made to address nurse retention.<sup>14</sup>

One significant cause of hospital overcrowding cited was a lack of access to home care, long-term care, and palliative care. The OMA drew on an example of a patient with dementia requiring supportive care provided by a long-term care home ending up in a hospital due to a lack of available resources.<sup>15</sup> This bottleneck of patients has existed in Ontario for many years, with its root causes remaining unresolved. The OMA called on the government to adequately fund home care and home-care providers, expand programs that provide hospital-level care in patients' homes, and ensure all Ontarians have access to palliative care when they need it.<sup>16</sup>

### ***Safe Consumption***

Despite the disproportionate number of overdoses in northern Ontario, there are only three safe consumption sites and only one is provincially funded.<sup>17</sup> The other two sites, surviving only on donor funding, are set to close.<sup>18</sup> When these life saving services are not made available, the region will see more people on the streets and in vulnerable situations. Investment in these services diverts the need away from acute care in hospitals.

### ***Mental Health***

Mental health is another area of concern for the Official Opposition. As with other sectors, we have outlined how unaddressed mental health cases often end up in hospitals. Primary care plays an essential role in the early identification and treatment of mental health concerns.<sup>19</sup> However, as has been recorded in other parts of this report, at least 2.3 million Ontarians are without a family doctor, and this is expected to climb to 4.4 million by 2026.<sup>20</sup>

Agencies that provide mental health care in Ontario are looking for multi-year funding to stabilize, sustain, and build the sector. The Executive Director of Children's Aid Society of London & Middlesex told the Committee that as of October 2023, London had “six youth in care who were not otherwise in need of protection, but for lack of access to these [mental health] services.”<sup>21</sup> We ask the Minister to consider the plight of these families, and the pain of surrendering a child simply because their community lacked appropriate mental health supports.

Several municipalities also expressed their concern about the downloading of mental health programming onto their budgets, especially through homelessness programs. This was stressed by Mayor Paul Lefebvre, City of Greater Sudbury, who stated, “We continue to use property taxes to address health-related issues, including \$1.7M in operating costs for wrap-around support services for residents in transitional housing. Additional operating funds would go a long way in helping municipalities support those with complex mental health needs through supportive housing, community outreach, low-barrier drop-in services, and supervised

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<sup>14</sup> Erin Ariss, Ontario Nurses' Association, SCFEA January 10, 2024

<sup>15</sup> Ontario Medical Association, “Prescription for Ontario: Doctors' Solutions for Immediate Action”

<sup>16</sup> Ontario Medical Association, “Prescription for Ontario: Doctors' Solutions for Immediate Action”

<sup>17</sup> Amber Fritz, Réseau ACCESS Network, SCFEA January 30, 2024

<sup>18</sup> Amber Fritz, Réseau ACCESS Network, SCFEA January 30, 2024

<sup>19</sup> Ontario Association of Social Workers, “2024 Provincial Pre-Budget Submission: Opening doors to mental health”

<sup>20</sup> Ontario Medical Association, “Ontario Medication Association”

<sup>21</sup> Chris Tremeer, The Children's Aid Society of London and Middlesex, SCFEA January 17, 2024

consumption sites.”<sup>22</sup> Municipalities have not been made whole since the passing of Bill 23 and cannot be responsible for carrying the burden for mental health supports and supportive housing.

## **Seniors**

The Committee heard a great deal about Ontario’s aging population and the impact this will have on an already overburdened healthcare system. While reflected in the final report, we feel that the severity of this situation warrants additional review.

In 2023, seniors (adults 65+) made up nearly 20% of the population; by 2031, they are expected to make up 25%.<sup>23</sup> In Ontario specifically, the population of 80+ individuals are expected to more than double by 2040.<sup>24</sup> Home Care Ontario calls this the “Demographic Tsunami.”<sup>25</sup> Many of these older adults are stranded in hospitals because there is nowhere else that is safe for them to live. At any given time, alternate-level-of-care (ALC) patients, who are mostly seniors, occupy between 10 and 20 per cent of acute care beds.<sup>26</sup> The Committee heard that by 2043, Ontario will spend over \$27 billion on long-term care and ALC costs exclusively for cases associated with dementia.<sup>27</sup> Many of these costs could be mitigated with immediate action to keep pace with the needs of an aging population with significant and sustainable investment in community settings.

Many seniors could live safely and productively in their own homes and communities if they had services that would meet their needs. This was alluded to in many presentations about the need for Ontario to establish and maintain a sustainable home and community care system to provide home support for seniors and Ontarians living with disabilities. However, the community care sector is experiencing a severe shortage of trained professionals to provide these services, coupled with significant unmet and steadily growing community need.

It is crucial to address the wage and benefits gap between what workers are paid in the community support services sector and what workers who do the same work in other parts of the healthcare system are paid. PSWs in the home and community care sector have the same training yet make 19% less than those working in hospitals and 9% less than those in long-term care.<sup>28</sup> Additionally, to keep about three-quarters of people aged 75 or older out of institutional care, Ontario will need to plan for an additional 23,000 home and community care clients each year - this means expanding home and community support programs by at least 25%.<sup>29</sup>

## **HOUSING**

The need for deeply affordable housing was heard across the province. Marianne Meed Ward, of Ontario’s Big City Mayors, shared that “more housing is important, but especially deeply affordable, supportive housing.”<sup>30</sup> The Advocacy Centre for Tenants Ontario (ACTO) described the need to invest in developing affordable housing and prioritize the non-profit community housing sector to own and manage them.<sup>31</sup> They hope to see all surplus land available

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<sup>22</sup> City of Greater Sudbury, “Provincial Budget Consultation: City of Greater Sudbury submission”

<sup>23</sup> Care Watch Ontario, Care Watch: Advocating Quality Home and Community Care

<sup>24</sup> Care Watch Ontario, Care Watch: Advocating Quality Home and Community Care

<sup>25</sup> Home Care Ontario, “More Home Care: Ontario Needs More Home Care”

<sup>26</sup> Ontario Medical Association, “Prescription for Ontario: Doctors’ Solutions for Immediate Action”

<sup>27</sup> Alzheimer Society Ontario, Help for Today, Hope for Tomorrow: PRE-BUDGET SUBMISSION 2024

<sup>28</sup> Deborah Simon, Ontario Community Support Association, SCFEA December 12, 2023

<sup>29</sup> Care Watch Ontario, Care Watch: Advocating Quality Home and Community Care

<sup>30</sup> Marianne Meed Ward, Ontario’s Big City Mayors, SCFEA January 31, 2024

<sup>31</sup> Douglas Kwan, Advocacy Centre for Tenants Ontario, SCFEA January 9, 2024

dedicated to “truly affordable housing” and the revival of full rent control.<sup>32</sup> ACTO noted that they have been presenting year after year at these consultations but have yet to see funding come through.<sup>33</sup>

Also returning with the same ask as last year, the Ontario Association of Interval & Transition Houses requested a \$60 million investment to offset revenue to the services of their members and ensure workforce stability.<sup>34</sup> While shelters were designed for 6 week stays, they noted the reality is that folks have been staying for 7 months.<sup>35</sup> This greater demand in service is paired with the fact that 46% of their workforce is made up of part-time, relief, and contract positions – “how can we expect the sector to perform its best?”<sup>36</sup> While recruitment and retention strategies are being utilized, stable funding and competitive wages would provide a real, long-term solution.

## **EDUCATION**

Delegations from the Elementary Teachers Federation of Ontario (ETFO) and the Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation (OSSTF) were not prioritized and needed to apply numerous times to be accepted at undersubscribed dates. This gap can be seen in the final report – which reflects an underdeveloped picture of what is happening in public education in Ontario.

While the report zeroes in on very specific concerns, it fails to highlight that education stakeholders all pointed to the greatest challenge being systemic underfunding of the sector. Since 2018-19, funding for education has fallen \$1200 per student.<sup>37</sup> Chronic underfunding creates a significant impact on the quality of education and the ability of hardworking teachers, education workers, administrators, and trustees to deliver the resources and support that students need to succeed. As one witness said, “Ontario students deserve the best, and it is our collective duty as lawmakers, as educators, to collaborate and deliver a world-class, publicly funded education to every student in our care.”<sup>38</sup>

Witnesses including the Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE), EFTO, The Ontario Federation of Labour (OFL), OSSTF, and the Ontario English Catholic Teachers Association (OECTA) called for the level of funding to be restored immediately to what it was in 2018-19 and annual adjustments for inflation moving forward. Stakeholders also requested that the government be transparent and accurate in reporting education funding.

Furthermore, stakeholders called for a full review of the funding formula to ensure that funding addresses student needs.<sup>39</sup> The last review was conducted in 2002. Two related themes were the need for specific investments in mental health for students and special education. Both are areas in which the needs are currently much greater than the resources provided. Only one in ten schools has regularly scheduled access to a mental health professional, while 95% of schools report needing some or more support for mental health.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Douglas Kwan, Advocacy Centre for Tenants Ontario, SCFEA January 9, 2024

<sup>33</sup> Douglas Kwan, Advocacy Centre for Tenants Ontario, SCFEA January 9, 2024

<sup>34</sup> Marlene Ham, Ontario Association of Interval & Transition Houses, SCFEA January 9, 2024

<sup>35</sup> Marlene Ham, Ontario Association of Interval & Transition Houses, SCFEA January 9, 2024

<sup>36</sup> Marlene Ham, Ontario Association of Interval & Transition Houses, SCFEA January 9, 2024

<sup>37</sup> Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation, “OSSTF/FEESO Submission to the Finance and Economic Affairs Committee”

<sup>38</sup> Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation

<sup>39</sup> Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation, “OSSTF/FEESO Submission to the Finance and Economic Affairs Committee”

<sup>40</sup> Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario, “ETFO Submission to the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs”

Stakeholders asked for greater investments in student mental health to ensure sufficient access to mental health professionals (ETFO, OCDSB, OCSTA, OECTA, OPSBA, OSSTF), greater training for educators on mental health (ETFO, OCSTA, OECTA, OPSBA), and additional funding for community resources for children and youth with mental health challenges (ETFO, OECTA, OPSBA, OSSTF).

On special education, stakeholders noted that school boards are spending more than they are receiving on special education and yet schools are still unable to meet the needs of children with disabilities or learning challenges, both for safety and for learning. As OSSTF noted in its submission, special education has been unfairly capped and divided among boards “in an inequitable manner based on statistical projections, which do nothing to address individual school board or student needs.”<sup>41</sup> These students do not get the supports they need to stay safe at school and to learn alongside their peers. Burnout among teachers and education workers is also on the rise as they do their best to support these children every day in deeply challenging conditions.<sup>42</sup> Witnesses called for changes to special education funding that take into account actual needs and set students up for success (CUPE, ETFO, OCDSB, OCSTA, OECTA, OSSTF).

The upcoming budget must make critical investments to address budget shortfalls including changes to special education funding, the lack of mental health support for struggling students and educators, and address the persistent school infrastructure backlog.

### ***Transportation***

Many of the presenters flagged the broken student transportation funding formula as a serious concern. The new funding formula does not cover non-bus modes of transportation, even though small vans are frequently used for students with disabilities and by French boards, which have larger regions with fewer students, making school bus travel an issue of equitable access.<sup>43</sup> An even greater challenge is that the new funding formula simply does not account for the rapidly rising costs of transportation, including the cost of school busses, fuel, and compensation for bus drivers.<sup>44</sup> As a result, the majority of school boards in Ontario are facing deficits, and many of them will face even greater deficits next year. Stakeholders called for funding changes that reflect the true costs of student transportation, including reinstating funding for small vehicle transportation (ACEPO, OCSTA, OPSBA).

Finally, francophone education partners reported that the shortage of French-language teachers has developed into a crisis.<sup>45</sup> Despite having the roadmap created by the Working Group on the Shortage of French Teachers, no commitment to necessary funding has been made, and no urgent action on the recommendations of the Working Group have been taken. Stakeholders asked for the full amount of funding necessary to address the shortage and the implementation of all recommendations (ACEPO, ADFO).

### ***POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION***

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<sup>41</sup> Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation, “OSSTF/FEESO Submission to the Finance and Economic Affairs Committee”

<sup>42</sup> Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation, “OSSTF/FEESO Submission to the Finance and Economic Affairs Committee”

<sup>43</sup> Ontario Public School Boards' Association, “2024 Pre-Budget Consultations”

<sup>44</sup> Ontario Public School Boards' Association, “2024 Pre-Budget Consultations”

<sup>45</sup> Assemblée de la francophonie de l'Ontario, “Mémoire sur les propositions pré budgétaires de la communauté franco-ontarienne en vue du dépôt du budget 2024 du gouvernement de l'Ontario”

Written and verbal submissions from the post-secondary sector illustrated that the sector is at a breaking point. Steve Orsini, CEO of the Council of Universities stated that Ontario has the lowest funding per student in the country, with at least 10 universities operating with deficits.<sup>46</sup> The province's own Blue Ribbon Panel found widespread challenges to PSE funding and noted that a failure to act will threaten the province's reputation, advancement of regional economies, the preparedness of our future workforce and the attraction of foreign investment.

The upcoming budget should take the opportunity to invest in our colleges and universities to make up for losses in the sector.

## **INFRASTRUCTURE**

Investments in infrastructure promote economic growth and improve quality of life for its residents. The government should provide funding for community infrastructure projects, such as a new community centre and arena in Red Lake. This community has been requesting provincial support for more than 10 years because they know the value of recreation in keeping residents healthy, communities strong, and youth engaged.

Also worth highlighting, the high proportion of road fatalities that occur on rural, northern, and remote roads. 55% of fatalities occur on these roads, while only 17% of the population resides on them.<sup>47</sup> One presenter noted, "Right now, road safety in Northern Ontario is 'thoughts and prayers' – we hope for the best."<sup>48</sup> There are significant healthcare costs associated with accidents on these roads, amounting to 43,000 days of hospital stays.<sup>49</sup> Good Roads' proposed partnership with the Ministry of Transportation, municipalities, First Nations, researchers, and the private sector funded by the province would allow them to diagnose and treat the problems leading to these road fatalities.

## **WOMEN AND GENDER-DIVERSE PEOPLE IN ONTARIO**

Absent from the Committee's report was the call to deem Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) an epidemic in Ontario. The Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA) Toronto explained the need to urgently prioritize the prevention of gender-based violence by declaring IPV an epidemic, which would lead to action to address the gravity of this violence.<sup>50</sup> This call was underscored by the fact that 62 women died by femicide between 2022-2023.<sup>51</sup> Acknowledging IPV as an epidemic in the province is a necessary step in prevention and elimination. Silence is violence, and ignoring these calls from across the province, including from survivors, sends the message to perpetrators that women's lives, their safety, and their security does not matter. The Official Opposition supports the call to declare IPV an epidemic and get the attention it deserves.

## **ONTARIO WORKS (OW) AND ONTARIO DISABILITY SUPPORT PROGRAM (ODSP)**

Every Ontarian deserves to have access to robust social services when they need it most. Recipients of OW and ODSP live in legislated deep poverty. The Hamilton Roundtable for Poverty Reduction were among many organizations calling for increased OW and ODSP

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<sup>46</sup> Steve Orsini, Council of Ontario Universities, SCFEA January 9, 2024

<sup>47</sup>Paul Schoppmann, Good Roads - Northern Zone, January 30, 2024

<sup>48</sup> Scott Butler, Good Roads, January 9, 2024

<sup>49</sup> Scott Butler, Good Roads, January 9, 2024

<sup>50</sup> Sami Pritchard, Young Women's Christian Association, February 1, 2024

<sup>51</sup> YWCA Ontario Coalition, "Ontario Budget 2024: YWCA Ontario Coalition Pre-Budget Submission"



rates.<sup>52</sup> The upcoming budget should address the cruel OW and ODSP rates, double them, and ensure that they keep up with the cost of living and inflationary pressures in the years to come.

## ***LIBRARIES***

Public libraries are critical to ensuring access to valuable resources, programs, and services that contribute to the educational, cultural, and social well-being of the community. Presenters from libraries explained that despite the essential services they provide, funding has not kept pace with inflationary pressures or the demand for library services.<sup>53</sup> We recommend that the government provide stable operational funding for public libraries, including additional annual funding for First Nations libraries to support operations and increase frontline library staff salaries. Additional funding support to boost the Ontario Digital public library would pool resources between urban and rural libraries to save funds and ensure every Ontarian has equal access to critical online resources.

## ***CONCLUSION***

The Official Opposition believe that this dissenting report paired with the Committee's report fully captures what was heard across Ontario during the 2024 Pre-Budget Consultation process. Overwhelming evidence was presented to suggest that without needed investments into human resources and other upstream services, health, education, and justice systems across the province will be further compromised. We hope to see the government address these informed requests for strategic investment in the upcoming 2024 budget.

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<sup>52</sup> Laura Cattari, Hamilton Roundtable for Poverty Reduction, SCFEA January 10, 2024

<sup>53</sup> Michelle Arbuckle, Ontario Library Association, January 9, 2024



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

## **INTRODUCTION**

The Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs ("the Committee") travelled across our province to listen to recommendations for the government's upcoming budget. The Liberal members of the Committee thank all those who presented, as well as all those who made written submissions, for taking the time to provide their views and expertise to the Committee. Regarding the format of the consultations, it is worth noting that no hearings were scheduled in Toronto, a decision that prevented many potential presenters from participating and intensified competition for presenter slots in other cities. This also diminished the breadth of perspectives heard.

During this year's pre-budget consultations, the recurrent use of the word "crisis"—used over 400 times by numerous presenters—underscored the urgent situation and funding crisis faced by multiple sectors across our province. Presenters from diverse fields representing healthcare workers, early childhood educators, postsecondary institutions, long-term care homes, and non-profit organizations (among other sectors) each articulated their own versions of crisis. Their statements laid bare a common truth: our communities are navigating an era where nearly "everything is in crisis," which demands decisive and compassionate action to resolve. Another disheartening pattern in this year's pre-budget consultations was the recurrence of requests made at last year's hearings, signaling a lack of progress and attention from this government. Organizations across the province, representing a diverse array of sectors, found themselves compelled to repeat appeals for critical changes and support because they remain unaddressed. Notable among these repeated calls were the urgent need to repeal Bill 124, as voiced by numerous organizations; the restoration of rent control, a priority for groups like the Advocacy Centre for Tenants Ontario and the Ontario Federation of Labour; the allocation of funding for the Digital Public Library, strongly advocated by the Federation of Ontario Public Libraries and local libraries; enhancements to the Risk Management Program, as requested by the Ontario Federation of Agriculture; significant investment in northern highway development, underscored by northern municipalities, foresters, and mining companies; and the expansion of team-based primary care, a critical need highlighted by the College of Family Physicians and others. The recurrence of these requests underscores the ongoing challenges faced by these organizations, representing a broad array of sectors and Ontarians, and reflects the failure of this government to address vital concerns that directly impact the well-being of Ontarians.

### ***BILL 124***

Considering the Committee's extensive consultations across Ontario, it is troubling that addressing the catastrophic impact of Bill 124 remains glaringly absent from the recommendations. This legislative measure, which capped wage increases for public sector and many non-profit workers at 1%—far below the rate of inflation—has had a devastating effect on our province's essential services and therefore on the wellbeing of Ontarians. The recent announcement of the bill's repeal comes as a belated acknowledgment of its detrimental effects, yet the damage caused to our public and non-profit sectors cannot be overstated. Countless dedicated professionals, including nurses, healthcare specialists, early childhood workers, and community-service based workers, have left their positions, driven away by unsustainable financial pressures and deteriorating working conditions. This exodus has strained our already overstretched public services and has eroded the quality and accessibility of care and support that Ontarians rely on. The failure of the committee's recommendations to address this issue does a disservice to the countless voices that have highlighted, once again this year, the bill's harmful legacy. It overlooks the urgent need for comprehensive measures to repair and rebuild our public services and non-profit sector, which have been severely compromised by this ill-conceived policy.

## **PRIVATIZATION**

During pre-budget consultations, a consistent theme in the presentations of hospitals and health worker associations was privatization, and how creeping privatization combined with public sector wage caps have propelled many nurses towards private agencies. These agencies, operating without the same financial constraints as public hospitals, offer significantly higher wages, effectively siphoning off skilled nurses from the public system. The irony is profound; hospitals, grappling with staff shortages, are compelled to 'rent' these same nurses back at exorbitant rates—multiples of what they would normally earn in the public sector. This exacerbates the financial strain on hospital budgets - many of which are dealing with deficits, in part caused by using nursing agencies, and undermines the integrity of our public healthcare system. Nurses, the backbone of patient care, are caught in a cycle that creates significant profits for private agencies at the expense of public resources, and the quality of care available to Ontarians. The government must conduct a strategic reevaluation of healthcare privatization and its impacts on the sustainability of our public healthcare system.

## **AFFORDABILITY**

Another common theme that is conspicuously absent from the Committee's recommendations relates to rent control. Numerous presenters highlighted the severe consequences resulting from the government's decision to remove rent control on units constructed post-2018, which contributed to the exacerbation of the housing affordability crisis. Apartments without rent controls have left tenants vulnerable to steep and unpredictable increases in their housing costs, placing them under immense financial pressure and reducing access to stable, affordable housing. The Committee's failure to address this critical issue in its recommendations disregards the strong pleas for action during the consultations. Strengthening the framework for rent controls is a crucial step towards stabilizing the housing market and providing much-needed relief to those caught in the crosshairs of the affordability crisis.

Furthermore, the increase in food insecurity among Ontario families was highlighted by several organizations, such as the Coalition for Healthy School Food, Feed Ontario, summerlunch+, and Sudbury Better Futures Better Beginnings. While we are hopeful that food prices will stabilize, the financial stress many Ontarians are experiencing, due to the current inflationary environment and the increase in the cost of housing, underscores the urgent need for action by this government to ease the burden on struggling households and make life more affordable.

## **PUBLIC TRANSIT**

There is a dire need for the government to invest in the public transportation system across the province. Many voices, including Grand(m)others Act to Save the Planet, Ontario Public Transit Association, Shaw Festival, David Suzuki Foundation, Ottawa Transit Riders and more, urged the government to invest in public transportation systems in Ontario. In his testimony before the Committee, Gideon Forman with the David Suzuki Foundation urged the government to invest in public transportation as it "generates very significant employment" and is "crucial to our post-pandemic recovery." Further, Tim Jennings, CEO of Shaw Festival, expressed his desire for improvements to the GO Transit System, as there are limited buses available for the route between Toronto and Niagara; investing in public transportation will benefit workers and tourists as they travel between the regions. This testimony is further echoed by Larry Whatmore from Scarborough Community Renewal Organization who stresses the need for urgent investments into public transportation to address persistent concerns such as congested buses, and long commute times and to prepare for population growth. As he said, the population in Scarborough is projected to increase by 175,000 by 2051 and the only solution to address transportation is a

large investment in public transit. There is a need to “create a collective sense of urgency now, so we can address the issues we already face and prepare for the population surge that is coming.” The investment in planning and constructing public transportation systems within the city will help improve transit accessibility and congestion within Scarborough. There is a recurring need for public transportation throughout Ontario as people feel the lack of public transportation available to connect major cities. The significant economic and environmental impacts of gridlock on highways and roads are estimated to cost over \$11 billion annually in lost productivity. There were several concerns and recommendations provided by organizations regarding the lack of funding in public transit for revitalizing Ontario's crumbling transportation infrastructure. The Government's persistent neglect of these critical needs is a glaring indictment of its failure to prioritize the welfare and prosperity of all Ontarians. We urge the government to invest in public transportation as it is crucial to better the economy and the livelihood of Ontarians.

## **BILL 23**

The Committee's recommendations also neglect to mention the significant financial strain imposed on municipalities by Bill 23, as indicated in the remarks from the Big City Mayors. This bill limits cities' ability to levy development charges and has drastically reduced municipal revenues across Ontario. This legislation placed Ontario's cities in a challenging financial position, resulting in many making significant increases to property tax rates. The province has promised to make municipalities "whole" through new funding but has yet to deliver on this promise more than one year later. This shortage of funding has adversely affected municipal services, undermining the ability of local governments to serve their communities effectively and plan for necessary infrastructure improvements. It is imperative for the government to act swiftly to remedy this situation, to ensure the sustainability of vital municipal services that are essential for the quality of life of all Ontarians.

## **KEY RECOMMENDATIONS**

1. Provide relief to families struggling with the affordability crisis by raising the Ontario Child Benefit and expanding access to school food programs and other programs aimed at increasing food security.
2. Address the staffing crisis created by Bill 124 in hospitals, schools, and long-term care facilities by improving working conditions and compensation for public sector employees, e.g. healthcare workers, personal support workers, early childcare workers.
3. Re-examine Ontario's approach to their design and roll-out of the federal government's CWELCC system, to implement a cost recovery model for childcare centres to alleviate financial uncertainty, prevent closures, and facilitate the expansion of accessible, high-quality childcare spaces across Ontario, as intended by the federal program.
4. Allocate funding to ensure sufficient educational assistants, behavioral counsellors, child and youth workers, psychologists, and speech and language pathologists to respond to the student mental health crisis and uphold the safety of students and teachers in classrooms.
5. Adopt strategies to contain spending on for-profit nursing agency services within public hospitals and protect sustainability of healthcare funding.
6. Address extensive delays at the Landlord and Tenant Board and strengthen the framework for rent control to enhance housing affordability and stability for tenants.
7. Implement funding mechanisms to compensate municipalities for lost revenue from Bill 23, preserving their capacity to deliver essential services and respond to infrastructure needs, particularly for new development.

8. Implement an immediate 5% increase to developmental services agency core funding, passport funding and special services at home.
9. Redirect funding allocated for Highway 413 towards essential highway development projects in Northern Ontario such as the twinning of Highways 11 and 17, addressing critical infrastructure needs to enhance road safety, and promoting regional connectivity and economic growth.
10. Increase funding to Ontario's Risk Management Program to further support agricultural producers in mitigating risks related to market volatility and unpredictable costs, enhancing the sector's sustainability and resilience.
11. Address funding crisis faced by postsecondary institutions to ensure long-term fiscal sustainability.
12. Allocate additional resources towards initiatives aimed at preventing drug addiction, reducing drug overdose deaths and responding to the opioid epidemic.
13. Work closely with local school boards to adequately fund French-language programs so that they can recruit and retain qualified teachers, thereby expanding French-language learning opportunities for Ontario students.
14. Allocate additional resources towards initiatives aimed at addressing the epidemic in intimate partner violence epidemic and violence-against-women.
15. Enhance operating subsidies for municipal transit agencies to ensure financial stability and operational certainty for municipalities.
16. Develop a robust climate action plan to protect Ontario's environment and reduce emissions, which may include measures like green homes and electric vehicle incentives.

