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(Hansard)**

Tuesday 26 February 2002

**Standing committee on
finance and economic affairs**

Pre-budget consultations

**Journal
des débats
(Hansard)**

Mardi 26 février 2002

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

Consultations prébudgétaires

Chair: Marcel Beaubien
Clerk: Susan Sourial

Président : Marcel Beaubien
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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

STANDING COMMITTEE ON
FINANCE AND ECONOMIC AFFAIRS

Tuesday 26 February 2002

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

COMITÉ PERMANENT DES FINANCES
ET DES AFFAIRES ÉCONOMIQUES

Mardi 26 février 2002

The committee met at 1001 in the Hilton Windsor Hotel, Windsor.

PRE-BUDGET CONSULTATIONS

The Chair (Mr Marcel Beaubien): Good morning, everyone. I'd like to bring the standing committee on finance and economic affairs to order. This is the second day of the pre-budget consultation.

CANADIAN AUTO WORKERS
CHILD CARE SERVICES

The Chair: Our first presentation this morning is from the Canadian Auto Workers Child Care Services. I would ask the presenter or presenters to please come forward. On behalf of the committee, welcome. You have 20 minutes for your presentation this morning.

Ms Heather Boyer: Welcome to southern Ontario. CAW Child Care Services, which began in 1989, began in partnership with the Canadian Auto Workers union, the Big Three corporations and government, with a vision that child care is a right of all Canadian children, that child care is a public good and support for working people and their family responsibilities. As an organization, CAW is both a founding and active member of the Ontario Coalition for Better Child Care. We believe in and support the coalition's mandate to advocate for the development of high-quality, non-profit child care services in Ontario.

The Ontario Coalition for Better Child Care has already made a presentation in Toronto. We're going to be providing highlights from their report, a little bit of what we think as an organization and also to mirror some of the recommendations that the coalition has put forward already.

Mr David Christopherson (Hamilton West): We haven't heard them yet.

Ms Boyer: OK.

Over the past decade we have closely watched as the government of the day made promises to child care that never materialized. The current environment in Ontario has seriously affected the accessibility of child care services and threatens to destroy an entire system that was once envied by every province in the country. Although the Ontario government maintains that it is spending more on child care than any other previous government,

the actual child care expenditures, based on analysis of provincial allocations, show a reduction of almost \$100 million from 1995 to 2001.

We have seen a changed Ontario since 1995 with major impacts on communities all across the province.

Municipal downloading: the transfer of child care costs, promised at 100% to municipalities, was suddenly deemed an interim measure and withdrawn by the province. We do not believe that the municipalities should be a major funder and supporter of child care. They simply don't have enough revenue from property taxes and provincial transfers.

Child care in schools: the province's new education reforms do not recognize child care in schools as legitimate school expenses. Therefore, 40% of all child care programs that exist within schools have now faced eviction, increased rental costs, reduced space and no capital funding to relocate.

Changes to OSAP regulations: removal of parents from social assistance if attending post-secondary education and the elimination of the child care bursary have created a situation where parents graduate with untenable debts and are the only parents expected to borrow in order to pay for child care.

Pay equity: while legislation mandates that child care programs continue pay equity adjustments beyond 1998, the province refuses to flow additional money to meet this obligation. The impact on child care programs is to either accumulate debts that will become unsustainable or directly contravene the statute and not pay the adjustment to workers who deserve it.

Ontario Works child care: this is the first public policy in Ontario to determine that the children of welfare recipients will be limited to unmonitored care due to lack of municipal funding. As a result, some of our neediest children are being placed at risk. More children have died in unregulated child care settings than Ontarians have died from flying truck tires on our highways. Yet the province has hired 54 new inspectors to monitor our highways and not one inspector to monitor unregulated, unmonitored private child care settings.

The same things we have been talking about for over a decade have not changed; we have watched as regulated child care has either diminished or faded away. The federal government has all but withdrawn from social policy, the provincial government has turned back the clock decades and made reductions not seen since World

War II, and municipal governments, now responsible to make crucial budgetary and operational decisions that were never before their responsibility, are in a state of turmoil, creating child care plans with no cohesion across cities.

High-quality child care programs such as the ones CAW Child Care Services offers have high adult-child ratios, consistent caregivers, small group sizes, appropriately trained and compensated staff, and adequate physical environments. These elements of quality child care depend on adequate public funding, non-profit delivery, parent involvement and enforced regulatory standards. We know from volumes of research, some even commissioned by the provincial government, that the early years are too important to waste on a patchwork of disjointed and diminishing services available in Ontario today.

Child care at the international level has received policy attention in recent years as policy-makers have begun to realize that access to high-quality early childhood education and care can strengthen the foundations of lifelong learning for all children.

Transforming knowledge into action is the key. A system of child care in Ontario will support healthy child development, foster economic growth, create jobs, reduce child poverty and homelessness, and invest in the future workforce.

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Along with the Ontario Coalition for Better Child Care, who in their 20th anniversary brief provide highlights from the analytical study by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, we strongly support the following recommendations.

(1) A systematic and integrated approach to policy development and implementation: we must move away from a targeted, subsidy-based system to a publicly funded system.

(2) A strong and equal partnership with the education system: Ontario must devise a system that integrates the current child care system under the Ministry of Community and Social Services with kindergarten under the Ministry of Education and includes a continuum of family support systems.

(3) A universal approach to access, with particular attention to children in need of special support. Ontario must move from a system completely void of equitable access to a plan for universal access. We believe that access to child care should not be based on either a high-income earner or a very fortunate low-income fee subsidy recipient.

(4) Substantial public investment in services and the infrastructure. Ontario must set a goal to match that of the European Union on spending 1% of GDP on ECEC services. This can be done by restoring regulated child care funding to pre-1995 levels and by showing leadership, with the federal government urging an appropriate federal role and substantial funding for ECEC within a national policy framework.

(5) A participatory approach to quality improvement and assurance. Ontario must strengthen its legislative, regulatory and consultative role to ensure that best practices in ECEC programs become the norm. Both physical and human environments for children must be appropriately funded and sustainable.

(6) Appropriate training and working conditions for staff in all forms of provision. Ontario must immediately restore funding to achieve pay equity for ECEC teachers and move their wages from close to the poverty line to a more deserving wage of a workforce with post-secondary education.

(7) Systematic attention to monitoring and data collection. Ontario needs a plan for providing up-to-date information about ECEC and a sustainable long-term research agenda.

(8) A stable framework and long-term agenda for research and evaluation. Ontario must remain at the forefront of new research, act upon new research that supports key elements of ECEC, fund research at the government and non-government levels and share the results with the community.

The Chair: We have approximately two minutes per caucus, and I'll start with the official opposition.

Mrs Sandra Pupatello (Windsor West): Thanks so much for coming today. We appreciate the comments you've made, in particular those changes since 1995 that have impacted on children in this area. We're going to hear from a number of those groups today.

I wanted you to give me a bit of a rundown on what you've seen, particularly in your child care area, in terms of the effects on families and those who are struggling with the costs associated with the various additional payments that the child care agencies are being required to pay.

Ms Boyer: For an agency like ours, I can tell you that we have 250 children waiting for service today who cannot access our child care program. There are 800 children in our area who require some sort of mental health intervention, with one part-time child psychiatrist to service the children who need it. We have families who watch as the child care fees increase and the subsidy criteria tighten. Parents who were able to access subsidy before, so they could go to work or to school, no longer qualify for subsidy because the government has tightened the criteria for subsidy guidelines.

Mrs Pupatello: Can you give me an example of the fees that the families are paying?

Ms Boyer: Currently it's \$46.10 a day to access infant or toddler child care at our municipal centres, and there are recent reports out now that those fees will be increasing in the very near future.

Mr Christopherson: Thank you for your presentation. First, I'd just like to underscore something that you've done a magnificent job of accenting, and that is, the real threat that exists to children in unregulated. For most people it just goes right by; it doesn't stay. The fact that you've tied it to how many people have died from flying truck tires and then pointed out that there are 54

new inspectors to monitor that, and nothing happening—in fact, there are increasing numbers of unregulated child care spaces—is really important.

I believe the average person thinks of unregulated as Aunt Martha down the street who will take in the kids and everything's fine there, and the two families are all but one and the same. What they're not thinking of is somebody who is just desperate, who doesn't have family around, who will take anybody who is taking kids in. They may or may not know them that well and, even if they do know them, that doesn't guarantee they have the skills and ability. They may have situations there that are unsafe for the kids. It's just such a huge issue, and this is the best I've ever seen it put, so I congratulate you.

I have one quick question, if the Chair will let me squeeze it in. You make the statement, "Although the Ontario government maintains that it is spending more on child care than any previous government, the actual child care expenditure based on analysis ... shows a reduction of almost \$100 million from 1995 to 2001." Could you just expand on that for us, please?

Ms Boyer: We were finding that the per-child amount that was being invested in children at 1995 levels was severely reduced in increments each year the Conservative government has been in power. The actual spending that the government spends on each child in this province has been reduced so that the number of children who require care has amounted to \$100 million. That's an actual reduction that we haven't seen since World War II.

Mr Ernie Hardeman (Oxford): Thank you very much for your presentation. I want to clarify the comments that you just made about the reduction. What you're suggesting is that the government's budget figures are correct, that more money is being spent on child care in total, but if you take that over the number of children who are involved in daycare, in fact, per child the amount hasn't gone up but total spending has gone up.

Ms Boyer: No, that's not true. Those figures are not correct.

Mr Hardeman: We should inform the Provincial Auditor of that, because he believes they are correct.

Mr Christopherson: Let her expand on that.

Mr Hardeman: It's my time, Mr Christopherson, thank you very much. You used yours; let me use mine.

I was just wondering if you could tell me about the CAW's involvement in child care. Are they financially involved in providing daycare for the children?

Ms Boyer: Yes, they are.

Mr Hardeman: The last question: in your first point, "A systemic and integrated approach to policy development and implementation. We must move away from a targeted, subsidy-based system to a publicly funded system," you're suggesting that we should have universal daycare that would be available to everyone equally, regardless of their income?

Ms Boyer: That's correct.

Mr Hardeman: They could send their children, just like in the education system?

Ms Boyer: Just like the model we're seeing right now in Quebec.

Mr Hardeman: So there should be no difference. Whether parents could afford to pay for daycare or whether they were low-income people, everyone should get the same service. We should take the money and spread it to more people, so the needy would not have the high quality of care.

Ms Boyer: Well, we've already seen a reduction in the amount of money spent on children in this province, so I wouldn't recommend taking the current amount and spreading it out to more people. It's very clear that the system has not gained over the past six or seven years. The children have lost money within the overall child care budget.

I have a chart here on Ontario's spending for regulated child care between 1942 and 2001. At 1994-95 levels, we were at \$564 million. Now, in the current child care budget in Ontario, we're at \$470 million. That's the reduction I was referring to earlier.

The Chair: On behalf of the committee, thank you very much for your presentation this morning.

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UNIVERSITY OF WINDSOR STUDENTS' ALLIANCE

The Chair: Our next presentation this morning will be from the Canadian Auto Workers Student Centre, University of Windsor. I would ask the presenter to please come forward.

Interjections.

The Chair: Let's have a bit of order, please.

Could you state your name for the record. On behalf of the committee, welcome.

Mr Enver Villamizar: Thank you. Actually, I'm here on behalf of the University of Windsor Students' Alliance. That's a typo. We're the representative organization of the full-time undergraduate students at the University of Windsor. My name is Enver Villamizar and I am the president.

I'm going to start my presentation just by reading off a portion from a United Nations document.

"The states parties to the present covenant recognize the right of everyone to education. They agree that education shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and the sense of its dignity, and shall strengthen the respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. They further agree that education shall enable all persons to participate effectively in a free society, promote understanding, tolerance and friendship amongst all nations and all racial, ethnic or religious groups, and further the activities of the United Nations for the maintenance of peace.

"The states parties to the present Covenant recognize that, with a view to achieving the full realization of this right:

"Higher education shall be made equally accessible to all, on the basis of capacity, by every appropriate means,

and in particular by the progressive introduction of free education.

“Fundamental education shall be encouraged or intensified as far as possible for those persons who have not received or completed the whole period of their primary education.”

The reason I begin with this covenant, of which Canada is a signatory, is to illustrate the fact that this was the stand of the Canadian federal government. It agreed to take a commitment ensuring that its people’s rights were respected.

At this time it is clear that both the federal and provincial governments have no interest in fulfilling this commitment. In fact, the situation facing students wanting to attend post-secondary education has gotten much worse year after year since 1972.

The most serious cuts of government funding came in 1995 with the change of the Canada health and social transfer. As a result, the province cut \$400 million from post-secondary education. As a result of this systemic underfunding, it is students who have faced these cuts head-on. University administrations have passed the buck on to students, mainly in the form of tuition increases.

When Dianne Cunningham, the Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities, said she felt that 35% of their university education was an acceptable amount for students to pay, students at the University of Windsor were paying 47%. Since that time, the percentage we’re paying has gone down, but the raw numbers in terms of cost of tuition have gone up. Since the time that statement was made by Ms Cunningham, a general arts degree has gone up by \$400 a year. That’s just a general arts degree; that doesn’t include those programs which have been deregulated.

In other words, percentages are masking the real costs of the constant cuts to base operating grants to post-secondary institutions. Study after study is confirming what common sense has always told us: as costs rise, students are less likely to attend post-secondary education due to their lack of financial means.

Since 1980, tuition has increased close to 200% in Ontario, after adjusting for inflation. In that same period, average family incomes rose only 1% after inflation. Young people from high-income families were 2.5 times as likely as those from low-income families to have participated in university education in 1998 or before. That’s from a recent Statistics Canada study.

The main issue here is that in many cases students are being faced with insurmountable challenges in order to obtain what is theirs—an education. The minimum wage for students has not increased substantially since 1995 and, generally, labour laws have been relaxed, which makes it easier for employers to demand more hours of work at the same or lower rates of pay.

With government grants shrinking and the economy also entering a serious recession, Ontario’s youth will be the ones who suffer worst. What is most ironic is that most of the cuts were carried out in the name of debt and deficit financing, and the need to balance books. In 1998,

when the provincial government claimed they had done so, we thought that money would be invested back into the system in order to make up a lot of the cuts that took place, but this was not the case.

Meanwhile, since the cuts began in the name of debt and deficit financing, it’s been basically OK for students to bear the brunt of this in the form of debt and deficit financing. On one hand, you have the government saying that fiscal responsibility is very important. On the other hand, you have the government saying it’s OK for students to bear humongous debts before they even enter the workforce.

What we’re trying to point out here is that the commitment which our government made, our country made, to deal with the rising costs of education has not been considered by politicians. Instead, the opposite has taken place. Nowhere can it be said that students are now more able to attend university or college. Instead, the opposite is true.

It is widely held that a university education is a requirement to get a job in today’s economy; therefore, those who cannot obtain a degree or diploma will quite likely not be able to obtain a job that will provide a wage that will allow them to live a stable life. Those who cannot attend will not be just those who do not have the academic qualifications. It will not only be those students who can’t afford to go; it may also be those students who will not be accepted by the university of their choice due to the current lack of space which most universities are facing.

The provincial government has claimed that there will be a seat for every qualified and motivated student in Ontario in time for the double cohort. For us, though, this does not simply mean that there will be a seat for every qualified student. Under current circumstances, we don’t even have enough seats for these students right now. Classes are packed and many students are unable to register in required courses due to class sizes. We feel the commitment the government should make is that the government is committed to a quality post-secondary education for every qualified and motivated student, not just a seat.

This year, for example, our university saw a 10% increase in enrolment—that’s the University of Windsor—up 3% from what we had projected to the government. We were attempting to buy into the government pressure to increase enrolments in order to receive funds that we used to receive ipso facto. When we grew more than we expected, we thought this would mean we would receive enough funds to provide at least the current level of quality to those extra students which we hadn’t projected. This was not the case. Instead, we were actually penalized for taking in too many students because the number of students we took in was above our 7% projections.

Now, the government can claim, “We made the promise that the money would be there in the year of the double cohort,” which would be 2003-04, but studies are showing that students are actually entering university before the double cohort in order to miss it. We’re taking

in some of these extra students, and what's taking place now is that we're actually getting penalized.

We feel that it is absolutely necessary that this be taken into account in next year's budget and that the funds that are allocated in the double cohort year be allocated on a basis whereby if certain universities are taking in students early, they also receive those funds; they don't have to wait until 2003 and ask their board of governors to enter into deficit financing or simply cut other programs in order to fund the extra students.

With respect to student financial assistance, it is the opinion of the UWSA that student loans are not a solution to the problem of the increasing costs of education. Many students are unable to access the limited pool that currently exists, which has not kept pace with the increasing fees as a result of outdated and unrealistic assessment criteria for financial need. Students must prove they live in poverty in order to receive funds they require to go to school and then live in poverty while studying.

In 1993-94, the Ontario government cut virtually all forms of grants to students, thereby forcing them to rely solely on repayable loans. Canada is one of only two OECD countries without a national system of grants.

Since the time that the major cuts to student financial assistance took place, the government has also disqualified part-time students from OSAP eligibility. They forced students with parental responsibilities on to OSAP by terminating their eligibility for social assistance. They have dismantled child care bursaries and made other changes which have made it harder for the students who most require loans to get them.

It is our opinion that the government should restore OSAP funding for part-time students. They should restore child care bursaries for students with dependants, restore access to social assistance for students with dependants and revamp parental contribution and dependency requirements to reflect current student realities.

It is our opinion that the money which has been taken out from student financial assistance should be used to re-establish a system of needs-based grants. As the costs of education have risen and family income has not, it only makes sense that student financial assistance should be made more accessible, not less.

One final issue with respect to student financial assistance: in 1995, a program was created called the work-study program. Initially, it was created with government dollars, which students appreciated because it did create work on campus. But since that time, the program has been expanded to use money from tuition increases, whereby in any given year, if a university chooses to increase its tuition, 30% of that increase in tuition must go back into the work-study program.

I want to give some examples at the University of Windsor. The pool of money this year has added up to \$1 million. The total since the inception of the program has been \$4,200,000. Basically, this equals out to a \$400 contribution per student for this fund. So what's actually taking place is that students are paying for their own

financial assistance. These work-study students have no rights as student labourers on campus. They're used to doing clerical tasks and work that office staff should be doing, who in some cases are unionized and in other cases aren't. The students on the campuses are pitted against unionized labour, whereby if there are retirements or vacations, work-study students are used to fill these spots. Furthermore, most students would rather have a grant, which did exist in the past, as opposed to having to work for the same money that used to be part of the system.

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In terms of research, the University of Windsor has had a great amount of experience with the new funding practice of the government, which forces universities to seek private approval in the form of donations for research as well as capital projects. These are called partnership endeavours.

Universities have had to allocate operating grant money to hiring individuals to seek out private sponsorship. We consider this a loss of money that could be going to students. This effectively, though, has given the private sector veto power over many areas of research at universities. As a result, students and taxpayers pay for infrastructure, lighting, professors and graduate assistants on a continual basis, while the private sector pays one-time donations for research, which increases their profits in the short and long term. It is our opinion that research dollars would be better put to use if universities were allowed to select their own type of research, which best suits the needs of society. If the private sector would like to fund research which is being carried out at a university, that is not the issue I'm having problems with. But new government funding for research should not be made conditional on private sector support.

We had an experience at the University of Windsor where, for example, they say they're going to create new programs in order to meet the needs of the emerging private sector interests. For example, at Windsor we had the program of physics and high technology, which was created because DaimlerChrysler, Mitel and Fitel saw that they had a need for research and space technology. I have no problem with research and space technology, but when it's student dollars that are being used to fund this kind of research for a limited number of students for these companies, I do have a problem with that.

Generally, we would like our government to set aside a plan as to how they are going to fulfill their commitment spelled out in the UN covenant. We are not asking for free tuition at this time. What we are saying is that governments have a responsibility to look out for the well-being of their members, in such a way that the standard of living improves for Canadians and Ontarians. It is our contention that the economy of Ontario has the natural and human resources to fulfill our rights, not only to education but to all other aspects consistent with a modern society. We know that many countries much smaller in size and economy are able to provide a high

level of post-secondary education at minimum to no cost for their youth.

We recommend that federal and provincial governments establish a multi-year plan on how they will address this issue, and bring forward real solutions. A completely accessible education system, in our opinion, is a requirement for Canada—and Ontario—to claim that it is a modern and developed nation. If the level of education of the whole of society is not considered important in determining the advancement of a society, then what is?

The Chair: Thank you very much. We have approximately a minute and a half per caucus.

Mr Christopherson: I was interested when you said that some universities are being penalized by the fact that some double cohorts are trying to get in a year early to avoid the rush and the crush. Could you just expand on that? I didn't quite catch why they're being penalized.

Mr Villamizar: The provincial government changed the method by which they funded universities, and said it would mainly be based on enrolments, as an incentive to encourage universities to create more spaces based on the monies that they had. So our university said, "Fine, we're going to go for those increased dollars based on enrolment by projecting a 7% increase," which we weren't even sure that we would get. But the way things went, we ended up receiving a 10% increase. The government promise was that you'd receive money for each qualified student who wanted to enter. But they had set aside a block of money, not money per student. If more students came, it was still that same block of money. So Windsor was in a situation where we said, "You told us to increase enrolments. We've done so. We're 3% over now. If we don't get money for these extra students, money from the 7% will have to go to them, and the level of quality across the board is going to diminish."

Mr Christopherson: What if the university had set 10% and they hit 10%?

Mr Villamizar: If they had set 10%, then we assume they would have gotten the money that they are now getting for that 7%.

Mr Christopherson: The same money?

Mr Villamizar: No, more money, because they had projected higher enrolment.

Mr Christopherson: So it's all based on projections rather than actual? Is there not a rationalization at the end of the year, based on projected and actual?

Mr Villamizar: They're based on projected as well as current enrolments. So as long as you can show that based on current enrolments, this is a reasonable increase, then they approve those numbers. We had 7% approved, not 10%. But as things went, again, we received 10%, which would make sense as students would start—

Mr Christopherson: Conversely, if you had only hit 5%, there would have been a reconciliation the other way at the end of the fiscal, wouldn't there?

Mr Villamizar: Yes.

Mr Christopherson: But there isn't on the upside?

Mr Villamizar: No, it doesn't seem so. They're basically saying, "Plan for receiving the money in the year of the double cohort, and then either run a deficit or cut other programs in order to ensure those students can be educated."

Mr Joseph Spina (Brampton Centre): Thank you, Enver. The purpose of these meetings is obviously to get input such as yours, from your student perspective. Along with a couple of others here, I'm also an alumnus of the university.

There seems to be a little bit of a contradiction, if you could maybe clarify that for me. You were just talking with Mr Christopherson about the increase and the unexpected enrolment. Enrolment has been increasing over the past few years, quite steadily. I guess what I'm trying to understand is that in your earlier comments you indicated that because of various funding reasons, whether it's OSAP or funding, the cost of university is getting out of hand and it's limiting access. To me it sounds like a contradiction. If it's becoming too expensive to go to school, then how come enrolments are rising, on average, 5% to 10% every year?

Mr Villamizar: Actually, it's quite simple. The reason is because the demographic has increased. The proportion of students from low-income families is decreasing; the raw numbers of students applying to university are increasing because there are more students that age in the demographics in Canada. So what we're seeing is not that the numbers are dropping; it's that who's going to university is dropping. So students from low-income families, again, and even mid-income families, are the ones who are being left out, while students from higher-income families are the ones who are having an easier time. There are students from low-income families who are able to access it through the student loans program but, again, they graduate with \$40,000 in student debt, and that can't be considered a progressive method of graduating from university, already starting out with a mortgage-sized debt.

Mr Spina: If I drew the example of a proportional amount of income versus the amount of student debt, when I finished in 1973, I owed the government almost \$9,000. My starting salary was \$8,500. Most graduates today with that high a debt would likely come out of a business program, as opposed to a liberal arts program, and should likely be able to get a job in the \$30,000 to \$35,000 range. Isn't that proportional?

Mr Villamizar: If that were the case. But, for example, computer science students have had deregulated tuition. The government has said basically, "Universities, double your enrolments in computer science." So Windsor took in double the enrolments in computer science. Now all of these students are not able to find jobs upon graduation, because the market has dropped out. So in the ideal situation, if those jobs were available, that would be the case, but that is not the case currently. Using computer science is a pretty good example; law school is another example where, if you want to pay back your

debts, you're forced to go work on Bay Street. You cannot do anything else.

Mr Spina: But on the other hand, the government—

The Chair: We've run out of time, Mr Spina. I have to go to the official opposition.

Mr Monte Kwinter (York Centre): Enver, thank you very much. I was interested in your comments about the double cohort and the fact that even now there aren't enough seats for students, and that because of the desire to get in before—we were in Sault Ste Marie yesterday; we heard that there's going to be a real problem to accommodate these students.

The funding is based on a full-time equivalency. Even though there's some capital funding to build more space, there doesn't seem to be any funding to operate, operational funds. Have you looked into that and do you have any feelings about what that impact is going to be?

Mr Villamizar: In general, over the system, there aren't enough operating grants, but the main problem we're noticing at Windsor is that certain programs have been focused on while others have been left. So even if there were enough operating grants, the smaller programs are still going to have the enrolment problems, the faculty-to-student ratio problems, because of the targeting funding that the government has used to support only certain programs. So in general across the system there are some areas which are going to have very good faculty-to-student ratios, but those are going to mask the smaller programs, such as English, history and visual arts, which are not going to get the operating grants even though they may be there. They're going to be funnelled into programs other than those which really need it the most.

1040

Mrs Pupatello: A quick question: Enver, you've done a lot of work to advance the case for students over the last several years while you've been at the U, so we thank you for that. I've been dealing in my office with a number of OSAP issues and students who, but for one little regulation in relation to owning a car, for example, and the idea that they have to sell off everything, including their means of transportation to a part-time job to pay the various costs that they have to live and go to school—they've become just untenable for students to continue.

I don't know if you've got a really quick ABC list of the changes that we have to get through OSAP immediately, because the regulations may have been well-intentioned—and I'm going to give them that because I don't know that they've been—but the OSAP rules, regardless of the costs total, which are just going through the roof, are literally throwing people out because of certain regulations that are impossible for students to get over. The ownership of a car and the requirement to sell everything is just untenable for people who have to work these days in order to go to school and can't get from job to school to child care etc.

Mr Villamizar: I guess the most important recommendation I would give is that the assessment criteria for

needs be completely reassessed with massive input from those students who feel it most, because yes, the intentions were good but a lot of students are falling through the cracks. It's not students themselves who are setting a lot of these regulations, or at least able to make recommendations. I don't necessarily just mean the representative groups, but that focus groups should be set up at different universities saying, "Why are you falling through the cracks?" because there are a lot of students who really do require the money who aren't getting it and are having to take out personal loans and credit card debt.

I'd say first it's just a revamping of the whole assessment system based on focus groups in universities where students can say, "Here's why I'm falling through the cracks." I think the biggest problem is that the government does not know how many students are falling through the cracks, whereas if we had these focus groups you could kind of get a litmus test as to how bad the situation is getting. But the requirements, for example, on parental income, that if your parents make more than \$60,000 a year they should pay for your full education—someone making \$60,000 in Toronto is not someone making \$60,000 in Windsor; and \$60,000 in the year 2002 as compared to when those numbers were set isn't the same either. So there's a need to revamp that whole assessment system so that it's more modern and takes into account current realities.

The Chair: With that, I have to bring it to an end. On behalf of the committee, thank you very much for your presentation this morning.

GREATER ESSEX COUNTY DISTRICT SCHOOL BOARD

The Chair: Our next presentation is from the Greater Essex County District School Board. I would ask the presenters to please come forward. If you could state your names for the record, on behalf of the committee, welcome.

Mr Tom Kilpatrick: I'm Tom Kilpatrick, the chairperson of the Greater Essex County District School Board.

Ms Beth Cooper: Beth Cooper, trustee and chair, finance and operations.

Ms Mary Jane Gallagher: Mary Jane Gallagher, director of the Greater Essex County District School Board.

Ms Penny Allen: Penny Allen. I'm the superintendent of business and treasurer for the school board.

Mr Kilpatrick: I wish to begin this morning by thanking the members of the panel for our opportunity to speak to you today. We are representing the Greater Essex County District School Board. The public school board in our county is responsible for educating approximately 39,000 students in over 70 elementary and secondary schools. As such, we educate approximately 60% of the community's children.

I think you've all been given a copy of our brief with some attachments. I'm going to go through part of it to-

day, but because of the time constraint I won't be able to go through all of it.

We're here today to tell you that there is a crisis looming in education in Ontario. "Crisis" is a word which is perhaps used too often when groups approach government, but I can think of no other adequate means to describe it.

The student-focused funding model for education in Ontario was introduced in September 1998. It was flawed at that time and, while the government has made some minor adjustments, it's now completely broken. This is not just our opinion but is evidenced by the experience of the vast majority of boards in our province.

In several areas the Ministry of Education itself admits the funding formula needs dramatic repair. We have been promised a new transportation funding model since 1998, and although we hear that, after four years of frozen funding levels and our working with the ministry staff on a new model, it has moved to the back burner and is no longer an urgent priority. The ministry likewise has involved us in developing a process and data to better inform the provision of adequate resources for high-needs special education students. After years of frozen funding—but not frozen student needs, I might add—and promises that emergency dollars would flow when boards can demonstrate that a need exceeds the funding, we're now told that new funds are not going to be provided.

In a province whose economic success is linked to the skills of its workforce, and in particular in this community, which is a significant engine driving our province's economy, the education of our youngest citizens is under-resourced and in jeopardy.

This is supported by the findings of the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives—Ontario, which states, "Contrary to the government's claim that its formula was merely redressing inequities in the previous funding system, the data show clearly that the formula is simply a disguise for significant cuts in resources allocated to education. The total gain for previously under-resourced boards—Catholic, northern and French-language—is less than \$88 million since 1997; the total loss for other boards, since 1997, just over \$1 billion. And despite the government's claims to the contrary, the real story of the funding formula is an attack on the financial base for public school boards in large urban areas in southern Ontario—a cut of more than \$921 million in real per student terms in 1997—more than all of the cut for the whole province."

Our board is a southern Ontario public school board that has suffered greatly from the new funding model. We suffered the fourth-greatest reduction in funding of any school board in the province. Only Toronto, Peel and Ottawa-Carleton public boards lost more funding per student.

The new funding formula was designed to correct the inequities of the past methods of funding our schools. By centralizing all funding of schools into provincial hands, the theory was that education could be equitably resourced based on student needs and not on the basis of

local taxpayers' wealth. This will only be true if two conditions are met, the first being that the needs-based component of the formula is designed to effectively measure and respond to the needs in each region of the province; and secondly, that the overall allocation to the education sector of the provincial budget is adequate and, on an ongoing basis, adjusted to meet the consequences of inflation, enrolment increases, changing levels of student needs and, finally, changes to curriculum and the overall expectations of our schools. Neither of these conditions is being met, and in fact, the oft-mentioned increases in education funding have fallen short of the inflationary and enrolment demands alone.

For our board, this means we have moved away from a community which funded our schools at a per pupil level that was among the top 10 in the province. We are now at the point at which we receive \$6,467 per student, placing us as the 70th poorest board out of 72 boards in Ontario. In moving resources from richer urban areas to rural and northern boards, the funding formula has swung too far, leaving boards with urban needs and, more importantly, many students with language, special needs and/or poverty-based barriers to learning without the resources they need for success.

Over the past several weeks our board has been examining these issues in the areas of the funding formula which pose the greatest degree of difficulty to us. While I can't go into detail on all of these issues, in the back of our presentation a summary of my comments regarding these issues is mentioned. But I would like to briefly highlight some of these areas.

For instance, in special ed, unlike the children's mental health agencies in our community, which have a waiting list of almost 700 students, our schools cannot exclude special-needs children until there are adequate resources to meet their needs. Cuts to community supports are resulting in a higher number of young high-needs children joining our junior and senior kindergarten classes. Our special education funding has been frozen for several years, but needs are increasing. We currently spend \$1.5 million more in special education than we receive from the province. Our true shortfall, to provide what we would identify as the minimum adequate level of service, is approximately \$5 million.

1050

In our building renewal area, our schools are significantly older than the provincial norm. Our predecessor boards, before they were amalgamated, spent between \$6.6 million and \$9 million annually on facility renewal. Since the new model has been put in place, we receive an allocation of \$4.5 million. That's a 40% cut. We cannot keep up with the basic physical needs of our buildings, and things like upgrading science labs, technology and computer labs have become almost impossible.

Transportation: in the mid-1990s our local school boards had created a shared transportation consortium. Students from all four boards were transported in the most efficient means possible. Savings were maximized coordinating transportation policies, school start-up and

stop times, and overall school year calendars. Unfortunately, our boards led the province and did so before 1997. Since then, our board has been trapped at the 1997 funding, less 3%. We now have no ability to reasonably compensate our bus operators and the service for field trips and sporting events has suffered as we do not have spare buses available to accommodate the students.

In-school administration: keeping students safe requires that every school have a principal and secretary. The shortfall in the school secretarial area alone is \$637,000, funded by reductions in other areas of our school board's operation.

In the staff compensation area, salaries and benefits in formerly wealthy urban boards, such as the former Windsor board, cause great concern to us. We inherited higher-than-average salaries that could never be rolled back without labour unrest, yet the funding model did not recognize these circumstances. Since 1998 there has been 1.95% specifically allocated in the funding formula for raises, excluding our custodial and plant staff, who were allocated zero per cent. The consumer price index has risen 7.9% for the same period. How is this fair and equitable for our staff?

One serious concern for our board is also in the teacher retirement gratuities. In the past, these were funded in one year by the difference in salary between the new replacement teacher and the retiring teacher. The savings for the next nine years, until the new teacher reached maximum salary, were used to fund new teacher training and other alternatives. The new funding model claws back these savings immediately but leaves the boards to pay the retirement gratuities, which for our board was over \$4 million in 2000-01. The savings in clawback for the ministry since 1998 have been over \$510 million. Where has this money gone?

Funds for curriculum change: another issue that our board finds unconscionable is the halving of the special textbook grants to buy new texts for the new secondary curriculum. These funds were sufficient to buy texts for core subjects in grades 9 and 10. This year our grant was halved to buy the texts for grade 11, and yet the textbooks for senior grades are more expensive. Where is the logic in this?

Boards stand to lose more funding beginning in 2003-04, when the last OAC classes graduate. Our board estimates a loss of \$3.7 million, after reducing variable costs such as classroom teachers. We can't withstand another cut of this magnitude.

In summary, if the plan was to create a fiscal crisis in education that would be felt throughout the school system, then the plan indeed has been a great success.

In closing, again quoting Hugh Mackenzie, "There is no mystery in the chaos afflicting Ontario's elementary and secondary education system. It all comes down to funding. The Harris government's new funding formula has served as a smokescreen for a massive cut in resources allocated for elementary and secondary education in Ontario." Our board, whose per pupil funding is now

70th of 72 boards in the province, is a primary victim of this formula.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much. We have a minute and a half per caucus and I'll start with the government side.

Mr Kilpatrick: We have another speaker, Ms Beth Cooper, who is a trustee and who looks after the finance and operations.

Ms Cooper: Good morning. The provincial funding model just does not work. Our board does face significant deficits in several areas. Provincially, one half of the public boards will have operational deficits this year. The government has addressed system-wide equity by funding all boards inadequately. Reserves for working funds in the province have been depleted to an all-time low of about \$68 million, and this is significant because it requires \$73 million a day to operate the 5,000 schools in the province. In addition to the \$1.1 billion that has been taken out of board operating funds annually, there is another \$1.4 billion removed that supports the maintenance and repair of our schools.

Assuming that the funding model was correct in 1997, it is half a decade old. Most funding has remained stagnant, despite rising inflation and costs. Unless there is a significant infusion of dollars, the education system in this province will be bankrupt. The areas of concern have been mentioned by our chair.

Special education is of prime concern in our board and all public boards. Currently, we are going through four cycles of validation. The funding has been frozen. Cycle 1 results show a \$2-million gap between what is funded and what the need is, and there are three more cycles to complete. Our area of the province is severely underserved and underfunded medically, in mental health services, in social services and in education. All of these affect our children.

In light of our community health profile, and it is attached, this causes us great concern. It clarifies the increased need of families and children in Essex county. We have a well-demonstrated, well-researched need here. This is not addressed by any of the ministries, and I quote from the report:

"More than 700 children are on waiting lists for care in Windsor-Essex county. Congenital anomalies are important in describing gross differences in communities related to pollution.... For example, 1998 data indicates a 44% higher incidence of hospitalization for mental health disorders for women and a rate 60% higher for men. Suicide is significantly higher as well.

"Windsor-Essex county has the highest rate of uses of child protection and residential care, and those are only the ones that have sought assistance. Over half the children who receive services in Essex county have disabilities in addition to their mental health disorders....

"There is reliable information from pediatricians of an ever-increasing rate of autism, attention deficit and hyperactivity among our children. The number of school-aged children with the highest special needs has sig-

nificantly outpaced the level of provincial funding made available for this purpose.

“Underfunding and underservicing by all the various ministries have caused a very serious problem for children and families. These concerns portend a local manifestation of the epidemic of learning, behavioural and developmental disorders from exposure to neurotoxins.”

We are a community in crisis. We are a community that supports and transports 47% of the NAFTA trade. It is time for government to deal with our real needs.

1100

The time has come for the province to reinstate the dollars taken from education. We are a growth board with less money than we started with. Our need is great. Our students can no longer be sacrificed for this cash grab.

As trustees, we must speak out to all who will listen to our pleas. Any tinkering with the math, any cuts, stable funds or minor increases will not help. We need our lost education property tax put back into the system.

A strong public education system is the underpinning of our society; 1997 dollars will no longer sustain programs and services in 2002. For trustees, it is now just a question of which laws do we break: run a deficit, serve students only to the funds given, stop transportation or say no to new special ed students.

Trustees must and do advocate for our students and for public education. We are constantly faced with the reality of the harm this funding formula has done. We are unable to provide for student choices and this inability causes us to rely on parents for fundraising. We are really faced with the increasing divide between have and have-not students. We can no longer allow our students to be the sacrificial lambs of a funding formula that has provided too little too late.

I thank you for your time. I have two or three full copies of the Gilbertson-Brophy study for the committee if anyone wants it.

The Chair: Thank you very much. There won't be any time for questions as you've used all the time allocated. On behalf of the committee, I would like to thank you.

THE KIDS CAMPAIGN

The Chair: Our next presentation this morning will be from The Kids Campaign. I would ask the presenter or presenters to please come forward and if you could state your name for the record. On behalf of the committee, welcome.

Mr George Johnson: On behalf of The Kids Campaign, we'd like to thank the committee and appreciate the opportunity to be able to speak to you this morning about the severity of our problem here in Windsor.

My name is George Johnson and I'm the chairperson of The Kids Campaign. On my left is my colleague Mark Donlon, who is the executive director of Glengarda Child and Family Services. I've worked in Windsor all my adult life in regard to working in the community. I've sat

on many boards and I represent the general public on issues. We're not an agency. We're a committee that's devoutly concerned about the children in this community.

I'll just give you a brief summary of our activities over the last two years. In the last two years, The Kids Campaign has dealt with children suffering from severe psychological disorders and behavioural problems. Over the past two years, we have made 76 community presentations and have received the support of thousands of families, service providers and community groups in demanding that services be significantly improved.

The first letter-writing campaign resulted in hundreds of letters and resolutions from parents and community institutions, such as municipal governments, school boards and agencies, being sent to the Minister of Community and Social Services. The second campaign, in five weeks, gathered together 7,000 letters which were presented to Mr Baird in the Legislature by Dwight Duncan. We conducted a community forum to educate the people on this issue and over 800 people attended. This was the largest event of its kind ever held in Ontario.

Our purpose today is that the experience of The Kids Campaign has shown that the people of Ontario care deeply about the issues of children's mental health. We are here today to respectfully request that the next Ontario budget prioritize the needs of children by investing significant new funds to strengthen services.

At this time I would like to turn our presentation over to Mark Donlon, who will make comments concerning the specific issues being faced by 18% of Ontario's children and the implications of our failure to adequately fund appropriate services.

Mr Mark Donlon: Thank you for the opportunity to speak to you briefly this morning about children's mental health problems. I'd like to preface my remarks by noting that in the presentation you just heard from the school board, with the enormous issues that are being faced by education across the province, on two occasions they referenced children's mental health issues. I think that's an indication of something. It's an indication of just how pervasive the problem has become and an indication of how widespread it is.

Kids who have mental health problems don't just affect their families and the agencies that are seeking to help them; they affect virtually everyone who works with children. If you ask people in education what their single greatest challenge is in addressing the needs of children, they will tell you it is this group of kids, a group of kids who are experiencing dramatic, serious behavioural, emotional, family relationship problems. I found it very interesting that Mr Kilpatrick chose to speak about that on two occasions as part of his presentation. It really does fit with our message to you today.

In plain language, our system of children's mental health in Ontario is inadequate for the task. Children's mental health problems affect 18% of all children in this province. Those difficulties that they are experiencing cause untold pain and anxieties for families, for children,

for schools, for teachers, for people who work in the justice system and for people who work in the health care system.

At present we are spending about \$330 million a year on children's mental health. There is one page in your presentation that summarizes the allocations by MCSS to different sectors that serve children. It sounds like a lot of money, but to put it into context, it is about what is spent in a medium-to-larger school board or one hospital, and we are attempting to address the needs of 18% of the most needy children and families in this province with that amount of money.

The truth of the matter is that one child in six who needs the service gets it in the province of Ontario. There are 8,000 children sitting on waiting lists in this province as we speak. Just to correct a little bit what Mr Kilpatrick said, it's 800 kids locally, not 700 kids, who are sitting on waiting lists for service. Those children do not wait well. They are not the kinds of kids who are going to sit patiently while their name works its way through, up to two years of waiting for a service, depending on what kind of service they are looking for. In the meantime, they are experiencing enormous difficulties that cost this province an enormous amount of money.

Some of the statistics that are associated with this that are relevant as a way of illustrating how difficult this problem is are on the previous page, where we talk about things like the adolescent suicide rate going up 400%; the fact that we now have the third-worst adolescent suicide rate in the world; the institute of child health says that healthy outcomes are affected more adversely by children's mental health issues than any other disability. Again, it affects 18% of children.

The rate of youth violence has gone up 121% in the last 10 years. The target for the safe school legislation in large measure is aimed at this group of children.

Our message to you today amongst the, I'm sure, hundreds of presentations that are going to be made to you all seeking money is that these kids can't wait. We must do something, and specifically we are imploring you to prioritize the needs of 18% of Ontario's children and make significant investments in children's mental health services in Ontario.

The Chair: Thank you very much. We have three minutes per caucus and I'll start with the government side.

1110

Mr John O'Toole (Durham): Thank you for your presentation. I just have a general sense that on many fronts, on many faces and in many countries the whole issue of youth concerns, in a broad sense, is certainly on the radar screen. We have, as you know, moved from an institutional model. In special ed, they were all just put into a separate class until they were integrated, so they are now up in front and we must deal with it responsibly.

I will just ask a general question, as you work in this area. The Colin Powell initiative in the United States is another example. It's not unique. Europe and England have programs and Ontario has a program, Ontario's

Promise. It's all tied to healthy beginnings and the Fraser Mustard report. Could you, working in the field without any political ideology, suggest, what is it? I'm a parent of five children. I'm kind of a strict discipline type, I suppose. What's happening?

I personally feel there is no respect, for others and themselves. Maybe that's simplistic and overarching. Maybe it's a lack of hope. What is it, in your view? We can talk about this. There have been studies. The government has a special initiative on children's mental health. Perhaps you could, for the committee, give us your experience in the world of working with young people with problems of all sorts.

Mr Donlon: There isn't a simple answer to that question, but in general I would say that the world has changed. The world has changed in dramatic ways that are putting enormous pressures on family life today.

Mr O'Toole: Yes, there's no family.

Mr Donlon: Not that long ago, the norm was a two-parent family where one, usually the father, worked outside the home and the mother was stay-at-home and took care of children. Today that is a distinct minority of family life. Some 40% of marriages end in divorce in Canada. Two-parent working families have become the norm. You will hear, if you talk to folks like Dan Offord, who is an Order of Canada award winner and a noted child psychiatrist at Chedoke Hospital, talk about things like the impact of these kinds of changes putting enormous pressure just on families being able to spend time together with one another.

With respect, I don't think it's an issue of respect. I think it's an issue that our society has changed and become so fast-paced. What we need to do is identify what the different needs are of families today versus 30 years ago. Some people would say things like the answer is to have women stay at home. Well (a) that's not true, (b) it couldn't be done and (c) we could probably do away with traffic fatalities if we all went back to riding horses, but it's not going to happen. It isn't going to happen, so can we get on with the business of identifying what families do need, as the last presentation said, for the importance of producing healthy, productive children who are capable of achieving their potential? What do families need in order for that to occur? We haven't done a good enough job of that yet in this particular sector.

If we continue not to better resource services that are designed for that purpose, then what you're going to end up with is a situation we now have, which is that as kids wait they get worse, and as they get worse, the prognosis for healthy outcomes, successful interventions, become less positive and more expensive. So we're on a treadmill here and we're going the wrong way.

Mrs Papatello: Thanks so much for your presentation. George and Jo-Anne Johnson have worked tirelessly with a number of advocates for children in our community for many years, and in the seven that I've been around in this job I've watched the group grow and unfortunately the funding fall. What's clear is that regardless of the government's photo ops in the area of

caring for children, in fact the funding levels to agencies have decreased. They've been coping with a number of cuts across the board that actually reduce service to kids. I find it interesting that if a child broke an arm and arrived at a hospital room, there would be no question that despite failing resources we have to repair the arm. We don't seem to have that understanding when it comes to a child's mind or additional mental health services required. We just don't say that we have to address this. One of the answers may well be around the notion of mandating services for children in the children's mental health area.

I don't know if you want to comment on this, but what's interesting is that the Colin Powell idea that this government has—it's like this strict disciplinarian photo; we're going to hammer home the importance of children—in fact has had little or no effect in the area of real services for kids. One example is the last time our chief of police arrived at Queen's Park for a Police Day and pulled Minister Baird aside, along with the head of Maryvale, to solve what was the crisis of the day, the loss of beds. The answer from the minister was to take money from children's aid and hand it over to Maryvale for them to be able to recoup the money that they weren't able to find. In essence, they kept the pool for the area the same and just forced a shift within the pool and solved that crisis for now.

Ultimately, do we have the exact figure of what we're going to need for all the agencies to reduce the waiting list of 800 kids?

Mr Johnson: We have determined that the amount that would attempt to alleviate the problem would be about \$6 million annually.

Mrs Papatello: That's for all the children's mental health agencies?

Mr Johnson: For all the agencies, yes.

Mr Donlon: Locally. As you go across the province, I imagine you are going to hear this message from more than one community.

Mrs Papatello: Mark, you need to be clear as well that our numbers are significantly higher across the board for a whole bunch—environmental, health etc. We have a higher percentage of children who need it than any place in Ontario.

Mr Donlon: Yes, right. One of the things that's absent from the system is a, for lack of a better word, rational funding model. The absence of it has created great inequities across the province, so that in certain communities certain kinds of services are accessible and in other communities they are not. Windsor is one of those areas that is badly under-resourced, by the ministry's own study. The southwest regional report which they completed last year showed in unquestionably clear terms that the residents of Windsor and Essex county are not getting their proportionate share. The same argument could be made in a number of communities across the province.

There are two issues. First, there is a need for more money, and there's no way around that. Second, we have

to come up with a better method for allocating it so that, as communities are so diverse and have diverse needs, that is taken into account. For example, in health care there are much greater services for kids with mental health issues in the health care system in the London region than there are in Windsor. That's just a plain and simple truth.

These things have an impact, as Mr Kilpatrick was saying, not just on us who work in this business but people in education, families and virtually everyone. We need an equitable system of funding allocations that is adequate to the task. That's the bottom line.

Mr Christopherson: Thank you for your presentation. George, congratulations again on continued good work.

Mr Johnson: Thank you, David.

Mr Christopherson: You make a real difference.

I've got to tell you, it's frustrating to listen—I won't name names—to some of the members from the government talk about how the problem with kids is there's not enough respect and all these nicety kind of things. Your example of talking about going back to horses makes a whole lot of sense because the answer to this government is, "All of us should go back to 1955 and then the world won't have all these problems." What they don't want to address is the fact that there's a large percentage of the kids, of the 18%, a huge percentage of them that come from families in poverty, yet this government won't raise the minimum wage. They raised their own wages, our wages—we're fine—but no minimum wage increase. They cut the income of the poorest of the poor by 22% seven years ago with no increase; people with disabilities, no increase; cuts in services. And what's their answer? Is it to put more money into special needs? This stuff makes me so angry, to listen to this. Do they put more money into special needs, here or in every community, whether in Sault Ste Marie or Windsor or anywhere in between? Do they put money in that? No. Where do they put their money? Into private jails. "We're going to build more jails because we're ensuring that there are kids coming out of the system who are going to end up there." It's infuriating to listen to the patronizing kinds of attitudes that come from across the way.

1120

Mr Spina: Look at the numbers he's provided, David. Look at them. Don't hand me that nonsense.

The Chair: Order, please.

Mr Christopherson: I didn't use names. If you want me to start, Joe, let's go for it. All you want to talk about is the way things ought to be but you don't want to do anything about it. But when it comes to your rich pals—lots of money.

Mr Spina: The numbers are there.

Mr Christopherson: Lots of money for your rich friends, the ones who finance your campaign re-election, but no money for kids. Where's the money for kids? I've been in classrooms—

Mr Spina: We've brought the numbers forward.

The Chair: Just a minute. If we want to continue this way, we're not going to go anywhere, but if you want to play like kids I'll let you act like kids.

Mr Christopherson, go ahead.

Mr Christopherson: You talk about kids and acting out. I've got classrooms in schools in my riding, because there's so little funding for special needs, that have to take two-by-fours and nail the desks together. Don't roll your eyes at me. That's the way it is; I can take you into the classroom. And why? Because there aren't enough teachers and special education assistants to take care of the kids who are having behavioural problems, these very children. So the only way they can actually manage on a day-to-day basis is to nail the desks together with a two-by-four.

The Chair: With that, I have to bring the discussion to an end as we've run out of time. On behalf of the committee, thank you very much for your presentation this morning.

LAMBTON KENT ELEMENTARY TEACHERS' FEDERATION OF ONTARIO

The Chair: Our next presentation is from the Lambton Kent Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario. I ask the presenter to please come forward, and if you could state your name for the record, please. On behalf of the committee, welcome.

Ms Ginn Rawlinson: The drive was fine, thanks. My name is Ginn Rawlinson. I represent the Lambton Kent local of the Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario. I am the local president. I thank you for the opportunity to speak to you this morning. I represent about 950 full- and part-time elementary teachers, and they're in charge of almost 20,000 students today. Though I will occasionally refer to other areas, my love, my passion and my perspective for today's address is public elementary education in Ontario.

The previous Ontario government, the New Democratic Party, in their For the Love of Learning document named the Kent County Board of Education as an example of efficiency. Lambton's practices were very similar. Both boards had been extremely frugal. The Kent board had established a Kent administrative group to take advantage of savings through joint purchasing of services and supplies, savings that were realized by all partners, public and private.

The board held funds in reserve for building maintenance and repairs, for which there was a five-year plan, as well as one to self-fund retirement gratuities. Transportation had always been provided on the basis of one road, one bus, for public and separate school students, elementary and secondary. We had qualified teachers in specialized areas of language education for students new to English, teacher librarians in all of our schools, many of them full-time, and music teachers who not only taught each class but took choirs to music festivals and organized concerts so students could show off to their parents what they had learned in this skill area. Some, but

not all, of our schools had art teachers. Some had teachers who specialized in physical education and coached intra- and extramural teams in a variety of sports. Ten schools in Lambton county had beautiful design and technology classrooms so that each intermediate student could attend for a half-day each week. Special education teachers were responsive to the needs of students in every school and spent a good deal of time in classrooms, offering support and assistance to students and teachers who needed them.

Each school had a full-time principal and most had a vice-principal, one to be the curriculum leader of the school, the other more involved in discipline and school management.

We faced, planned for and addressed the challenges of declining enrolment. We had, and maybe still do have, one of the most experienced and highly qualified staffs in the province. Despite having few vacancies, along with the separate school board, our public board had a satellite faculty of the University of Windsor, 40 students each year to train in our Lambton-Kent schools to become familiar with our school culture and education priorities and goals.

Some things have not changed. Lambton-Kent is still a very efficiently run and cost-effective operation. However, its board of trustees has learned that being frugal is not rewarded. Instead, in 1998 they were punished for it with the largest—4%—cut allowed under the new funding formula. No staff, school or program was left uncut when budget slashes of such magnitude had to be implemented. Still attempting to squeeze every last cent of spending out of each taxpayer's dollar, another large corporate group was formed, involving corporations in both Lambton and Kent, and still meets regularly to take advantage of bulk purchasing of supplies and services. Lambton-Kent's 1998 reserves for its 65 elementary schools, only one of which was younger than 25 years old, had to be redirected to other budget shortfalls. In fact, the rigidity of the funding formula had forced 170 of the province's schools to close in the past three years; 15 of those have been in Lambton-Kent. This evening, at its regular board meeting, the trustees will decide the fate of three more schools.

Though selling off our schools where that's been possible may pay to repair a roof or put new windows and a fresh coat of paint on a dreary old building, it's pretty hard to attract new students to schools that are closing and new families to communities that are disintegrating since there is no longer a local school. Despite the growing body of research indicating that smaller schools are better for young students' learning, the schools that are closing are the smaller ones and young students are spending too long on a bus, up to an hour and a half each way, to attend larger, more intimidating schools. Rural schools have been particularly hard hit in Lambton-Kent. Like most others, our board is also considering moving vulnerable grade 7 and 8 students into the more independent learning environ-

ment of our secondary schools, not for sound pedagogical reasons but to save money by filling space.

While I'm on the topic, funding for elementary and secondary schools has never been equitable, but under this government that funding gap has increased by 30%. Despite all of the evidence that suggests the first years of school are critical to a student's educational success, secondary students are currently funded at \$751 more per student than any elementary one.

While robbing Peter to pay for Paul's repairs, selling schools has created transportation problems far beyond those already being suffered by every board in this province. While the funding top-ups received by boards the last two years have been appreciated, the initial budget estimates for the 2001-02 year showed 62 of 72 public school boards with a total transportation deficit of over \$53 million. While the sale of closed schools may create some much-needed revenue, there is no added compensation to help get those students to their more distant new schools. Like all other benchmarks in the formula, funding for transportation is based on 1997 costs. Unless you ride a bicycle and you've been living in a cave, you know what has happened to the cost of driving a vehicle down a highway in the past four years.

Lambton-Kent runs from Wheatley in the south to Grand Bend in the north, never mind its east and west boundaries. On a good day, that distance takes three hours to travel. With no money to build one central building, we have two board offices, one an hour from the north and another—a port-a-pak attached to a school—one hour from the south. What's left of our board office staff, those who live an hour or more from the board office to which they must report, can be compensated for some of their travel costs if they carpool, with at least four employees in each car. Please help me understand how anyone, young or old, can work or learn productively, spending three hours a day on a crowded bus or in a carpool.

1130

Let's take a look at what's happening to the specialized staff we used to have. According to Liz Sandals, then president of OPSBA, school boards have diverted \$84 million from other program areas to address underfunding in special education alone. She also reports that the number of very high-needs children in our schools is increasing. As a consequence, special education programs for low- to moderate-needs children continue to be cut, something akin to emergency room triage for special-needs children.

People for Education, a parent advocacy group, estimates that 37,000 elementary school children in Ontario are waiting for special education services. That's a 15% increase since the 1999-2000 school year.

In Lambton Kent, we currently have 34 fewer special education teachers than in 1999-2000. A few of those might be attributed to declining enrolment but the majority is due to budget cuts. Not only do we have too few resources and special class teachers, but they are spending more and more time pushing paper and less and less

on supporting the students and the teachers who need them.

We no longer have speech pathologists or English-as-a-second-language teachers for those new to the English language.

Provincially, library has been cut in 30% of public elementary schools this year. That's on top of almost 30% last year and 47% the year before.

Music programs have been cut in 11% of schools this year, 14% last year and 22% the previous year.

English-as-a-second-language programs have been cut by 15% this year, 17% last year, on top of 22% the year before. I hope you're adding some of those figures.

Design and technology programs have been cut in 7% of schools this year, 12% last year and 22% the year before.

Back to Lambton Kent: some of our largest schools still have part-time teacher-librarians, not full-time, and a few lucky ones still have teachers who teach the odd music class. Our smaller schools have neither. All of our beautiful design and technology classrooms closed two years ago.

These programs that support the curriculum and help to ensure that all children are given an opportunity to develop their unique skills have disappeared at a time when a growing body of research points to the value and the need for a more flexible, enriched program. These are the very programs that bring school to life, not just for our students but for us as their teachers.

We have lost other specialized staff in Lambton Kent. In 1998, we had 39 vice-principals, most of whom had half of the day to train beside their principals. What was once a team, as I mentioned before, of a curriculum leader—if that suited the skills of the individual—and a school administrator is now more commonly one full-time, or even part-time, principal who's run off his or her feet, downloading whatever they can to whomever they can. We now have less than half—only 17 of our original 39 vice-principals—remaining, some in name only, with no time outside of the classroom, and few, if any, with enough administrative time to learn what they need to know before being promoted to fill the vacancy of another retiring or burned-out principal.

In 1998, we had 15 supervisory officers. We now have six, and they spend a great deal of their time travelling in cars between board offices and schools.

We continue to struggle with declining enrolment and its cost to our system under this formula.

Though we've experienced record numbers of retirements in the past three years, our satellite faculty, established 10 years ago to train new teachers in our Lambton-Kent culture when there weren't any jobs to be had, will graduate its last class of teachers in the next few months. It will close at the end of this current academic year despite the fact that all of Ontario, including Lambton-Kent, is now facing a teacher shortage.

Not just students and teachers but parents too are recognizing the problems created by a funding formula that seems to have addressed system-wide equity by

funding all boards inequitably and inadequately. What used to be fundraising for extras or what was considered to be frills has become necessary in many cases to provide basic needs.

I'd like to read a brief editorial to you from the Sarnia Observer, February 12. "If parents want extras for their children's school, they should hold bingo nights and bake sales. After all, a theatre trip to Toronto to see the Lion King may be valid educationally, but it should not be the responsibility of taxpayers.

"But there is something very wrong when parents have to schlep chocolate bars to the homes of grandparents and neighbours to buy books for their school library or sell muffin mix to equip the gymnasium with basketballs, yet that's exactly what's happening, as many parents with a child attending a school in Sarnia-Lambton can attest."

Ontario's education funding formula is making it almost impossible for the public and separate school boards to provide what were once basic programs and services. So parents are moonlighting as door-to-door salespeople, pushing everything from magazine subscriptions to blocks of cheese to buy recorders for the music program, if their school is one of those lucky enough to still have a music program.

The definition of a frill is changing. School boards once provided playground equipment; now parents pay for that and build it themselves if they want children to have somewhere to play at recess. Buying new binders and pencil crayons has long been a September rite of passage; now kids must also bring pencil sharpeners because the classroom units are often broken.

According to a recent report from the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, the Ontario government has cut \$2.3 billion from school boards over the past six years. At the same time, parents are opening their wallets because they want their kids to have the best education possible to succeed in life. But it's gone too far. When cheese sales determine the size of a school's library, then the funding gap between government and school board has grown too wide.

I'd like to again quote Liz Sandals—and this is from her January 30 speaking notes—a pretty reliable source of information in my opinion. She both asks and answers, "So what is the current financial reality in Ontario's school boards? For English public boards in 1998, the first year of the funding model, 12 boards had operating surpluses totalling \$12.6 million; only three had deficits. Last year, 11 boards were in deficit, for a total of \$35.4 million, and only two had surpluses."

She estimates that about 50% of boards will be in deficit at the end of 2002. "Let me be clear: the school boards in this province are bankrupt or very close to being bankrupt. Our only source of revenue is the provincial government, and with the money we're getting this year and expect to get next year, we will not have sufficient funding to meet our contractual or legal obligations. The Ontario Public School Boards' Association calculates that the gap between school board revenues and the legitimate expenditure pressures exceeds \$1.1

billion annually. Running a deficit is against the law. Funding education at 1997 costs is impossible."

Perhaps a broader comparison will help clarify my concerns. Since this government took office, taking inflation and enrolment into account, \$2.3 billion, as I stated before, has been cut from education. That's over \$1,000 per student. In 1994-95, Ontario's per pupil expenditures ranked 42nd of 63 jurisdictions in North America. In 1999-2000, we ranked 56th, behind every state in the US, as well as Manitoba and British Columbia. In US dollars, the highest per pupil expenditure was \$11,315, in New Jersey. These are all US dollars that I'll be quoting. The average for the US was \$7,577. In US dollars, Ontario's per pupil expenditure was \$4,939. How will our students compete in a global market if education is not one of Ontario's priorities? How can Ontario itself survive?

You don't improve a school system by starving it; you improve it by investing in it, ensuring that students and teachers have the tools and resources they need. You improve it by providing support, not demoralizing teachers, parents, administrators and students. This government must begin to trust school boards, teachers and administrators to spend money in ways that improve learning for the students of this province.

When I became a proud member of the teaching profession 31 years ago, I never thought for a minute that my role would include defending publicly funded public education in an attempt to ensure that it would be there for the futures of my students and their children, which also ensures a future for you and me.

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It's hard to accept the rhetoric that the changes that have been made to Ontario's public education system are improving that education for our students. So many indications, the most recent of which is the tax credit for private school tuition, make it difficult for me to believe that this government has any public education agenda short of the complete demise of our system, the one I've known and loved, without which private education and voucher schools may not be possible. If our unprecedented public protest and two weeks' loss of pay in 1997 and all that has gone on since have not convinced you, let me assure you here today that the public elementary teachers of Ontario will not allow our system to fail.

Funding a strong public education system is the most important investment we can make as a society. The financial commitment must be made today because for our children the future begins now.

I doubt whether anything I've told you today is new information. I've tried to draw a picture for you of how the Tories' education reforms have impacted the Lambton Kent District School Board—my little corner of the world. What gives me hope is that so many are coming forward throughout Ontario, from inside and outside of education, to help us sound the alarm.

Public education is in huge financial trouble. A good education must not be only for those who can afford it. It

must be there for every child in Ontario and therefore must be appropriately and publicly funded.

Ontario's elementary teachers are not interested in the status quo, and much of what has changed in the past years cannot and should not be reversed, for it would only serve to extend the chaos we've suffered through for the last four years and before. I do, however, want to leave you with a number of recommendations to consider that I know are needed that could provide much-needed funding and could certainly improve current practice:

(1) That the government inject new money into the funding formula, restoring money stolen from our students and schools; funding that will allow boards the flexibility to hire additional specialist teachers to provide the necessary support and enhanced programming to elementary students.

(2) That the money being directed to teacher recertification and the entry-to-the-profession test be redirected to school boards to be used for professional development programs that are focused on individual board and school growth plans and learning goals.

(3) That the government restore the five professional activity days eliminated by Bill 160.

(4) That the government eliminate the existing every-student standardized testing in grades 3 and 6 and drop its plans for every-student testing in every grade, re-directing that money to learning resources for students and teachers.

(5) That the government invest more money in the delivery of special education programs for every student who requires it.

(6) That the government provide more funding for transportation costs.

(7) That the funding formula be changed so that small community schools are not forced to close.

(8) That the tax credit for private school tuition be abolished.

(9) That overall funding be increased to ensure that every student gets the education they deserve.

Thank you.

The Chair: With that, I would like to thank you on behalf of the committee. There won't be time for questions as you have used all the time allocated.

LEGAL ASSISTANCE OF WINDSOR

The Vice-Chair (Mr Doug Galt): Our next delegation is Marion Overholt, staff lawyer with Legal Assistance of Windsor. A total of 20 minutes has been set aside for you. After your presentation, whatever time is left over we'll divide equally among the three caucuses. Please, for Hansard, state your names so they get them down clearly.

Ms Marion Overholt: My name is Marion Overholt. I'm a staff lawyer with Legal Assistance of Windsor.

Ms Shelley Gilbert: My name is Shelley Gilbert. I'm the coordinator of social work services with Legal Assistance of Windsor. I'm going to begin our presentation today.

I'd like to thank you for the opportunity to speak with you. This submission represents the views of several organizations that regularly advocate on behalf of individuals, families, vulnerable citizens, refugees, immigrants and those who as a result of a mental or physical disability are unable to access government programs and resources without assistance. I'd like to ask the members of these organizations who are here with us today to stand and introduce themselves, if I can.

Mr Dominic Boyd: My name is Dominic Boyd. I'm with the Sandwich Community Health Centre in the west end of Windsor.

Ms Mary Seaton: Mary Seaton, unit 7—

Ms Helen Petrimoulx: Helen Petrimoulx, Windsor Refugee Office.

Ms Jeannine Carley: Jeannine Carley, Canadian Hearing Society.

Ms Jody Lee Farrah: Jody Lee Farrah, Citizen Advocacy.

Ms Karen Gignac: Karen Gignac, Canadian Mental Health Association, Windsor branch.

Ms Maureen Curtis: Maureen Curtis, labour programs and services, United Way.

Ms Debbie Desjardins: Debbie Desjardins, campaign labour staff, United Way.

Ms Janet Clayton: Janet Clayton, Community Mental Health Association.

The Vice-Chair: We'll have a representative from Hansard come around just to get your names clearly in a few minutes.

Ms Gilbert: Thank you. The purpose of our presentation today is to call attention to the significant impact the deterioration of financial supports has had on individuals, families and children. The inadequate welfare rates, the clawback of the national child benefit supplement and the lack of affordable, adequate housing have resulted in families being unable to meet their basic needs and has forced families to make choices between food and heat.

At present, the local Ontario Works office has a caseload of over 6,100 cases, equalling 3% of our population. This translates into thousands of families and children in Windsor and Essex county living in severe poverty.

As a result of the downturn in the economy, families surviving by both parents working full-time are now in the position of one or both of them having lost their jobs or having their work hours dramatically cut. As a result, families are forced to turn to Ontario Works as a means of survival.

Allow me to direct you to the budget sheet you have in front of you, explaining how a family of four survives throughout a month.

After a family of four have exhausted all of their savings and assets and are approved for Ontario Works, they begin to receive an income of approximately \$1,200 a month from Ontario Works. Although this family also receives a child tax benefit of \$378.66, \$192.50, the national child benefit supplement, is taken from their Ontario Works entitlement each month, leaving them a total income of \$1,386.16. This family begins each

month by paying rent of approximately \$839 a month for a three-bedroom apartment, which is the average rent for an apartment here in Windsor.

With their existing income of \$547, they pay increasing hydro and gas costs of over \$120 a month each, leaving this family approximately \$307.19 for food, telephone, clothing and any incidentals the family may have throughout a month. If a member of the family becomes ill, the family is expected to pay a co-payment for prescriptions. If the children in this family have additional school expenses for supplies or trips, the family chooses between food and these costs.

We have averaged approximately \$9 each month on your budget sheet for these expenses. A family's total expenses before buying food is \$1,088 a month. Is it any surprise that by the third week of the month, many parents are forced to use food banks as a way of ensuring their children have food to eat?

In the year 2000, over 150,000 people in Windsor utilized a food bank. According to the report by the United Way, 7.2% of the population of Windsor report they do not have enough money to buy food each month. On a daily basis, social agencies are attempting to assist families who have been unable to pay their skyrocketing gas and hydro costs and are presently living without heat or hydro.

Parents are sending their children to bed with coats on at night or are attempting to find other supports to care for their children. More and more often, these families are finding themselves evicted from their homes and are forced to split up until they are able to find housing again. Obtaining subsidized housing is an unlikely option, as over 2,700 households are presently on the waiting list for the central housing registry.

Unfortunately, emergency hostels are being used more frequently as long-term housing options, due to the lack of affordable housing. According to the United Way report, the Well-Come Home shelter, the only homeless women's shelter in the city of Windsor and in Essex county, housed 59 women between January and June 2001. During that time, the shelter, which is not equipped to house families, received 24 requests from single-parent, female-led families, and 14 requests from double-parent families.

In the year 2000, the Salvation Army hostel saw an 11% increase in men requiring emergency shelter, and served 52 families in their emergency apartments, which was a 24% increase.

I'd like now to refer to Marion Overholt, a staff lawyer with Legal Assistance of Windsor.

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Ms Overholt: We came here to talk to you about poverty. We find it very interesting that in every submission you've heard today, the issue of poverty was raised as part of the problem those groups and agencies were facing and dealing with, whether the issue was children's mental health or education. There is a continuing stream of concern about what poverty rates in Ontario have done for the clients they're trying to work with.

When we look at why we have poverty in Ontario, it's very important to recognize that we have poverty as a result of legislation. We have legislated poverty in the province. It is up to government to fix the poverty that we face.

When we look at housing, access to good-quality, affordable housing is a basic human right. Since 1998, the Ontario Rental Housing Tribunal has ordered over 115,000 rental householders to be evicted without a hearing. The housing shortage creates a vicious cycle for tenants, who often tolerate slum dwellings in desperate need of repair, always fearful that their landlords will evict them at the first instance of a late payment of rent. Landlords have failed to invest in maintaining rental buildings. In addition, the government has attempted to sell social housing and reduce the level of rent-geared-to-income subsidies, which also threatens the existing supply. There is a four-year waiting list for subsidized housing in Windsor.

Municipalities have been saddled with the cost of provincial social housing programs. Funding housing from property taxes is bad public policy. The provincial government should resume its funding of these programs. Emergency shelters are not the answer to the homeless crisis; neither are jails. We have witnessed the struggle of clients who have lost their accommodation and ended up on the street. The uphill battle to re-establish them in housing is huge. Each success story is tenuous, as they are one financial crisis away from being back on the street.

We are recommending, therefore, that a fully funded program to create 18,400 units across the province should be implemented. The cost would be \$900 million annually. Since 1995, the Ontario government has made deliberate choices to give priority to tax cuts that benefit primarily the wealthy corporations, instead of social programs that would benefit the 4.5 million people living in rental households. The time has come to shift the financial support to those who need it the most.

Besides investing in social housing, the Ontario government should join with the governments of Manitoba, New Brunswick and Newfoundland and stop the claw-back of the national child tax supplement. Since its inception, Ontario has prevented families on welfare from receiving the full child tax supplement. Instead, the monies have been distributed through the municipalities for funding projects that have little guidance in their terms of reference, and little accountability. This money belongs in the hands of families, to provide for their basic needs. The supplement is roughly \$680 to \$955 per child, and could go a long way to providing the day-to-day sustenance for welfare families.

The bottom line, to use financial lingo, is that it's a mistake to let the market overshadow human needs. When we attempt to measure the cost of poverty, economic policy has concerned itself with money, the size of the market where money is exchanged, but it has not been concerned with how people live. It's in the interests

of everyone to lower poverty rates and raise the standard of living of the people in deepest poverty.

When you listen to the statistics of food bank use in Windsor, you should be able to conclude two things: number one, far too many people would not be able to survive without regular food bank use and, number two, the food banks are not able to keep up with demand. A 400% increase in usage spells a crisis that requires government intervention now.

As recorded by the National Council on Welfare, we have been moving in the direction of increasing privatization and deregulation. We've been shifting from corporate to individual taxation and cutting taxes that are the basis of programs that support the common good. We see growing stress in families and non-governmental organizations trying to cope with fewer public services and growing consumption of luxury goods alongside the increased use of food banks. This polarization increases social tensions and it costs society the creative and productive capacity of a large portion of the population. It costs the government the trust and support of the public and it costs our society its humanity.

The government has the power, it has the legislative authority, to end the poverty that our citizens face. We come to this committee before budget to ask that the welfare rates, the cuts that took place in 1995, be restored.

The Vice-Chair: Thank you very much for your presentation. We have about two and a half minutes per caucus, beginning with the Liberal caucus.

Mrs Pupatello: Thanks for your presentation today. We appreciate the work that legal assistance does and we work with you on a regular basis with our clients, so it's good to see you here.

I wanted you to address for a moment the Ontario disability support program, because you mentioned the detail of Ontario Works and there's a significant gap and grey area between people who are trying to get into the ODSP who are clearly disabled, as defined by medical experts. We are having a tremendous amount of trouble in our office right now with people who are caught in that grey zone. While the government declared they were going to set up this tremendous opportunity for people with disabilities to get into a program that was essentially manna from heaven, we're having trouble getting people in the program, for a whole bunch of reasons, in the Windsor-Essex area. Being underserved by physicians, for example, we can't get our people in to see specialists to get the kind of documentation required to get them into the ODSP. If they have a specialist meeting so that they can get this kind of paperwork, it takes a year to get them into their appointment because we don't have the specialists. They have to go away to get it, if we can get them an appointment out of town, and all the costs that means for these people. We just have a tremendous amount of difficulty making this legislation work.

They created Ontario Works in 1997. We have seen the fallout in Windsor particularly because of the housing crisis, because of the extra costs people are forced to bear, just for a whole bunch of reasons. Quite interest-

ingly, the effect of being underserved by physicians has a tremendous impact on our people who are on workers' compensation. We can't get them doctors to fill out the forms. The doctors aren't able to take the time to do all the paperwork required to help our people get on Ontario disability. So, as was mentioned by several speakers before you, our whole system, through several ministries being so deficient for the southwest region, is causing a mad panic in a whole bunch of areas that, individually, people wouldn't realize how much one impacts on the other.

We work specifically with some of the ODSP clients to get them through and we're working together on several cases. Could you mention the ODSP from the legal aid perspective?

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The Vice-Chair: We've gone well over the two minutes allocated for a response, but I'll provide you with 30 seconds, if you can do it in that time.

Ms Overholt: I'll do my best. I've been practising in this area since 1988, so I have 10 years of experience under the Family Benefits Act dealing with disability. When I look at the administration of the ODSP Act, it is just totally unworkable. The ministry says they reject 85% of applicants. When people apply, they wait at least four to six months to have their application reviewed, and then the appeal process before the Social Benefits Tribunal takes at least another year to 18 months to reach a decision. In most of the cases the clients are then being found eligible for disability benefits. We've had clients die during the process. It is extraordinarily difficult to get clients, especially people who have been homeless or suffering from mental health conditions who are not under the care of regular physicians, in to see a doctor in order to document the case. It has been very difficult for the disabled community to access the benefits they're entitled to under the legislation because of the administration and the process of that program.

Mr Christopherson: Thank you very much for your presentation. I know that at times over the last few years it must feel like you're speaking into the darkness and it's not going anywhere, but I assure you it's really important to come forward and make these arguments, because the rest of the time, majority governments have access to a lot of media control and all we ever hear about is the tax cut. They had their economic boom and a very small number of people did very well, but now we're finding that the argument that everybody does well during the boom is not the case. The boom is over and a whole lot of people who were in a tough spot to start with are now in a tougher spot. What's going to happen to them in the next few years?

There's so much that needs to be said, such an important part of Ontario's story to be told. You're doing that today and it's appreciated.

We don't have a lot of time. You've covered so many issues. I want to ask you one question. The current finance minister, who wants to be the next Premier, has

said he's going to solve the homelessness problem by outlawing it. I'd like to hear your thoughts on that.

Ms Overholt: I'd love to share them. We have a huge problem—

Interjection.

Ms Overholt: Pardon me?

Mr O'Toole: I was just saying that perhaps the best solution is to ignore it.

The Vice-Chair: Please respond. Don't worry about him.

Ms Overholt: We have a huge problem with the approach of criminalizing people who are homeless, because it's clear from the comments that were made that the individual would be charged in order to be taken into custody. Care in a jail is probably the most expensive shelter that is available, so one would wonder why one would look at the most expensive shelter as the appropriate option for people who are homeless.

When you look at the lack of availability of affordable housing and why people are on the streets, those are very complex issues. I think what has come out universally from all the shelters and the social agencies that work with homeless people is that we need to restore the cuts in welfare so that people don't become homeless in the first place. Then you need adequate funding of the emergency shelter programs. We need second-stage housing, which we don't have, in order to provide people with adequate supports. To say this is a criminal law problem is just fundamentally disrespectful of the rights of people and the needs that we have in our community, and it makes us very concerned that that would be put out as a viable solution.

The Vice-Chair: We'll move to the government side.

Mr Hardeman: I have two topics I just wanted to touch on. I'll give both questions and then you can answer the one you prefer.

One is the issue of the ODSP and the appeal rate and the process. I think Ms Papatello mentioned how long the process takes and so forth and the difficulty in getting it done. Yesterday we heard that the success rate of the appeals was 70% in that legal clinic, that in fact 70% of those who appealed the decision of the workers within the ODSP who had denied benefits, after the appeal got the benefits. Is that the type of rate, and if it is, would it not suggest that there's something wrong with the system if both parties, the panel that hears the application and the individual who made the original decision that they were not going to benefit, were using exactly the same rules?

Professionals are the ones who are doing the original application and are saying, "No, you don't qualify under these rules." You present that case to an appointed board and they say, "No, you're right. Our professionals did not do a good enough job. They should have granted this application."

Maybe you could suggest which one of those two is not working properly.

I would like to go on to the issue Mr Christopherson mentioned about what we need to do with the homeless people on the streets. I totally agree with you that you

don't go out on the street and take people because they don't have any place to go and put them in jail and then look after them there. I don't think anybody would suggest that's an appropriate way. But does it not bother you that for many people who have mental health problems, who don't have the capability of making the choices of where they could go or where they should go, the law does not allow now for anyone to do anything about that?

The Vice-Chair: Mr Hardeman, your two minutes are up.

Mr Hardeman: They die in the street because no one cares, and I think there's something wrong with that.

The Vice-Chair: Mr Hardeman, your two and a half minutes are up. Maybe we can give her 30 seconds to respond.

Ms Overholt: I can respond to the second by saying that's happening because of a lack of political will on the part of the Legislature. You have the power. You could write the legislation so that we don't have homeless people on our streets. So you have the power and I hope you will use it.

In terms of what's happening with the disabilities, what often happens is that when you look at the application form that the doctor has completed, when it's reviewed by the ministry staff, they will discount their opinion and say, "This person couldn't be as bad as this," because this type of condition has various ways of presenting itself. Because the ministry has been instructed to reject 85% of the applicants, we find that with a host of medical information put in, those cases are still being rejected.

The legal clinics in Ontario have worked with every government in the last 20 years in helping to give feedback on what kind of application process would help people in order to establish their case for disability, and what we're finding is that because of the standards that the provincial government has put in place, it's harder for someone to qualify under the provincial disability legislation than under Canada pension disability. So those are fixable problems.

The Vice-Chair: Thank you very much for coming forward. Your presentation is very much appreciated.

Mrs Papatello: On a point of order, Mr Chair: I'd like to make a request of the committee that the Hansard notes from the 1997 Ontario Works legislation be distributed to the finance committee, specifically the presentation by Legal Aid Ontario. In its presentation in 1997, it identified before the legislation was enacted the problem specifically on the medical certification of the people who were reviewing the files, and that in fact has created much of the problem that was presented today.

The Vice-Chair: So your request is to have that tabled?

Mrs Papatello: If the committee could be provided with Hansard, then we might note that all of the problems that we said in 1997 would happen with this legislation are now in fact what we're faced with.

The Vice-Chair: We'll request our clerk to produce that for us.

Thanks very much for your presentation.

ONTARIO SCHOOL COUNSELLORS' ASSOCIATION

The Vice-Chair: The next one is Phil Hedges, president, Ontario School Counsellors' Association. Twenty minutes have been set aside for you. When you begin, state your name for Hansard, and whatever is left over from the 20 minutes will be divided equally among the caucuses, if I can limit them to that amount of time.

Mr Phil Hedges: Thank you. Good afternoon. My name is Phil Hedges. I'm the president of the Ontario School Counsellors' Association. That's the voluntary association of guidance counsellors in the elementary and secondary schools—public, private and Catholic—throughout Ontario. At the moment, there are about 1,200 members.

We thank you for the opportunity to bring to your attention our concerns around the application of the funding formula and its impact on the provision of equitable access to high-quality programs and services for all students in all Ontario schools.

Let me begin by providing some background. In 1999, at the same time that secondary reform was being introduced in Ontario schools, a new, long-awaited guidance and career education program policy was also released. That document, Choices Into Action, is a comprehensive developmental program for all students in all schools from grades 1 to 12.

In the rationale from that document it is stated, "For their educational, social, and career success in the 21st century, students will require effective work habits and the ability to make sound decisions, solve problems, plan effectively, work independently, communicate well, research, evaluate themselves realistically, and explore new educational and career opportunities. A carefully planned guidance and career education program, beginning in the elementary grades and continuing through secondary school, will help students acquire these skills.

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"Students must learn and develop skills at school that will help them become more independent and responsible individuals. They must be able to apply what they learn in school to other areas of their lives. They must learn to work co-operatively and productively with a wide range of people, to set and pursue education and career goals, to evaluate their achievement of these goals, and to assume their roles as responsible citizens. A comprehensive guidance and career education program will provide students with an understanding of the concepts in the three areas of learning in the program (student development, interpersonal development, and career development) and with many opportunities to practise new skills in structured and supportive settings. It will allow them to learn from their experiences and accomplishments and to apply their skills and knowledge in the

classroom, in the school with their peers, and teachers and in the community. It will also involve parents, community partners, teachers, teacher-advisers, guidance counsellors, and community mentors in the program.

"The guidance and career education program will help students relate what they learn in school to the community, understand and value education, recognize the learning opportunities available to them, make choices from among those opportunities and adapt to changing circumstances. It will help them make transitions throughout their lives—from family to school, from school to school, from school to work and from school to lifelong learning. Through learning activities that emphasize managing time, completing tasks, setting goals, resolving conflicts, volunteering, collaborating, and co-operating, students will learn self-discipline, personal and social responsibility, and respect for others from diverse cultures."

Initially, I considered summarizing those details from the rationale and hitting the highlights. My decision was to include all of them because I believe they are all extremely important.

As an association, we were very much involved in providing input into the development of that policy. We were and continue to be committed to its full implementation. We see Choices Into Action playing a significant role in providing support for achievement for all students and providing support for the development and maintenance of effective schools.

Choices Into Action clearly describes the competencies that students will achieve and the roles and responsibilities of those charged with delivering the program. You'll find an extensive list of the duties and responsibilities of guidance counsellors in the appendix.

At the same time that Choices Into Action was released, the funding formula was introduced. In it, there was an allocation for guidance teachers of 0.2 per thousand in the elementary schools and 2.6 per thousand students in secondary schools. That translates to one counsellor for 5,000 students in elementary schools and one for 385 students in secondary schools.

We were told that the staffing ratio was based on the status quo of staffing across the province prior to the introduction of Choices Into Action. While that may have been true, the ratio was clearly not based on the new model of guidance and career education as outlined in Choices Into Action. As we continue to move forward with the implementation of this policy, we are becoming more and more aware that the staffing level indicated in the formula is problematic.

In elementary schools, prior to the introduction of the formula, many boards had at least some elementary guidance counsellors. However, the allocation in the formula was so low that many boards decided to eliminate elementary guidance counsellors entirely because the level of staffing that could be provided would be so low as to be seen by some to be of no value at all.

Currently, throughout Ontario elementary guidance counsellors exist in only a handful of district school

boards and yet Choices Into Action is a grade 1 to grade 12 program. Without leadership provided by elementary guidance counsellors, the policy is often seen as an additional responsibility added to the work of already burdened classroom teachers.

In secondary schools, the formula provides for more counsellors than in elementary, but since the allocation is not protected, staffing levels vary widely from board to board and school to school. As district school boards struggle with difficult budget deliberations, areas in the funding formula that are not protected become potential areas for savings. As a result, staffing for guidance programs in secondary schools has been cut by many district school boards. Rather than providing staffing at the ratio of 1 to 385, as suggested by the formula, we hear of many, many schools where the ratio is 1 to 450, 1 to 500, 1 to 800 and even 1 to 1,000 students. Clearly, there is no consistency. Clearly, there is not equity of student access to the same level of quality programs and services across the province. No matter how efficient, hard-working and dedicated he or she may be, there is no way that one counsellor can provide the same program for 1,000 students that he or she could provide for 385.

Since the introduction of the funding formula, we have lobbied for the protection of guidance staffing. We have had little or no success.

As an association, we have worked in partnership with the Ministry of Education to provide meaningful training on many of the components and features of this new guidance and career education policy.

We have worked with our members to ensure a common understanding of the details of the program. We have developed support materials. We have worked in partnership with other provincial and national organizations to obtain and distribute outstanding career development resource materials free of charge to every school in the province. We have attempted to focus on the value of all destinations and that all students should have equity of access to quality programs and services.

But every year at budget time we find ourselves in the same position of trying to justify the value of the work that we do and competing with others for limited financial resources. We are increasingly frustrated by the fact that on the one hand we have an exceptional, comprehensive policy that seems to support the value of providing programs and services for all students, but on the other hand we have a funding formula that gives district school boards permission to undermine the effectiveness of that program by allowing the funding allocation to be moved to other areas, thereby reducing levels of guidance staffing to a level far below that which is required for an effective program.

As guidance staffing levels continue to be cut, there is a cost to students. It is relatively easy to help a highly motivated, academically successful student with clear goals and many available options. It is much more difficult and much more time-consuming to encourage students who have experienced less success and who see fewer available opportunities and more barriers. Many of

those students are at risk of disengaging and dropping out. Surely they deserve equal access to quality programs, services and supports.

We know that the new curriculum has proven to be very challenging for a large segment of our student population. Those students need more individual assistance and support than those who can handle the curriculum more easily. An effective, comprehensive guidance and career education program seeks to address the needs of all learners to ensure that no students fall through the cracks.

The new secondary school curriculum is a destination-based system. Students must make important decisions at an earlier age. In order to do so, they must be taught the skills they'll need in order to be able to make good decisions. They'll need to learn what resources are available to them and how best to use those resources. They'll need support in order to gain confidence in their abilities to make good decisions. We want all students to be fully aware of the vast array of opportunities available to them. That's what an effective, comprehensive guidance and career education program is all about.

The double cohort has been attracting a lot of attention lately. There are serious implications in terms of guidance staffing. Counsellors will need to be very knowledgeable about the many more options that students will want to explore. We will have many more students working through the process of exploring, researching and applying to post-secondary education and training, all at the same time.

Even after the double-cohort year, the complexity of exploring an increasing variety of options combined with the shortening of the secondary school program to four years and the increasing costs of post-secondary education all have implications in terms of the necessity to provide adequate programs and support services to all students, particularly those who find the process confusing, stressful and frustrating. We are well aware that the stress level of senior secondary school students is at an all-time high. The stress level for teachers is a little lower. We are already experiencing a massive increase in requests from parents seeking information and assurances that their students will not be adversely affected. Our focus will be on teaching all students the skills they need to make good decisions and supporting them in the process. While our goal is for students to become self-directed, independent learners, there's no question that many students will need a considerable amount of teaching, re-teaching and support in order to reach that goal.

Some might suggest that the solution is for us all to work a little harder and work a little smarter. We're already doing that. We have changed the way we do business. We have developed a sophisticated network that provides significant support to our members. Almost all of them are subscribers to our listserv that provides daily updates on the very best information and resources that will assist them in doing the work they do with students at all levels and all grades. We have developed a comprehensive Web site that contains a myriad of re-

sources that our members can use to their advantage. We continue to offer professional development opportunities.

Our approach has been proactive, collaborative and positive. But I caution you that as we continue to face the same challenge year after year, the enthusiasm weakens. It becomes more and more difficult to continue to be advocates for and supporters of a program that appears to be well-supported from a philosophical perspective but that gets little or no support when it comes to providing adequate funding to properly implement the program.

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There is an increasing belief that successful implementation will not be possible. None of us would believe that being an adolescent is any easier or any less stressful than it used to be. When we couple that reality with the fact that we are asking our students to make critical decisions at an earlier age about their future in an increasingly complex and competitive world, the seriousness of this situation should be obvious.

We believe that Choices Into Action is a valuable policy that can play a major role in enabling all students to become confident, competent decision-makers and independent, self-directed learners, but that can't happen given the current reality of guidance staffing.

If we truly believe that all students deserve equitable access to quality professional programs and services, regardless of where they live and where they go to school, then there can be no doubt about what must be done. The guidance staffing allocations suggested in the funding formula must be guaranteed as an absolute minimum in every district school board and in every school.

The Chair: Thank you very much. We have a minute and a half per caucus.

Mr Christopherson: Thank you very much for your presentation. Just to follow up a little bit on the stress on the teacher side of it, I'm interested in whether or not, as a result of the lack of funding, the morale in schools across the board is dropping tremendously. People are getting out of teaching as quickly as they can, a lot of people are being advised by veteran teachers not to go into teaching. It's no longer seen as the kind of profession it once was. I wonder if you could reflect on how that's affecting teachers who specialize in the counselling area.

Mr Hedges: In terms of the work that we do in terms of the guidance and career educators, we still have a very optimistic, enthusiastic group, but I think we have a group that needs some sort of a sign that this government is serious about supporting the program. They believe in this program, they believe in Choices Into Action. This policy is one of the best guidance and career education program policies in the world, but it won't work unless there is staffing to support it.

Mr Spina: Just a quick question, because you've put a lot of emphasis on Choices Into Action. It is the guidance and career education program policy that was released by whom?

Mr Hedges: By the Ministry of Education at the same time as OSS, the new secondary school diploma document. It accompanied that piece.

Mr Spina: Thank you. I just wanted to get that in perspective.

Mr O'Toole: I appreciate that, as you've outlined, there's funding in the foundation grant. There is recognition of the importance of guidance and you've said that the curriculum is a destination-based curriculum. I guess that's where I think ideologically or—do you have a problem with that, if there's a purpose for the learning? There's lifelong learning, all these words that we've heard for a couple of decades. Do you have any problem with the destination being employment and life skills and learning to take responsibility for yourself? The whole thing was educating the person, the whole person kind of thing, this feel-good kind of thing. Is this a problem for the guidance people?

Mr Hedges: Let me address the first part, which is the destination-based education system that we now have in Ontario. We believe that system makes sense. We believe that there is value in all destinations, and as guidance counsellors we are very concerned about the fact that often it's university that's seen as the destination of choice. So we are working very hard to ensure that—

Mr O'Toole: But that's the culture of the past.

Mr Hedges: That's the culture of the past, but we're working very hard to ensure that students and parents are aware of all the options that are available to kids.

Mr O'Toole: The trades.

Mr Hedges: The trades, direct school-to-work opportunities, colleges and so on. The difficulty with that is that as those opportunities increase and there are more things that we need to make students aware of, then that necessarily means there's an increased amount of time that we need to spend doing that. It's extremely important to do that work. It's a lot easier to focus on university.

Mr O'Toole: I think 7, 8 and 9—

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mrs Pupatello: How many class days a year are there?

Mr O'Toole: One hundred and eighty-five.

Mrs Pupatello: So let's say a school has one counsellor per thousand students. What does each student get, 10 minutes in a year?

Mr Hedges: My guess would be that in a secondary school with 1,000 students and one counsellor, that counsellor would spend most of her time looking after day-to-day crises and would not get the opportunity to go into classrooms to do any developmental work, and that's a significant shift in terms of guidance in Ontario. It's not just office-based.

Mrs Pupatello: These numbers in particular with this double cohort. There must have been a significant increase in the demand for counselling so that students and their parents can determine what to do. Do they rush through, like we've heard they're apparently doing, with overcrowding at an extra 3% at our universities, to get

ahead of the double cohort? Do they back it up because the Minister of Education came out and said, "Whoa, you can still take five years if you want" because they realize there's a crisis coming? Or do they just sort of jump in there with the herd of double cohort and go. There has never been more of a need in terms of counselling, and your ratios are going up in terms of fewer per student. Class days are just about the same. You can't expect to do your job with 10 or 15 minutes a year per student in all of this change in education.

Mr Hedges: That's correct. It becomes very challenging, in terms of the double cohort issue alone, the interest on the part of students and parents and post-secondary institutions in Ontario, post-secondary institutions outside Ontario that are now very interested in our organization and the students we work with. There's a tremendous increase in the amount of time that is devoted to the double cohort issue. I think while that's extremely important, there is also all of the rest of the comprehensive developmental program that is for all students, from grades 1 to 12.

The Chair: On behalf of the committee, thank you very much for your presentation this morning.

TEEN HEALTH CENTRE

The Chair: Our next presentation will be from the Teen Health Centre. I would ask the presenters to please come forward. Could you state your name for the record. On behalf of the committee, welcome.

Mr Jim Bowman: Thank you, ladies and gentlemen. My name is Jim Bowman. I am the treasurer of the board of directors of the Teen Health Centre. I have been involved with the Teen Health Centre for almost nine years, most recently as the secretary-treasurer. With me is Sheila Gordon, the executive director of the Teen Health Centre. We deeply appreciate the opportunity to address this important committee of the Legislature.

We are grateful for the time you have allotted us. At the risk of being a bit immodest, I can assure you that it will not be a wasted 20 minutes. I do want to explain more about our community health centre, but I first want to explain why we are here today.

The Teen Health Centre has come today because we genuinely believe we have a solution to offer the government that will make significant improvements to the province's health care system. Given the amount of money the government has poured back into health care, we know that this is your number one area of interest. I praise the government for continuing to reinvest in health care. It is money well spent.

I think we have an offer that the government should not and cannot refuse. Simply put, we think the government should continue to invest in health care and we think community health centres are a natural and worthy candidate for that investment. By investing here, the government will improve the province's health system and begin to deliver in a significant way on its commitment to expand primary health care networks province-wide.

Community health centres have been in the forefront of primary health care reform for the last 30 years. As a result, we wholeheartedly support the government's commitment to roll out primary health care reform province-wide. In last year's budget, the government committed to having 80% of family physicians working in primary health care networks by 2004. Again, we applaud both the impulse and the target. We think we can assist the government in accomplishing this important, ambitious objective. In fact, today we want to leave the committee with a proposal that moves the primary health care reform yardstick a considerable distance.

Who are we? Windsor already has two existing community health centres: the Sandwich Community Health Centre, serving the geographic area of Windsor's west side, and the Teen Health Centre, serving primarily youth ages 12 to 24 in Windsor and Essex county. We also serve homeless individuals of all ages.

Today, there are 65 centres in operation in all areas of the province. Fifty-five are community health centres and 10 centres provide services as aboriginal health access centres.

These centres are all community-based, non-profit organizations that provide high-quality, cost-efficient primary health care services. But our centres do not stop there, they also focus on health promotion and illness prevention to improve overall health outcomes for the individual, families and for the communities they serve.

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In June 2001, the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care completed a strategic review of the community health centre program. The report is not yet public, but key findings presented by the ministry show that community health centres:

- (1) exhibit desired primary care reform features;
- (2) are accountable through community governance, service agreements and accreditations;
- (3) deliver on ministry goals and strategies; and
- (4) have a strategic role to play in primary health care, particularly with populations facing access barriers.
- (5) Family health networks will not reduce the need for community health centres, since family health networks are not designed to improve access for disadvantaged groups.
- (6) Community health centres are one way to meet the needs of underserved areas.

Ms Sheila Gordon: From a local perspective, the Teen Health Centre in Windsor is currently serving over 13,000 active clients. We have eight satellite offices throughout Essex county, as well as our main centre here in Windsor.

In the last fiscal year, we saw over 18,000 visits from youth in our community to the health centre for services they access through either our physician, nurse practitioner, dietician, psychologist, social workers or counselors. We have also provided health promotion and prevention services to over 5,500 youth in our community.

As you may be aware, Windsor and Essex county is one of the most underserved areas in Ontario for family

doctors. Many of the clients who use our services do not have family doctors and rely on walk-in clinics for their health care. Approximately 50% of the youth who come to see us do have family physicians, but they choose the Teen Health Centre because of the confidentiality which they are assured of maintaining, and the dignity and respect in the way our staff treat the youth, as well as our known expertise in the community.

Increasing funding to provide additional physician and nurse practitioner services through a community health centre model will be a very cost-effective way for the government to provide quality care for our youth and the homeless populations we serve. Our medical department sees a large number of teens for sexual health reasons, yet the percentage of teen pregnancies in Windsor and Essex county is 26% higher than the provincial average. This is according to the Windsor-Essex county health unit's technical report that they produced last year, and those are from 1996 census statistics. Increasing funding in the medical counselling and health promotion areas will help us to reduce this number to at least the provincial average, if not below. This one area alone will save the government considerable money in reducing our health care costs, as well as costs to the welfare system.

Additional funding would allow us to serve over 200 new clients every month—that's currently what we're seeing walking in the door now—as well as providing our existing clients with increased access to physician, nursing, dietician and counselling services. That I would see primarily in the county area, where access in the rural areas of Essex county is more difficult. Our current waiting lists for counselling services are approximately six to eight weeks long. While that may not seem long to you and me, for a teen who has made a decision to give up substance abuse, alcohol or drug abuse, and turn their life around, that six- to eight-week waiting period may have a severe negative impact on them. For a client who is depressed, a six-week waiting period can mean an institutionalization or hospitalization, which is a much more expensive outcome.

The demand that the Teen Health Centre has to make presentations in the high schools far exceeds our ability to do that. An increase in staffing and health promotion staff would allow us to keep our nursing and medical staff in the centre and have health promoters go out into the high schools, again in an illness-prevention model.

The committee may not be aware that community health centres have not received an increase in the salary line budgets of our funded programs from the ministry in over 10 years. The ministry sets these salaries for us, and yet they have not increased. This has created an enormous amount of pressure among all the community health centres across the province to attract and maintain qualified staff. We would challenge this committee to find one other area of health care where they have not received a salary increase in 10 years.

I don't think I am going too far out on a limb to suppose that some of the most frustrating calls that members of this committee and other MPPs take from their con-

stituents are from those who have dissatisfaction or frustration at not being able to access health care services, primary care. Our plan, by increasing funding to community health centres, will be one large step to improve this.

Mr Bowman: In summary, the community health centres are in their fourth decade of providing high-quality, comprehensive health services to high-needs groups in communities. Our centres feature a multi-disciplinary team. Our centres provide 24-hour access to coordinated services. Our centre model is built on a broad understanding of the determinants of health. Our providers promote illness prevention and health promotion. Our centres have invested heavily in information technology and we can measure what we do and what we achieve. Our centres have a high level of patient satisfaction. Our centres are community-based and reflect the health and service needs of their communities. Our centres are accountable. We enter into service agreements with the ministry. We are governed and managed by local people and we submit to outside review through accreditation processes.

What we hope to accomplish today is to re-establish our presence and worth in today's health system and to state very clearly that the key health directions the government has identified as priorities are areas in which we have a proven track record of accomplishment.

We understand the government has made primary health care reform expansion commitments with the Ontario Medical Association, but we hope the government would keep an open mind on other models that can help the government achieve its objectives. We are one such model that can meet these objectives, but we also meet other objectives, like wellness and service. The health care needs in many communities of this province should not be put on hold and made to wait while the government and OMA figure how best to implement primary health care reform. We have a service model that works in this community.

We understand the committee cannot endorse our 65-centre comprehensive expansion proposal until more details are known around the government's primary health care reform expansion plans. Yet we think our phase I proposal is important for the health system today to begin rolling back the gaps in services which have popped up in several Ontario communities.

We're proven. We have a plan. We hope you will see the merits in this plan. Thank you for listening to us.

The Chair: Thank you very much. We have two minutes per caucus, and I'll start with Mr Galt.

Mr Galt: Thank you very much for the presentation. Interesting content, and what you people have been doing certainly when it comes to health care, it's probably the most difficult one financially to get our hands around and keep funding and increasing at approximately the rate of 10% per year. It's becoming pretty scary for a lot of provincial governments right across Canada.

The program that you're mentioning, I get from your presentation, is pretty specific to your area, but there are

other, similar ones in other parts of Ontario accomplishing the same thing. Is this very unique here, or are you familiar with others that are kind of similar?

Ms Gordon: I'm familiar with the other community health centres because the executive directors meet on a regular basis. Probably the model of the Sandwich community health centre would be similar, the most common model where you serve a geographic area with a designated population and provide all the services to them; the Teen Health Centre; and there are about four others that are primarily youth-focused to identify those specific needs of youth.

Mr O'Toole: Just a quick one.

The Chair: Very quickly.

Mr O'Toole: I was in Sault Ste Marie yesterday, and I do want to commend you for bringing a cost-effective, accountable model forward.

Just one question. The OMA is sort of the gatekeeper. Yours applies rostering and other kinds of relationships with patients. How do you see the relationship with the OMA and the OHA, where they then became a resource for the community health manager like you, saying what resources, whether it's children's mental health, whatever, playing a less dominant role in allocating dollar resources? Is there some new governance model—district health councils, community health—that you could sort of break out of the paradigm and you be the box, the intake, and they just be resources? What do you think about that?

Ms Gordon: That sounds terrific. We could be the gatekeeper, sure.

Mr O'Toole: The OMA wouldn't quite accept that, though.

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Ms Gordon: No, I don't think that would be popular with the OMA. If you look at family health networks in that model—and the government has made that commitment—I can tell you from informal discussions I've had with physicians in town, it isn't popular in Windsor and they're not banging down the door to sign up.

The cost-effectiveness of our model is that we use, and we have, salaried nurse practitioners. Particularly in our centre, and I know in Sandwich as well, they can take care of the majority of health needs of the clients who walk in the door, and it's probably \$40,000 a year less in salary. When I compare the salaries we pay our physicians to what they can make in a walk-in clinic, for every hour they work for us they lose about \$40 to \$50 an hour. The people who work with us are very dedicated; they're there for very good reasons. But it is a much more cost-effective model, and it's a holistic treatment. So while a visit may take a little longer, you're treating the whole person so there's not that repetitive coming back again and again.

Mrs Papatello: There's specifically a great role for community health centres to play in areas of Ontario that are underserved. We've advanced this notion for the last seven years as at least a stop-gap measure until we get our physician count up in Windsor and Essex

counties. Since that time, though, most of Ontario is now underserved, so it stands to reason this can be a stop-gap for several years, until we find some solutions that the government has yet to embark on to change the ratio of doctors. Moreover, the community health centres are really the concept that the family health networks are based on, because they do have that holistic approach. What is interesting is that it's often the hardest to serve that you'll find in a community health centre, versus the skimming of the best patients that is likely still to happen if they ever get the family health networks off the ground.

I just wanted to share with the committee right now that it's not just in Windsor where we're having a tremendous difficulty with our doctors wanting to sign up. Doctors across the province do not want to sign up, for very good reasons, one of which you stated. Just practising in a clinic they're able to make much more money and not have the obligation of keeping files on patients, so you have no continuity of care, yet our patients are forced to go to the clinic because we're such an underserved area.

Commenting—I've seen your work. At the provincial level, it is important that the members of the government on this committee understand the role that community health organizations play in their own communities, including the member from Northumberland.

Mr Christopherson: It's good to see you. I was interested that given all the good things you're doing, you're doing them in the context of salaries that have been literally frozen in your budgets for 10 years, if I read this correctly.

Ms Gordon: Yes.

Mr Christopherson: "The committee may not be aware that the salary budget lines of community health centres have been frozen for the last 10 years." I'm assuming you haven't asked 100% of your staff to take no increase for 10 years, although I guess that's possible. I'm curious as to how you've managed around that. I would think you've probably taken from other areas, but I'd be interested to hear.

Ms Gordon: Government policy is that we cannot pay beyond the salary range. We do get funding from other areas, and we use that. People have to basically increase their hours and pay them through different funding, through a Trillium grant, through Ontario Women's Health Council, that sort of thing. But it is very difficult to keep and maintain staff. There is a grid, so if you started 10 years ago at the bottom, in five years you would be at the top.

Mr Christopherson: Right, but you have to find the money for that and this line has to reflect that. I'm curious. What rationale does the government use for freezing a salary budget line for 10 years? Certainly they didn't think that was important to do with MPPs, but it seems to be—

Mr O'Toole: We decreased ours.

Mr Christopherson: Just hang on. It seems to be that that is what they expect you to swallow. What argument

do they give you at the table when you say, "Hey, 10 years is a bit much. We need an increase in the salary line"?"

Ms Gordon: I have only been involved with community health centres for the last few years, but for a long time they said the government was planning a strategic review of the community health centre program and so really couldn't make any changes until that was done. That has been done, although not released publicly at this point. The rumbling we hear from the civil servants is that certainly would be in their business case, to go forward to the ministry. The program consultants in Toronto are very understanding of the fact and supportive that there should be some increase to that in order to retain, because there are certain health centres that can't even attract doctors to come.

Mr Christopherson: Striking a report and a review, of course, is the political equivalent of "the cheque is in the mail."

The Chair: With that, we've run out of time. On behalf of the committee, thank you very much for your presentation this afternoon.

TRANSIT WINDSOR

The Chair: Our next presentation is from Transit Windsor. I would ask the presenter to come forward; if you could state your name for the record, please. On behalf of the committee, welcome.

Ms Gabrielle McMillan: My name is Gabrielle McMillan. I'm the director of administration. I understand our national organization, CUTA, will be making a presentation in front of the committee on Friday, but our community would like to make a presentation to let you know the importance of transit funding for us.

Firstly, I'd like to take the opportunity to thank the provincial government for its recent approval of funding for capital for transit authorities. It was a much-needed first step, and I would emphasize the need to institute ongoing sustainable funding for the long term in order to meet expansion and replacement needs. The 10-year provincial transit investment program needs to be delivered. In addition, municipalities must have the flexibility to invest the monies in capital or operating budgets for public transportation based on local need. Although this funding is a step in the right direction, it is not adequate to meet transit needs. The transit industry recommends that the provincial government supplement current public transportation commitments by earmarking 3% per litre of current gasoline taxes collected in municipalities for transit systems.

Windsor is a border crossing. Improved equipment would assist in reducing the congestion in the tunnel, particularly during the summer months. A single bus can carry as many people as 40 to 50 cars. Transit Windsor's fleet has an average age of 14 years, with our oldest bus in service being 35 years old. Commuters are not using the system in the tunnel, particularly in the summer, as our equipment is old and not air-conditioned. It is critical

to have the capital dollars to institute a bus replacement program in order to have a chance of increasing ridership and taking cars off the road. The lack of sufficient capital funding mechanisms in place to accommodate the changes in funding have led to the deferral of bus replacement, which has resulted in higher maintenance cost and reduced reliability. It has also made it difficult to accommodate any form of expansion or pursuit of new riders even when the markets are there.

I'm sure you're aware of all the statistics regarding air pollution and the impact on the health of Canadians, but I think they bear repeating today. Seventy-five per cent of all Canadians feel air pollution is affecting their health. Sixteen thousand Canadians die prematurely each year as a result of high pollution levels and poor air quality. The number of children hospitalized for asthma increased 23% between 1980 and 1990. Getting cars off the road can help. Using transit reduces CO₂ emissions by 75%.

Transit funding has declined 43% in Ontario over the past five years. Public transit infrastructure in Ontario needs \$5.4 billion over the next five years to replace or renew existing equipment and meet growth demands. The transit industry needs your support and we hope you will give serious consideration to our needs when setting your budget. I thank you for the opportunity to speak today.

The Chair: Thank you very much. We have four minutes per caucus, and I'll start with the official opposition.

Mrs Papatello: We had an opportunity to speak to Transit Windsor. Provincially, all of the MPPs hopefully will have had a chance by now to meet with their local transit representatives to bring some of these issues to light.

A couple of things crossed over that are important to a city like Windsor with some of the recent health reports: for example, the environmental friendliness of using transit, for one, is particularly important to our area, where we've had recent reports, and several that have been referenced today during committee, about increasing health risks; many feel it is environmentally based or pollution-based and the benefits, then, of transit and the kind of funding that's going to be required for that. The difficulties in a town like Oshawa or a city like Windsor, who are so automotive-based as communities, is that it becomes even more difficult. It is a struggle to have virtually few marketing dollars, if you will, to do the proper promotion of a fare increase, let alone using transit.

I wonder if you can speak for a moment about what exactly you do to promote things that were always in the public interest and why the Ontario government was always involved in transit, because there were greater for-the-good-of-society issues that were involved in using transit.

1250

Ms McMillan: You spoke basically about the environmental issue. Part of the need for requiring additional funding from the province for transit is with respect to the equipment. You're right; this is an auto-

motive town, and we have to have something to encourage people to get out of their vehicles and get on a transit bus. It's not just marketing; it has to have a vehicle that is enough to make them move. If you can take your air-conditioned car through the town or sit on a city bus that's not air-conditioned, that's not a hard choice for people to make in this town. That's part of our problem. We have 20 vehicles out of 100 that have air conditioning. Those are our low-floor vehicles, so those are dedicated to routes for handicapped accessibility. They're not dedicated to getting people out of their cars and into the buses.

We also need to do a lot of promotion with the Big Three, with the automotive companies here. That's a marketing strategy we need to develop that we don't have dollars for right now: to encourage them to get out of their vehicles and get into the bus.

We'd also like to encourage employers to look at employer-paid bus passes. We are lobbying the federal government to have that as a taxable benefit for an employee if they're given a bus pass to get out of their car and use the public transit system.

So there are a lot of challenges, you're right, in an automotive town, but the health issues here are very critical, and we believe public transit can help relieve some of that pollution and help address some of those issues.

Mrs Pupatello: I don't know how much time we've got left here. It puts us in quite a quandary, because we want to build more cars and we want people to love their cars. So you do face a significant difficulty in your job here at Transit Windsor, more so than other communities, but I think some who are here today from the Oshawa area would understand it more.

As well, what do you do about the capital cost required to repair buses? What do you do now in terms of your budget?

Ms McMillan: Right now, to repair or refurbish a bus, that is taken out of operations. So when we do get capital funding such as the capital funding that came down, that doesn't help deal with the existing buses that need to be repaired to keep them on the road. Actually, the funding Transit Windsor got will purchase two vehicles. We need to be on an ongoing replacement program in order to replace our fleet. As our fleet gets older, we're spending an awful lot of our operational dollars fixing and replacing those vehicles as opposed to putting them toward a marketing plan or improving the service.

Mr Christopherson: Thank you for your presentation. I think public transit is going to continue to be a growing issue as we move through these hearings.

It's interesting to hear you talk about the impact of air conditioning. I can remember raising the issue of air-conditioned buses in Hamilton when I was on city council in the 1980s, and to listen to the reaction of some councillors, you'd think I was suggesting putting in gold-plated toilets, for God's sake. I agree with you entirely; the reality is, when the average middle-class working person has an equal choice in their mind between their

car or the public transit, and the public transit is as efficient, as comfortable and as decent an environment as your own car, with the added benefit that you don't have to give a thought to it—you just get on, you're taken there and let off—then we'll be where we need to be. Right now, I know in Hamilton, and I'm sure in Windsor and other communities, that is still seen as “those who can't afford a car,” or for some reason or other they don't have a driver's licence or because of a medical condition they can't drive. It's only in the negative. If you can't take your car, then you take transit. That really is the view. I would hope—and I think I hear you sharing a similar vision—that in the future we'll have a whole different view of that, but it does mean governments have to readjust their thinking.

I think one of the key answers is going to be environment. Windsor is very much like Hamilton in terms of air pollution being a key issue. It's an issue that affects us not only in terms of drawing investment but it affects the health of our children. When we look at the toxicity of the fumes from vehicles alone, eventually we'll get there. The question will be, will it be too little, too late? We still have an opportunity now to make a move. Any thoughts you have on that I'd appreciate hearing.

One specific question would be, I'm curious as to what percentage of your overall revenue you generate from the fare box and how that fits in terms of the ranking of other comparable municipalities across Ontario.

Ms McMillan: I'll answer that question first. We get 60% from our fare box. We have probably one of the higher fares. Our rates just increased. We're at \$2.25 for an adult cash fare, and that's fairly significant. That's almost as much as the TTC, so that's fairly high. That relates to the level of funding we're getting municipally, where we have to raise at least 60%. So that's where we are at, and we are on the high end of fare rates.

As far as your comments with respect to the air quality, you're absolutely right. The majority of our ridership right now are people who have to take transit; it's not people who choose to take transit. That's the market we need to get to. The only way we'll get cars off the road is if we can encourage people who have a choice, rather than no other choice but to take transit.

Mr Christopherson: Exactly. An important part of that is making the public argument, and you've done that today, and very well, too.

Mr Galt: Thank you for your presentation. I have a question. I'd just like to relate a couple of things. Recently the select committee on alternative fuel had an opportunity to see Calgary. Their fare box is approximately the same as yours, 55%, and there is zero provincial support. They call it “Ride the Wind.” The energy for it is provided by 12 windmills. It was quite interesting to see the operation. The total downtown is free ridership, to encourage use of the system. To park is very expensive. They will only allow one parking spot per 1,500 square feet of development. This free ridership in the downtown core really promotes ridership and encourages the use of that system.

This is not coming as a government suggestion but rather from that committee and some of our discussions. That's where I'm coming from with my question, and it has to do with the gas tax. I've had many requests in my area that the municipality get a portion of that gas tax. If that should happen—and I underline “if,” being on the government side; it's coming from the committee—would you and your transit system be willing to dedicate all of that to vehicles that would use alternative fuels and the purchase of those alternative fuels?

Ms McMillan: If that was the basis for the funding, then we would do that. Right now, alternative fuels are an extremely expensive venture. We have looked at it. We have actually fitted almost the majority of our buses with 0.1% emission kits, which actually reduce the particulate emissions in the air. So we are trying to do what we can with what we have to reduce the pollution that our own buses give out. Obviously we are all looking toward alternative fuels. The best for everyone is to have a bus that doesn't emit pollution and cars that are off the road. So certainly we are in favour of doing that.

I'd just like to make a point on what you said about the parking. You're absolutely right: when you have expensive parking or no parking in an area, it does encourage transit use. Free parking or cheap parking is a disincentive to using the transit system, and that's something we struggle with as well. Clearly businesses in downtown Windsor would like to have reduced parking to encourage people to come down, so you're always stuck in a bit of a Catch-22 situation. If you increase the parking, people might not go down and not take transit, but when you reduce it, you reduce the probability of people using transit.

Mr Galt: It's interesting; you have a city that has a lot of vehicles being produced, but in this case, Calgary is the oil centre of Canada and they've gone to their transit being powered by the wind. Once we open up our market on May 1, if wind power is available—I guess you're not on an electric system here, though.

Ms McMillan: No, we're not.

Mr Galt: So that question is not applicable. Anyway, thanks very much for your response.

The Chair: On behalf of the committee, thank you very much for your presentation this afternoon. Good luck.

This committee will recess until 2:30 this afternoon.

The committee recessed from 1259 to 1430.

WINDSOR AND DISTRICT CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

The Chair: Good afternoon, everyone. I'd like to bring the standing committee on finance and economic affairs back to order.

Our first presentation this afternoon is from the Windsor and District Chamber of Commerce. I see that our presenters are already in place, so could you identify yourselves for the record. On behalf of the committee, welcome.

Ms Linda Smith: Thank you. My name is Linda Smith. I am the president of the Windsor and District Chamber of Commerce, or staff, here in Windsor-Essex county.

Mr Tim Fuerth: My name is Tim Fuerth. I'm a member of the board of directors of the Windsor and District Chamber of Commerce and I'll be the primary presenter today.

The Chair: Go ahead, any time you're ready.

Mr Fuerth: Thank you, Mr Chairman and members of the committee. I suspect that probably our presentation this afternoon will vary somewhat significantly from some of the presentations you've heard this morning. Probably the presentations following us will be somewhat different as well.

The Chamber of Commerce, as you know, has been the voice of business. Our little region of the world, Windsor-Essex county, has a GDP that exceeds many of the—I shouldn't say many of the provinces in the country, but certainly some of the provinces in Canada and several countries around the world.

There is a submission; I assume that's been handed out in hard copy. I think you'll find it a fairly comprehensive submission. I don't intend to go through the submission in explicit detail, other than to really touch on some of the main themes, so that we have opportunity for dialogue and questions subsequently.

The main themes in our presentation really circle around a few items. One is, from the chamber's perspective, we believe that in setting the budget for 2002-03, a zero deficit should be the norm, be the criterion that any budget item is measured against. The province has come a long way in terms of reducing the annual operating deficit from over \$10 billion annually in the early 1990s to now being a balanced budget. We believe that confidence in the province by the business community requires that a deficit be avoided even in these current difficult times.

The second theme that we've highlighted in our summary recommendations is that debt reduction should continue to be a priority. In last year's budget there was a commitment of \$3 billion to debt reduction. We certainly would like to see that continued and in fact expanded. We're concerned in the current environment, where interest rates are certainly the lowest levels in quite a number of decades, that there would be a tendency to take our eye off the ball with respect to debt management, debt reduction, because constant dollars will be able to service higher and higher levels of debt. The flaw in that approach, of course, is that in the years when the interest rates invariably increase, which they will, we'll be stuck with that higher debt and having to service it and it will take away from resources that will be available to fund other priorities, whether it be health care, education or tax cuts.

The third plank of our submission is that we would certainly like to see the tax reductions that have been announced in previous budget documents implemented as planned, that there not be any delay in the imple-

mentation of those tax initiatives. In the current environment, with the contraction of the economy, we acknowledge that there isn't a lot of room in the 2002-03 budget for increases in tax cuts, additional tax cut programs; however, we do think that there are some less costly intermediate and shorter-term programs that can be followed.

That's really the thrust of our presentation. What I'd like to do, as far as this presentation, is to not go through in detail, but perhaps if you'd flip to page 13, I'm going to change the format a little bit. Rather than talk about a series of tax initiatives and those types of things, I'd like to focus on some of the local issues that I'm sure will be near and dear to Sandra's heart.

The first one, I think we all are aware, was September 11 and the events that happened. Being a major border crossing in Windsor, the accessibility of free and efficient flow of goods across the border to our largest trading partner, the United States, is of paramount importance, not only for our region but for the province and for the country. For years and years, as a resident of Windsor, I've been dismayed personally and I think our Chamber has been dismayed with the lack of progress on resolving some of the systemic and the infrastructure issues that deal with the efficient flow of trade. Some might say that's a Windsor issue, it's not the rest of the province's problem. The fact of the matter is that this is the busiest border and the greatest amount of goods flow across this border than any other border crossing in the country and it's of vital significance to continued economic growth and competitiveness.

A number of companies in this region of the province are in the automotive sector. Rarely a week goes by where you don't hear some comment or see some evidence that investment decisions that are being made, invariably in foreign jurisdictions, whether it be Germany or the United States, are starting to get a bad odour to them in the sense that Canada is going to be getting in the future the short end of the stick on a lot of these major capital investment decisions unless we can at least demonstrate that we are assertive and that we're committed to dealing with the border crossing issue.

The second issue is a corollary to the border crossing issue, other than the efficient flow of goods. It is the link—if you drove into Windsor, you would have driven down the 401 and all of a sudden hit a roadblock on Huron Church, a stretch of road which, under restructuring back in 1998, was required to be maintained at the expense of local taxpayers, whether they be corporate taxpayers or property owners on a residential basis. We've recommended in our submission that the province, in conjunction with the federal government, immediately take steps to pick up the tab for maintaining Huron Church. We believe it's imminently unfair for local taxpayers to be supporting that vital international transportation link that benefits the entire province as well as other regions of the country.

Another thing, in terms of summary, that we've touched on is health care. Many of us who live in this

region are very much dismayed with recent reports setting out the high incidence of heart disease and cancer in this region. There's no shortage of hypotheses as to what's causing these things. Certainly one thing that we'd like to see is that the per capita health care funding in the Windsor-Essex county region be at least on par with other regions in the province. Currently we're far below that. There are going to be tremendous competing demands for resources, including health care, in this region. It seems to us that with the incidence of illness, the incidence of death in this region, we have certainly a very strong argument for committing additional funds to this area, perhaps rather than in the health care sector in terms of bricks and mortar, hospitals, in the wellness area in terms of reducing all those kinds of illnesses that we're faced with every day of the week if we have friends who are passing away, those types of things.

The last item that I'd like to touch on is the suggestion for a regional infrastructure authority. I don't believe this is a new concept. Certainly in this region we've gone from 21 municipalities to seven municipalities and barely a week goes by where we don't see bottlenecks, where we don't see roadblocks in relevant, rational, objective decisions being made with respect to infrastructure, whether it be new roads that will benefit the entire region or whether it be water treatment facilities.

In today's Windsor Star, if you happened to read it—it might have been yesterday—there are a couple of local issues where the town of LaSalle actually is looking to build their own water treatment facility, notwithstanding that Windsor has the capacity to handle that. Another recent example in this area is the town of Lakeshore, which is immediately to the east of Windsor. It is actually looking at expanding their water treatment facilities for drinking water, notwithstanding that Windsor has both the capacity to handle their water requirements and is prepared to do it. I would submit the issue is one of political interference for various motivations and/or an unwillingness to co-operate on a cost-effective basis.

Again, it's not a new initiative but it's certainly one that we see—all those initiatives that I've outlined—as being critical for improving the competitive climate of Ontario and certainly the region, and also ensuring that value for money is being received on tax dollars that are being expended.

Those summarize the global issues. I've kind of jumped around a little bit in our submission. I've also set out in the submission—I believe they're on page 7—suggestions that we've brought about for sustainable prosperity. As you might expect, being a chamber of commerce, we've certainly looked at areas where there are opportunities for efficiency, duplication of effort. Some of these are new, some of them not so new. There are items that I'll walk through very quickly in the interest of allowing time for questions and answers.

1440

The first item we've suggested is the elimination of capital taxes. This again is not a new submission. It's one that's been studied by various levels of government. It's

a job killer. It's entirely insensitive with respect to profits. To suggest how silly it is in terms of increasing Ontario's capital investment in this province in competitiveness, if I have a company and I owe money, the easiest way that I reduce my capital tax liability is to buy a bond. I can buy a bond, whether it's government of Canada, the province, any bond. I am doing nothing to improve the competitive capacity of the province, but I'm reducing my capital tax. I submit that that's counterproductive to the direction we want to take in this province in terms of increasing competitiveness and enhancing the investment in this province in capital assets. Again, it's not a new issue but I think it's probably a relevant one.

The second and third items are somewhat linked. That deals with the clawback of the small business deduction where, under the current tax regime, over a certain level of income the small business deduction is clawed back. I don't want to waste a lot of time on this point. It's not a new issue.

One thing we've suggested which we think may be new, as perhaps a suggestion to take a middle ground on this, is to allow a small business deduction room. The analogy to this would be your RRSP contribution room. You all file personal tax returns. You're familiar with the concept of your RRSP contribution room, where you're entitled to make those contributions and claim the deduction when it suits you best, based on your personal circumstances. With the small business deduction contribution room, we're suggesting that with the inevitable peaks and valleys of the business cycle, if a business doesn't use the small business deduction room in a year, they be able to take that room and carry it back to a previous year or carry it forward. So the business cycle won't interfere with their ability to access that tax incentive on an ongoing basis.

The elimination of the corporate minimum tax: again, I don't want to waste a lot of time because you've heard it probably ad infinitum before. In our view, it's a very important item to deal with because our belief is that it's very inefficient in terms of the cost of government, the cost to the business sector to comply with this legislation, and the tax revenue that is actually generated from it is not sufficient. There are a number of other points that I will leave to your leisure reading to determine whether the points we've raised are appropriate.

In the fifth point, we're suggesting that there be a continuing emphasis to streamline government collection activities and really to reduce duplication in the government. We talked earlier with one of your members about the Red Tape Commission and their work. We've suggested some examples of some things that we believe, from the business community's perspective, are easy to accomplish and don't cost a lot of money—in fact, the government will save money—things as simple as the fact that every organization in Canada, including charities and non-profits, has a business registration number that's assigned by the federal government. The question has to arise, why can't we use the same number for EHT, WSIB, Ontario retail sales tax, corporation tax ac-

count? And there's probably a host of other different account numbers that are maintained at the provincial level that I'm forgetting or I'm not aware of.

The federal government, for its part, has actually done that. They have one number and they put a suffix at the end of that number to denote which account it is, whether it's payroll deductions or GST and so forth. I am submitting that it would improve efficiency and certainly simplify the system if those numbers were adopted at the provincial level.

We've also indicated that a number of the taxes that employers have to remit—WSIB, workplace safety, EHT, CPP, EI, income tax—are payroll-based taxes, and by and large the formulas for calculating those taxes are identical. We're suggesting there should be one agency that administers those programs as far as collection so that an employer has to remit to one agency, setting out the various amounts they are remitting with respect to each of the programs for then passing those funds on to the agency. We believe that will reduce a lot of the red tape, a lot of the inefficiency, and not only save businesses money but save government money in terms of the cost of collecting these taxes.

The last one is a minor one, but I do think it emphasizes the silly result that we have in some areas of the income tax system. Each of us, when we file our personal income tax return, gets a basic personal tax credit. As you probably all know, the credit is slightly different federally and provincially. I've set out in this demonstration that the federal exemption is \$7,634 and the provincial exemption is \$7,686. As an employer, I have to get a separate form from each employee documenting the exemption they're entitled to. I also have to maintain that form and to set up a separate tax calculation based on that exemption that's different from the federal level. If you flow it through, for someone earning up to \$30,000 a year in taxable income, it actually results in an additional pay every week of four cents, based on a 52-week pay period. So an employer is having to go to all these expenses so the employee receives four cents extra net pay, notwithstanding that when that taxpayer filed his tax return at the end of the year, he'd still get the money even if the employer didn't. We're asking that these kinds of silly little things in the tax system be harmonized to reduce the employer's requirement to maintain separate files and to do separate calculations.

We've also seen a greater incidence, with the downturn in the economy and the slow processing of corporate tax refunds, of loss carry backs. I mentioned earlier that the business cycle invariably results in taxable income of corporations going up and down. In the current climate, many corporations are sustaining losses, tax losses as well as cash losses. In an effort to carry back those losses and recover taxes paid in previous years, a right which even individual taxpayers have and will utilize, the province of Ontario has a unique regulation dealing with these refunds that if it's over a predetermined amount, there has to be an audit before that refund cheque will be cut. So we find ourselves in many cases in silly situations

where we file for that refund and, if we get a refund from the federal government, many times months and years after we've gotten the money back from the federal level of government, the province is still waiting to knock on the door to do their audit before we can get our refund.

We're suggesting that, like individuals, corporations are entitled to that refund expeditiously. Certainly the auditor has the right to come and carry out their audit and to reallocate their resources to do so sooner rather than later if that's how they wish, but we believe it's unfair—and not only is it unfair; it's ineffective and inefficient—to hold on to those funds, because those businesses need that money, which is really money they've already paid previously in taxes, to continue in many cases to stay afloat. A minor change, again, and not a great deal of cost, but we believe it's one that's important, and frankly it's fair and equitable.

Item number 7—and if someone wants to let me know if I'm running out of time, please do so. I'm coming close to the end.

The Chair: You've got three minutes to go.

Mr Fuerth: In item number 7, we've recommended that with the health care system being under tremendous stress and various levels of government—the federal level, the provincial level—trying to control their costs in that area, invariably it has resulted in many of these costs being paid for by individuals or, in the case of the business sector, employers who offer private health care plans to their employees. Currently there is a tax on the premiums that employers pay on those health care premiums. We believe it would be fairer, given in effect the escalation in the costs of some of these premiums—we've heard at the municipal level that the escalation this year alone is in the range of 25%, and certainly many employers have seen double-digit increases in their premiums. We believe it would be fair and equitable to at least eliminate the tax on those premiums.

In the interest of allowing time for questions, the other two items are self-explanatory. Again they are examples of where we believe that with a minimal or no cost, efficiencies can be derived. One of them is increasing the threshold for tax instalments, both personal and corporate. Because of the low interest rates now, we have a hard time getting our minds around the value of money today compared to what it was 10 years ago when interest rates were 10%, 12%, 13%, 15%. Now, when it's 2% or 3%, the value to the government of having those funds earlier may not be as high as what it's costing to process those instalment accounts. Again, it's a simple suggestion that in the current climate we believe merits review.

I would like to thank you for your attention. Hopefully you will find our submission to be informative, comprehensive, and probably a little bit controversial, but hopefully it's good reading.

The Chair: There's less than one minute total for questions, so I'll allow a very brief question from each caucus, quick and to the point.

Mr Christopherson: Thank you for your presentation. You'd make a good politician: say one thing and do another. "I'll leave lots of time for questions," and then use it all up.

Mr Fuerth: I've been here before.

Mr Christopherson: I know you have, and I'm sure you're getting some good advice from your friends.

I'll try to put it in a nutshell. On the first page, page 2, I quickly counted eight tax cuts, and included in there was \$3 billion or more to debt, at a time when we've been told that we're between \$3 billion and \$5 billion short on the budget. I understand your absolute fear of deficits, but with the US government, nobody has accused Bush of being some kind of left-wing socialist. He's going to run a deficit because he realizes he's in such a crunch.

Earlier today we heard from some people in your own community who talked about the fact that 15% of children in Ontario are in poverty, but in your community it's 18%. There are 800 children on waiting lists for mental health services, and we heard in very great, graphic detail what this means for those individuals and those families. Then there are the hospital costs; there are all these other things. As a citizen, I'd like to know how you feel justified in saying, "All those things are second, tax cuts should continue to be the priority," especially when we've had tax cuts for the last six years and all these other areas have fallen anyway. Nobody benefited long-term in the areas I've just raised. How can you take that position?

1450

Mr Fuerth: First of all, we haven't said that tax cuts are the priority. What we've said is, having zero deficit is a priority. We're not here to say that we should be taking funds away from, for instance, health care and contributing it to the business sector. What we're suggesting is that the first pillar of the budget should be a zero deficit. If that means no one gets their wish list, that's what it means, but that has to be the plank for this budget.

When you talk about the US as an example in deficit spending, I think you have to look at the two economies in relation to each other. Canada's GDP contributed by the government sector is, as a percentage, significantly higher than in the United States. Even with the increased spending in the United States, the percentage of the GDP that gets contributed by the government sector in the United States is still light-years away from where we are in the province of Ontario, and in the country, not just the province of Ontario.

The Chair: Mr Spina, briefly.

Mr Spina: Quickly, on the cross-border transportation issue, there are 16 lights between Mexico City and Montreal; nine of them are on the Huron Church Line. The feds and the provincial government, from what I understand—please tell me if I'm wrong or out of line—would be happy to do the direct connection of the 401 right to the bridge. But the bottleneck seems to be the city because, I gather, you've got businesses along Huron

Church who suddenly feel like they're going to get bypassed. How do we resolve this?

Mr Fuerth: I guess I answer the question by responding that I'm not aware that the city is the bottleneck. Certainly the local community will have concerns. I think that the city, as a result of the events of September 11, more than ever is cognizant of the consequences of not having an efficient transportation link between Highway 401 and the two border crossings that we have. In speaking with representatives from the city, they're certainly alert to the importance of that. Although they have an obligation to represent regional interests, the residents, their taxpayers, I do believe they're at the table when these discussions take place.

Mrs Papatello: Thank you for your presentation today. You're right, I'm very surprised by the total content of your package today. You tend to focus on tax issues. I have to say that your presentation reflects the work of the chamber, in this last year especially. Linda, I know you participated a great deal at a high level on major issues. It's funny enough for the chamber to be participating in these enormous social issues, because ultimately the neglect by the provincial government for the south-western region, in particular the areas of education and health care, is now coming down to the level where it is seriously impacting the economic wealth of the area and companies are starting to suffer, hence your major involvement in the issue of doctor recruitment, for example, the chamber of commerce having to be a participant on a committee to recruit doctors; the issue of education on the apprenticeship training and the lack of skilled trades for the area.

These are tremendous issues for us to deal with. As mentioned earlier, children's mental health has a significant impact on our education, which is a major player in attracting young families to stay and work in this region.

I really appreciate that the chamber has taken the time today to speak at a finance committee hearing to talk about these major social issues that are having a tremendous impact on our business. In the seven years that I've been here, I can honestly say that I haven't seen such a well-rounded discussion of all the issues, finally. I appreciate that, and the role the chamber has played in some major social issues in our area.

The Chair: On behalf of the committee, thank you very much for your presentations this afternoon.

WINDSOR AND DISTRICT
LABOUR COUNCIL,
CANADIAN AUTO WORKERS LOCAL 444

The Chair: Our next presentation will be from the Windsor and District Labour Council. I would ask the presenters to please come forward. For the record, could you state your name. On behalf of the committee, welcome.

Mr Gary Parent: Thank you very much, Mr Chair. My name is Gary Parent. I am the president of the Windsor and District Labour Council. To my left is Nick

Laposta. He is the financial secretary of the Windsor and District Labour Council.

Before we go into our presentation, I want to preface my remarks by speaking on the previous presentation that was given by the chamber. I want to say, which is normal in the city of Windsor, that we do agree on one thing: there has to be some infrastructure change with regard to the whole question of the border crossing. I am not necessarily totally convinced yet that it's here in line, that's for sure, but I do know that we have to have some type of infrastructure change. Actually, as you go through our brief you will see that we do make some remarks with regard to the whole question of infrastructure.

I'll have Nick begin the brief and then I will pick it up midway through.

Mr Nick Laposta: Thank you. First of all, just off the cuff, I want to thank everybody personally for allowing this presentation today. Quite frankly, I recognize a great many people here from other, as we refer to them, horse-and-buggy shows that have come here to Windsor. But I want to say to everybody, you all look much better in person than you do on the parliamentary channel, honest to God.

Mr Christopherson: Even O'Toole?

Mr Laposta: Even O'Toole.

Mr Spina: We wouldn't say that about Sandra.

Mr Laposta: Sandra always looks good, especially in this community.

We would first of all like to thank you for the opportunity to present to this committee the views of the 60,000 unionized workers in our community, retirees and their families in the Windsor and Essex county area.

We're going to start off with the additional health care funding that is really needed. The current government, since coming into power in the province of Ontario, has continually introduced privatization into our health care system which, in our opinion, has not provided the best health care for Ontarians.

Other jurisdictions, such as England and New Zealand, that have tried this type of privatization in their health care systems are now attempting to reverse their systems because they have failed to provide the type of care needed for those systems and the type of care demanded by the citizens who live within those systems.

We know that some in the government will argue—and this provincial government does just that regularly—that health care spending has increased by approximately 28% over the last five years, which is true. But what these same people in government fail to tell the public is that health care spending in the mid-1990s was interrupted by an unprecedented five-year period of decreased spending between 1993-94 and 1997-98. Even though spending in 2000-02 was 15% higher than the level in 1991-92, this is still less than would have been spent had the trend before 1993-94 continued.

We implore this government in this budget not to go further down the privatization road, which has been shown in other jurisdictions to be a failure, but to

adequately fund our system so that it can continue to be a fully universally accessible, publicly funded and managed health care system. The only way to start doing that is by making sure you start off with the tools you need to run that type of system.

In the area of hours of work, we submit that the government has bowed to the business community in this province with regard to the hours of work and has moved to a 60-hour workweek without, in our opinion, any studies being made on the effects this would have on workers and their families. Again, we see jurisdictions in Europe reducing the hours of work in their countries to 37- and 35-hour workweeks, but not here. We have moved from a 48-hour workweek to a 60-hour workweek.

We know those on the government side will say it is only voluntary. Well, the government has to get into the real world. One only has to look at the recent 10-week strike at ADM, where 92 workers were on strike to fight against this same legislation, which is supposed to be voluntary.

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We believe the effects these expanded hours will have on families will strain all of our social programs, because of the added time away from their families and the added stress from work hours. This is obviously something that always brings people apart and drags them down. There are studies on the books that show that.

We implore this government again to rescind this draconian piece of legislation that will further add financial stress to the bottom line of this province.

In the area of affordable housing, which we believe is a must, what did this government think was going to happen to people whose social service benefits were reduced by 21.6%, and at the same time as rent control has been eliminated, which has resulted in escalating rent costs for the most vulnerable in our province? On top of all this, there was the wisdom to download the provincial responsibility of non-profit and co-op housing on to the municipalities which, in our opinion, over the long term will prove to be disastrous to those municipal governments. Some are already crying.

The resolve for homelessness cannot be to throw those who are homeless in jail so that they won't be seen or heard. It has to be this government changing these detrimental policies, and getting back to making affordable housing a priority in this upcoming budget, with the commitment to build more non-profit and co-op housing units and revert back to a better rent control system. Remember, one of the things this government stated was that the private sector, which was complaining about co-ops and non-profits, would step up to the plate and fill the void, which has not been seen to be the case.

Child care promises that haven't been kept: it seems to us that this government looks only to the short term, with very little attention ever given to the long term, especially where our children, our future, are concerned. In almost every community across this province, there are waiting lists for child care, yet the government in-

dicates they care about our children. We say to prove this, then out of this budget there has to be a firm commitment to add more child care spaces, so that the future of our province will be more secure. This is another major, important tool. If it's missing, it can't be used.

Monies needed in the area of the environment: in the last couple of months, especially here in the Windsor-Essex county area, we have been presented with the fact that we live in an environment that is causing our citizens to become sick. We have been shown that we have elevated types of cancer, heart disease and many other illnesses that this government has failed to address. This community feels an environmental research facility is a must, and this government should commit to this. We are also asking this government to put legislation that will protect Ontarians from this tragedy continuing, plus to commit to increased enforcement in the environment, which we believe has been highly suspect in the past since the government cut inspectors from this ministry.

We spoke earlier in this presentation about health care funding not being adequate. Quite frankly, this will not get better until all environmental concerns get to be addressed. One of the ways to address them is by having that facility placed right here in our community.

No to privatizing our utilities: that's a mainstay. If anyone's listening, this province is headed for more financial trouble if they go ahead with the privatizing of our provincial utilities when other jurisdictions now realize that after that it did cost more. Corporations, hospitals, school boards and municipalities have already raised concerns as to what this will mean to them, which ultimately affects every citizen in Ontario—higher user fees and higher taxes. We ask the government to delay the May 1 implementation and do what Environment Minister Witmer has stated publicly: there should be a more in-depth review, before implementation takes place, of the long-term effects of such a move.

I'm going to turn this over now to Brother Parent, because I believe he has some very important news in the auto sector.

Mr Parent: The auto industry and Ontario's economy: the auto industry is Ontario's most important industry, directly accounting for close to 5% of the provincial GDP, about 2.5% of provincial employment and about half of Ontario's exports. Billions more of GDP and hundreds of thousands of jobs depend indirectly on the stimulus provided by this high-tech, export-oriented industry.

The decade-long expansion which the industry enjoyed in the 1990s was crucial to the expansion of Ontario's economy. It is important to note that most of the major investments which contributed to that unprecedented decade for the auto industry were in the pipeline long before the Harris government started cutting taxes and slashing our social programs. Those right-wing policies didn't cause the boom in the auto industry, just as they aren't protecting us from the current contraction.

Canada's auto industry peaked in 1999. Between 1999 and 2001 auto assembly declined by 17%, from 3.1 million units in 1999 to 2.5 million last year. It will likely decline by another 10% to 15% over the next two years. Auto parts production, which depends on the assembly sector for its business, is declining in step.

About 12,000 auto-related jobs have already disappeared since the peak levels of 1999 and 2000, half in assembly and half in parts, and virtually all of them in Ontario. Thousands more will disappear in the coming months on the basis of layoff and plant closure announcements that have already been made and continuing weak demand conditions facing many Ontario plants.

The downturn in Ontario's auto industry is not a cyclical problem. It has occurred despite record or near-record sales levels: 2001 was the best year ever for Canadian new vehicle sales and the second-best ever for US vehicle sales. The coming modest economic recovery which most forecasters expect for Canada does not imply that the auto industry will get back to business as usual.

The downturn, rather, reflects a structural crisis in the industry, especially the falling market share of Big Three producers, Canada's diminishing share of new auto investment compared to Mexico and the US South, and deep financial problems in the independent auto parts industry.

The provincial government has a large fiscal stake in the continued prosperity of the auto industry. It receives about \$1 billion per year in income tax payments from employed auto workers, let alone from those in other industries who depend on the auto industry for their livelihoods. It collects over \$1 billion per year in provincial sales tax on new auto sales. It collects additional revenues from corporate income taxes and other sources directly related to auto production.

Ontario's government has refused to become actively involved in promoting and nurturing the provincial auto industry despite its importance to our overall provincial economic prospects, let alone to the provincial government's own books. The government argues that low taxes, anti-union labour laws and smaller government will automatically protect our most crucial industry. But the industry's current downturn proves that business-friendly policies are no guarantee that the auto industry will remain healthy in Ontario.

Ford's announcement that it was to close the Ontario truck plant in Oakville is the latest and most glaring example that you can bend over backwards to make yourself highly attractive to business, yet still be out of work if a foreign multinational decides to close your plant for whatever reason. The Ontario truck plant was 10% more productive and had labour costs 35% lower than US plants which will continue making the same product. Yet Ford is closing the plant, and the provincial government seems powerless to do anything about it.

To protect the hundreds of thousands of jobs and billions in provincial revenue that depend on this crucial industry, the Ontario government must abandon its hands-off approach to the industry. The provincial gov-

ernment needs to have a seat at the table where the crucial decisions about the future of this industry are being made. The provincial government needs to take a more proactive role in recruiting new investment to the industry.

We, the CAW, have proposed a multi-part auto policy for Canada that would involve all stakeholders in the industry—federal, provincial and local governments; assemblers; parts makers; the union; and the research community.

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We have proposed a set of measures that would help the industry adjust to the current downturn, ensure that Canada and Ontario get a healthy share of future investment and address other long-run challenges facing the industry, like technology, foreign trade and the environment.

The Ontario government must be an active player in this new auto policy for Canada. In particular, the government should be willing to provide emergency financial assistance to independent auto parts companies facing imminent bankruptcy in the current downturn; strengthen legal protections for displaced workers by guaranteeing their back wages and pension benefits and requiring companies to negotiate mutually agreeable plant closure contracts; invest on a 50-50 basis with the federal government in improved transportation infrastructure linking Ontario's auto-producing communities with the US border, especially by widening the 401 south of London, connecting the 401 with the Ambassador Bridge at Windsor, and improving border crossing infrastructure in the Windsor and Niagara regions; and participate with the federal government in the creation of a technology partnerships investment fund to assist auto assemblers and parts makers to finance cutting-edge investments in new products and processes.

We have proposed that the federal government pay in \$500 million per year and the provincial government \$250 million. When I keep saying "we," that's the CAW. As I understand, Brother Hargrove will be making a presentation to this committee tomorrow and I am sure he will expand on what I'm saying here today. We have also proposed a ministerial-level task force of auto industry stakeholders to investigate other longer-run challenges facing the industry and report back with policy recommendations by the end of 2003.

What is most important is for this government to abandon its hands-off approach to this most important industry in Ontario. For too long, government has taken for granted the continued success and growth of the auto industry, believing its own propaganda about how low taxes and free markets will protect our long-run future.

Now, unfortunately, it's time to wake up and smell the coffee. This industry is locked in a serious decline, its most difficult crisis in a generation. The jobs and money which this industry has generated, including billions in provincial revenues, cannot be taken for granted any longer.

The provincial government faces a historic responsibility to roll up its sleeves and get to work, playing an active role in protecting and repairing the industry for the next decades.

The recommendations we put before the provincial government are:

- (1) Increase health care spending to the pre-1992 funding levels;
- (2) reduce the number of hours of work to provide more job opportunity, as well as more family time;
- (3) create additional non-profit and co-op units and create a rent control system that will protect tenants;
- (4) create additional child care spaces throughout the province;
- (5) put additional monies into the environment for a Windsor-Essex county research facility, as well as greater prevention and enforcement; and
- (6) propose and push for an auto task force for the creation of a new auto policy, not only for Ontario but for Canada.

We have to look at positioning Ontario for the future. In our opinion, the recommendations we have provided in our presentation certainly address Ontario's continuing to have the competitive edge that the current government, at every opportunity, states it now has.

The Chair: Thank you very much. We have one minister per caucus and I'll start with the government side.

Mr O'Toole: Thank you very much for your presentation. I tend to agree that the auto industry is an important part of our economy. I've worked in it for over 30 years and I commend the relationship with the CAW in understanding the whole economic model. I appreciate your input and probably agree with part of it.

I just want to ask you a question. There was an article in the Financial Post this morning and I'd encourage you to read it. It says, "Kyoto's Real Cost." In that, I just start by saying, it's the right thing; it ties into the quality of life, the environment, health care—huge decisions, policy decisions.

The Chair: Question, please.

Mr O'Toole: The question would be, do you agree with the Kyoto accord and the possible ramifications for the auto industry?

Mr Parent: Obviously, we agree that the environment is very important—

Mr O'Toole: A 20% reduction in auto production is forecast.

Mr Parent:—depending on where you're going. We have already, on research and development within the auto industry, been pushing the auto industry on the whole question of alternative fuel, alternative engines. In fact, in the city of Windsor today, in the Ford complex, which has a couple of engine facilities, five plants, a couple of them have no product line beyond 2006, I believe. We have been after the Ford Motor Co—and this is where the provincial government can step in and provide the research and development monies to create an alternative fuel so that we can meet the deadlines set

out in the accord, so that we can go forward and make sure that the environment is definitely in the interests of all of us in Ontario and all of us in this world.

Mr O'Toole: Stay tuned; a big issue.

Mr Kwinter: Thank you very much for your presentation. I just want to tell you about what happened at estimates this year, where the Minister of Economic Development and Trade appeared and spent a half hour giving a state-of-the-union address about his ministry and in the 30-minute presentation did not once mention the automotive sector. I took him to task for doing that and afterwards his staff called me and he called to say that I was absolutely right, it was an oversight. What I don't understand is how something as important as the automotive sector would be an oversight in a presentation made by the Minister of Economic Development and Trade to the estimates committee as to where that ministry was going.

I just wanted to let you know that I commend you for at least bringing that to the forefront, that the government has got to be a player in what is happening. It's really critical because there's overcapacity in the industry. We see the GM plant in Ste-Thérèse, Quebec is being closed, they're phasing out the truck plant in Oakville, and unless we do get in there and try to influence some of those decisions, then we're going to be in big trouble and places like Windsor are going to suffer as a result of it.

Mr Christopherson: Thank you, Gary and Nick, for your presentation. Mr Fuerth raised on page 4 of his report—and you did, Gary, in your opening comments and on page 14—the whole issue of security versus efficiency at the borders. I just want to step that out once and ask for your thoughts on the government's position. I think most of the candidates for Premier I've heard talk about it are in favour of a larger North American security perimeter. If we went down that road, then a lot of the cross-border security issues would be resolved. A lot of them would become moot because you would have the North American perimeter. Given the fact that I know your politics, Gary, I know how you feel about a lot of these things, but also the fact that you need an efficient border crossing, which you've spoken to, what are your thoughts on that? Do you see that as the only real way to deal with security or is there a way we can do it without going to the North American perimeter?

Mr Parent: We're absolutely opposed to the North American perimeter. We have stated that at a trans-boundary meeting here publicly, at which Sandra Pupatello was in attendance. What we're saying is that as far as to smooth-line the whole question of the border crossing is to reverse the immigration-type endeavours that were present. I'm not even sure now, I don't know if they've changed, because they have changed back and forth a couple of times on the whole question of pre-immigration inspection being on this side of the border versus in other locations. We've talked about that in this community. We think that would help tremendously in stations along Huron line or off the 401 or wherever, that we can have that pre-immigration inspection done so that

it can add to the security you're talking about, Mr Christopherson; that we can continue to make sure that the products and the goods and services do flow across that border to obviously improve the economy of Ontario and Canada as a whole.

We have to have that, but we can't do it if we don't have the federal and provincial governments working together, along with the municipality and the American side. My understanding, coming out of that meeting, and I stand to be corrected on it, is that there had been some federal—I believe it was on the US side—proposal being put forward to the US government that was already in place, and it was our side, meaning the Canadian government, that was dragging its heels on the whole question of the implementation of such a proposal that could dislodge some of the whole question of the trans-boundary transportation system.

The Chair: With that, I have to bring it to an end as we've run out of time. On behalf of the committee, thank you very much for your presentation this afternoon.

Mr Parent: Thank you very much. We look forward to the budget with all of our proposals.

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WINDSOR-ESSEX CATHOLIC DISTRICT SCHOOL BOARD

The Chair: Our next presentation this afternoon will be from the Windsor-Essex Catholic District School Board. I would ask the presenters to please come forward and state your name for the record. On behalf of the committee, welcome.

Mr Fred Alexander: My name is Fred Alexander. I'm chair of the Windsor-Essex Catholic District School Board. On my right is Mr Michael Moher, who is the director of education. To my left is Mr Peter Marchini, superintendent of business and the board treasurer.

Mr Chairman, ladies and gentlemen, I welcome the opportunity of addressing the committee briefly on matters that are of great concern to us. We want to thank you in advance for your interest in carefully listening to the concerns of the local Catholic school board.

The amalgamation of school boards, along with the new funding formula for education, has required much adjustment on the part of school boards across the province, and the Windsor-Essex Catholic District School Board is no exception. Throughout the four-year history of our new board we have been challenged to provide quality Catholic education in Windsor and Essex county while staying within a balanced budget. In order to accomplish this, we believe that our board has shown a willingness to make hard decisions.

Since January 1998, we have instituted a number of cost-cutting initiatives, including downsizing of our senior administrative staff from 12 at the time of amalgamation to the present complement of five and reducing the consultant staff, which is the curriculum support sector, from a high of 27 in the two former boards to six in the year 2001-02. We have closed seven

elementary schools, resulting in operational and administrative cost reductions. This board has endured a five-week strike of custodial staff in an attempt to bring costs in this envelope in line with the grant. We have eliminated teacher librarians in our city schools. We have worked co-operatively with our coterminous boards to achieve savings on things such as transportation, courier services, shared teacher resources etc. At this time we are also in the process of combining four administrative locations into one board office, sharing space with one of our secondary schools.

I say this to you because I want to point out that these are just some of the efficiencies that we have been involved in in terms of trying to live within the parameters established by the Ministry of Education. Despite all of these things, we are still struggling to eliminate a cumulative board deficit of \$3.2 million. Frankly, we feel we have run out of things to cut. The story is not peculiar to this particular board. I'm sure you've heard this across the province as you make your rounds. We are reaching a point where irreparable harm will be done if we make further cuts.

There are a few changes which we hope will be considered in your budget deliberations and which would make a significant difference in our board's ability to provide a level of education which we feel our students deserve.

The two aspects of the 2002-03 education funding formula which, if addressed, would most contribute to our board's fiscal solvency are outlined in a document which we have provided to you entitled Financial Concerns. I will address both of them briefly but trust that you will examine more carefully the details we are providing.

The first and very serious concern we have is that the ministry will again provide only "stable" funding. As outlined, we must state strongly our need to have the funding for ISA 2 and ISA 3 claims, the special education envelope, reflect the realities of the eligible files established by our board and others in 2001-02.

Secondly, we respectfully request that the ministry funding for employee benefit funding be adjusted from the present 12% of a base teacher's salary to 15.5%, which more accurately reflects the real cost of these benefits for our board.

These two items, which have implications for many boards, would make the difference for our board between a precarious financial position, one which will necessitate further, more educationally drastic cuts, and solvency and the ability to continue to provide a quality Catholic education to the families of Windsor and Essex county.

Mr Chairman, these are very carefully scripted comments that I have presented here to the committee. I would like to say a few things to the committee. You'll forgive me if these comments appear somewhat disjointed, because they are really extemporaneous.

There is a rumour going around that there is a perception that boards of education really don't have a problem, that somehow we are doing this at the appropriate

time as the finance ministry is beginning to crunch the numbers, and that somehow there is a perception that what we are doing does not really reflect a problem. I want to assure the committee that nothing could be further from the truth. We are continuously going through the process of robbing Peter to pay Paul.

Just in the special education envelope, through no fault of this board, we are experiencing or certainly approaching a \$1-million shortfall for this coming year. I know the superintendent of business will make remarks to that effect later on.

We have made the rounds. We have gone to the round table and addressed Jim Flaherty, who is also a candidate for the leadership of the party. We've addressed our concerns, and everyone listens to us politely. I want to tell you with all the sincerity I can muster that we have a serious problem. When I say "we," I mean the boards of education in the province and, since I am speaking on behalf of the Windsor-Essex Catholic District School Board, this board in particular. It is a problem, not to be melodramatic, that is almost catastrophic.

Particularly in special education, we have raised the level of expectation in the minds of people for whom we are providing the service, and we cannot deliver because of the shortfall in funding. We are going to other envelopes to subsidize special education because we feel that's our mandate. We cannot continue to do this any longer.

We make these remarks to you in the hope that you will take this seriously. If you have any additional questions on the specifics, I'm sure that either the director or the superintendent of business will be more than happy to address your concerns.

The Chair: Does that complete your formal presentation? OK. For questions we have approximately two and a half minutes per caucus, and I'll start with the official opposition.

Mrs Pupatello: I'd like to address the \$3.2-million debt. Your coterminous board also has a debt, and, as you know, debts are not allowed in boards of education across Ontario. They're not allowed in hospitals or municipalities. School boards now are looking at the same ratio of debt as our hospitals; over half are in debt, at least.

How are you going to resolve this? What kind of financing costs are you facing? How are you going to the bank? How much of that is attributed to capital that you are no longer getting from the government? They've essentially moved what would typically be government debt to assist financing of new schools or school buildings and now you are assuming the debt, so they've really moved the nut under the shell. The debt is now at a much more local level. But essentially, you cannot have this debt, so how are you going to deal with this?

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Mr Peter Marchini: If I can respond to that, the board did experience a cumulative deficit of \$3.2 million as of their August 31, 2001, financial year-end. In January 2001, the trustees met with administration and

scoured a 20-page document. At the end of a long meeting, we approved for implementation a \$3.8-million budget reduction plan for implementation September 2001. By and large, most of that has been implemented, other than one item that was held up through an arbitration and that now should be implemented during the month of March. That was the change in workloads for our custodial group. We had a five-week strike and subsequent arbitration.

To address the issue of the debt, the board has done pretty much everything they possibly can. What's left in the hands of the trustees are things of the nature of a couple of music teachers. When you leave the classroom teacher, that's pretty well all that's left. We have a handful of consultants, a couple of music teachers, and not much beyond that. So the system was basically stripped to the bare minimum.

The implementation of the \$3.8 million occurred in September. The board is now looking at a balanced budget for this year, the year we're currently in, but barely a balanced budget with, if anything, a minimal repayment of the \$3.2-million deficit. We're in the midst now of putting together a deficit management plan for Mr Wayne Burtnyk from the Ministry of Education to show how as a board we'll be able to address that deficit, because they are not legal.

Mrs Pupatello: Will that include finance charges where you'll be spending money to finance that deficit?

Mr Marchini: Our deficit is part of our line of credit with our bank. We have a \$40-million line of credit. Part of that line of credit involves this \$3.2 million, so we'll be paying 4% to 5% on that over the next year or two or three, and that is basically not funded as well.

It's a struggle, especially when we hear news of a reduction in funding or no increase in funding for this fiscal year coming. That really makes it difficult to do long-term planning.

Mr Christopherson: Thank you for your presentation. We're hearing it. It's our second community and probably our fourth or fifth submission on what's happening to the education system.

I like to keep things fairly local. I don't know if you were here earlier for the Windsor and District Chamber of Commerce presentation, but they made a whole raft of recommendations that involve tax cuts. Their biggest overarching concern—to be fair, he did say the new tax cuts didn't necessarily have to be first, but he did say that implementing all previously announced tax cuts should take place, and that's around \$2 billion. And he said that there cannot be a deficit, no matter what. The other priority was at least \$3 billion going to pay off the debt.

If the government listens—and I can tell you they listen very carefully when the chambers roll in—there will not be any new money. You will be lucky to hang on to what you have. Notwithstanding that the government says they don't cut from education, all you have to do is tinker with the funding formula and suddenly you've got a deficit outcome. We all know how the classroom

spending discussion went and all the things they just carved out of that equation and then played games.

My question to you is this: this is your community. This was your business community speaking. Business is obviously crucial to all our communities; you can't avoid that. But if you followed what the chamber wants, and there's a good chance this government will, you're not going to get another dime. I'd like to know what you think about that. Do you think we should go into a short-term deficit if that's necessary? In other words, is the crisis big enough in the Catholic school system that even if we have to go into a short-term deficit, we ought to do that, or should balancing the budget and continuing with tax cuts be the priority even if it means you don't get any new money?

Mr Marchini: A response on the deficit: I think what will happen is that on one side of the ledger or the other, the government will have a deficit. If there is 0% funding coming to the school boards, they're just shuffling the deficit on to hospitals and school boards, so there is a deficit there. Whether it's on the government's provincial ledger or whether it's on the school boards' ledger, it's going to occur. It just can't be stopped without some sort of realistic grant increases.

Mr Alexander: Mr Christopherson, we're talking about children and we're talking about education. I was not here for the presentation by the Windsor Chamber of Commerce. I'm sure theirs was a much more polished presentation than mine. We're talking about children and we're talking particularly about a group of disadvantaged children, to a large extent, in the special education sector. The government has mandated boards to provide a certain level in terms of special education to these people. That is what I meant by saying that there is a level of expectation that this board is unable to fulfill at this time. It is the basic mandate. It is a legislative mandate imposed on this board by the government. All we are asking is that you allow us—give us the tools—to do these things. That's just one small part of the total budget. There's the question of retirement gratuities and benefits, but focus on special education for a minute. I want to tell you, from my perspective as the chair of this board, it is a ticking time bomb. It is something that is going to happen; it's going to explode in the faces of the politicians in this province and the consequences are going to be interesting.

You're in the middle of a leadership race. We've been to all the leadership candidates in Windsor. We've made our presentations. They all listened very intently, but I want to come back again: we are about the business of children, and particularly children and special education. I ask this committee to take a look at it and not shuffle the papers around and tell us that we're not going to get any funding or be lucky to hang on to what we have. That bothers me a great deal.

Mr Christopherson: It should. It should bother you, sir.

The Chair: With that, I have to bring it to the end and go to the government side.

Mr O'Toole: Thank you very much for your presentation. I should say that I am no stranger. I was a separate school trustee for a couple of terms and I have a perspective on that as my wife is a teacher and my daughter is a new high school teacher. I would like to be remembered as being supportive to doing the right thing. Sometimes the culture is more difficult to change.

Mr Christopherson: It's your fault.

Mr O'Toole: David, you had your time. I'm not sure you made your point, but I did listen.

Mr Christopherson: I'll return the favour.

Mr O'Toole: What is your budget now in terms of the amalgamated budget of all the boards?

Mr Michael Moher: If I may, the budget is \$171 million. I defy anyone to manage their own personal affairs in terms of a variance of 1% or 1.5%. We get changes from the government, unannounced, where we're expected to fund—we have no control over teachers who decide to retire. We budgeted \$1.8 million for retirement gratuities. Teachers are leaving the profession in droves: a \$3.2 million expenditure, unexpected. We have no flexibility within the funding formula to recoup that. That happened last year and we've had to try to look at ways to recoup that this year.

The problem we are having is that it's like running a business and the best you can hope as an entrepreneur is to break even. We can't even do that. That's the difficulty. There's no flexibility within the funding formula to address local conditions.

Mr O'Toole: I just want make a couple of points before the time ends. One of them is that, on special education, I chaired that CIAC committee. When they introduced the ISA and the SEPA funding, the actual number of students being lined up for it tripled. The reason they did is the funding was there. It was the new bundle of funding. The IPRCs, prior to that, were never done until grade 3 or 4. They delayed it as long as possible and kept moving the kids through the system until they were 17. Now the system, I believe, in ISA, that funding specifically, has been stopped twice by the ministry to find a different delivery model and a different way of assessment and tools that aren't so prescriptive and expensive.

Have you got some new ideas of how to reduce the administrative costs of ISA levels 1, 2, 3 and 4 and the whole bureaucracy required, without those dollars going to help one student?

The Chair: You have 30 seconds left.

Mr Moher: My advice to you is—

Mr O'Toole: New information.

Mr Moher: My advice is, trust the boards, trust the teachers who know the students best, decentralize the service, put the money back in the hands of the school boards, who manage it effectively. You're putting more money into the system and you've got less service than you ever had before.

Mr O'Toole: That's right; it's all administrative money.

The Chair: With that, I have to bring it to an end, but on behalf of the committee, thank you very much for your presentation this afternoon.

1540

CHAD BARRETTE

The Chair: Our next presentation is from Chad Barrette. I would ask Mr Barrette to please come forward, and could you state your name for the record, please. On behalf of the committee, welcome. You have 15 minutes for your presentation this afternoon.

Mr Chad Barrette: My name is Chad Barrette. Good afternoon. I'm a special education teacher with the Windsor-Essex Catholic District School Board. Thank you for the opportunity to allow me to address this group. I'm here to represent the interests of children from publicly funded schools in Ontario.

Since 1995, there have been numerous provincial tax cuts. The goal of the Harris government apparently was to be competitive with all of the jurisdictions around us. They have accomplished that. Our business tax rates, corporate tax rates, are the lowest in the area, right around the Great Lakes states. So they've accomplished that. But there have been some prices that have had to be paid and the children of the Windsor-Essex Catholic District School Board, as well as other areas, are paying them. We may be paying for years into the future with an inadequately educated citizenry. If you don't take care of the needs of our most vulnerable students, they tend to make life more difficult for the rest of us and themselves, and it makes learning hard for the other students in the classroom.

Students with special needs in the Windsor-Essex Catholic school board are being funded at approximately 80%, based on the 1999 ISA grants audit. We had to shut down our special education department for a good two months to prepare for those audits. Our speech pathologists, social workers and psychologists all had to shut down and become fund generators. The effect of this is that the very kids we're trying to help and apply for were not getting any service. That's two months of no service. We're locked in at the 1999 rates for the ISA grants. We have to wait until September 2003 for our most recent ISA grants to take effect. We have new students since that time and that's \$2.5-million worth of special-ed funds that are not being accounted for. In the interim, our board must operate at a deficit to meet these children's needs.

Another problem we have is that our educational assistants are being funded at 1999 levels, so every time we hire an educational assistant to help out with a student with special needs, half-time is \$4,500 and full-time is \$7,000. So far, our board is operating at a \$1-million deficit to fund our EAs.

I suggest that the Ontario government—I don't know if this their mandate with their Red Tape Commission—shorten the allotted time and allow children to qualify for these special needs or ISA grants and allow the teachers

to stop being fund generators and allow them to teach in the classroom. Allow new submissions to count immediately and be reviewed every five years. Once a child is labelled with Down syndrome, that's a lifelong condition. We don't need to prove that every year. That's something that they have and it doesn't change. We know how much the Ontario government hates bureaucracy and paperwork, and we'd like to move along with that as well.

In addition to special-needs claims changes, we need more local support services for children's mental health, developmental disability support and respite assistance. Again, children who need this help act out in many ways. They disrupt everyone's learning environment and put themselves and their classmates further and further behind. The Ontario Safe Schools Act is a good start to this, but many of these children can't control their behaviour. They have disabilities, and suspending them won't fix the problem. It's more of a Band-Aid solution. Many of these children are getting suspended over and over again. They're on waiting lists for treatment but not getting any help. I know there's a limited amount in the budget, but I suggest the Ontario government find some efficiencies to effectively deliver these community services.

In addition to community services' waiting lists, there are severe shortages of psychological, speech and social workers' regular visits to schools. People for Education recently did a study across Ontario and they found that in less than 40% of cases there were regular visits by these speech pathologists, social workers and psychologists to the schools. In order to be funded to receive special education help, these children need to be identified, so they're kind of caught in a tough spot. Many times parents will have to get privately funded psychological services, which cost between \$500 and \$1,000.

Like standardized report cards, we need standardized availability of these professionals to help the neediest of our students. Please don't make it a race to the bottom like our corporate tax rates. We need good services. I'm not saying let's make them all lower, down to 20%. I would like to raise it.

I'll leave the other recommendations, or most of them, to the public's good friend, the Provincial Auditor. Some highlights of his report are: school boards are spending \$95 million more than they receive from government on special education services; there's an insufficient number of teacher assistants and experienced special-ed teachers—we need to recruit more; the Ministry of Education should establish procedures that enable it to monitor the cost and effectiveness of special education.

I have a few more recommendations of my own:

Eliminate the private school tax credit. You aren't spending enough money on public education and we don't want to divert any more money from it;

Allow more local control of schools. We have two school boards the size of France. Queen's Park cannot control 4,800 schools;

Also, I'd like you to quit killing communities by funding schools by square footage. Most schools that were closed had fewer than 350 students. Animals at the Stanley Park zoo are allowed twice the square footage as Ontario students; they get 100 square feet per student;

Finally, hire more special education teachers. I work with the Windsor-Essex Catholic District School Board, and the average special education teacher has around 50 students that they must see. That turns out to be about half an hour a day that the children are seen by a special education teacher, excluding the months of September and October, of course, because their teachers are fishing for grants. We need special education teachers to be able to spend more time with these children. If you don't meet the bottom third of the class' needs, you won't meet the top third's needs either.

Another thing that I'd like to see is more accountability in the funding. It was very difficult to research through boards' Web sites for how much money is being spent. It's almost like a puzzle, or hidden. I'd like to see a pie graph for each board and the teachers, where they account for—say, special ed is one department and transportation is another. Put it into cents and the full thing as a dollar, and each board has to do it so they can account for the spending.

Thank you for the opportunity to address this group.

The Chair: Thank you very. We have approximately a minute per caucus.

1550

Mr Christopherson: Thank you, Mr Barrette, for your presentation. I think it says an awful lot that you're here as an individual, that you're here as a teacher, a special-ed teacher at that, and a young teacher.

I'll tell you ahead of time, you're going to have a very difficult time getting any one of the four government members to agree that money has anything at all to do with the problem. They'll tell you it's everything under the sun: it's administrative, it's bureaucratic, it's this, it's that. It's going to be a whole multitude of things, but it's not going to be money. If you manage to get that out of them, you've done your day's work, believe me, because they just won't admit it. In fact, if you listened to the previous presentation, quite often it was their fault. It was always back to administration, back to bureaucracy. It's always somebody else's fault. It's never the fact that there just plain isn't enough money.

What I'd like to hear from you in the little bit of time we have is, being a young teacher in this area, if things continue the way they are, how do you see things? With maybe 20- or 30-plus years of teaching ahead of you, assuming we're lucky enough to keep you in the system, how do you see it if things continue along the trend line that you've seen in the last few years?

Mr Barrette: I think we'll be like the United States. We'll have the haves and the have-nots. We'll have corporations such as Edison funding private schools, all the services available in the private schools, and the public system—they make jokes about it in the United States all the time, "Oh, I went to public school," and

that's supposed to be some kind of handicap that you have. Because you were in a public school, you didn't have the opportunities that everyone else had. In England it's similar. They can discriminate against you just based on the region you live in and your accent. That may happen in the future here if things don't change.

Mr Hardeman: Thank you very much for your presentation, particularly as someone from the special education area, and I've had a number of discussions with people who are involved in that. Contrary to the New Democrats, I don't believe the only answer is just to put in more money.

I think every presentation today and in previous days has suggested there are other things that need to be done to make the system work. I think in special education the issue is opening up the envelope so school boards can make decisions of where best to put the money, as opposed to saying, "This is how much you get and this is where you have to put it."

I'm also very interested in the area of the amount of time it takes to do all the paperwork to identify and then to justify the grant per student. It seems to me, as you mentioned, that's a lot of red tape for very little purpose.

In previous years, prior to this funding formula, special education was funded as special education, apart from the regular funding, but it wasn't directed as to where it had to go. How much has the paperwork increased between the time before the funding formula and now?

Mr Barrette: I can't really speak to that because I've just been in special education during the time that we've had the ISA grants, but talking to my colleagues, they did not have to stop services for eight weeks. I'm definitely sure of that. It was far less, for sure.

Mrs Pupatello: It's interesting to hear a government member sit here and wear like a badge of honour the fact that he chaired the committee that created this mess of a bureaucracy to get students special-ed assistance in the classroom. It's no badge of honour. They've made an absolute mess. The bottom line is that before the change, kids had assistance in the classroom; after the change, they have less assistance in the classroom. It's that simple. In our community, we have kids at home because they don't have assistance in school all day and they need help with basics like going to the bathroom. The system that this individual chaired and wears like a badge of honour has actually created the problem.

Moving on from that, specifically speech pathology is another area of specialty that we're having a significant problem with in this area.

Mr Barrette: Definitely.

Mrs Pupatello: The mental health agencies for children were here earlier today and spoke about the lack of mental health services for kids. The impact of all those things in our community, the deficiencies, like lack of doctors, lack of specialists, lack of environmental controls etc, are all creating a real, terrific problem in the classroom. Tell me about your day and how you see that affecting your day.

Mr Barrette: You're saying the lack of community agencies?

Mrs Papatello: Assistance overall; like you mentioned, your speech paths, OTs, psychologists.

Mr Barrette: What happens is that we have people on long waiting lists. We have children who have been on the waiting list to see a psychologist for three years now. So they are not identified. What happens is they end up going into high school reading at about a grade 2 or 3 level without being identified as learning-disabled. So I foresee them dropping out of high school.

Also, I only see the children in the classroom for half an hour a day. In the past, they used to have three to four special-ed rooms where the children would have help. They would get the help they needed, and then the children in the regular classroom were able to excel. That doesn't happen now. What happens is they warehouse the children with problems in the classroom and you get all kinds of suspensions. Teachers are spending 85% of their time with these children with all the problems, and the children who are "normal" are missing out.

Another thing they've done is they have dumped gifted education on to the special education teachers, as well as early literacy training. So what happens is that the kids with colds, if I can make an analogy, are getting lots of attention, whereas the kids with cancer are being ignored, the kids with special education needs, because they are diluting the resources. There used to be four special education teachers—not in every school; I'm not saying that—and lots of help.

These kids are on a waiting list. We don't know what is being done to help them, or we don't know how to help them without the expertise offered by these professionals. Kids who are sometimes suicidal or have emotional problems are in the classroom and the classroom teacher is left to deal with them. If you have a principal who does not like to suspend children who aren't behaving properly, your classroom is a joke. There's no discipline. You can't really do much. You're locked in there, a prisoner of this child who doesn't see the need to follow a routine, so no one is learning.

The Chair: With that, I have to bring it to an end. On behalf of the committee, thank you very much for your presentation this afternoon.

Mr O'Toole: Mr Chair, if I may just raise a question and perhaps he can get back, does he prefer the integrated model or the segregated model in special ed?

Mr Barrette: Personally, for myself, I don't speak on behalf of my board, but I would like to see the segregated model.

ONTARIO ENGLISH CATHOLIC
TEACHERS' ASSOCIATION,
WINDSOR-ESSEX SECONDARY UNIT

The Vice-Chair: Our next presenter is Brian Hogan, president of the Windsor-Essex secondary unit of the Ontario English Catholic Teachers' Association. Twenty minutes have been set aside for your presentation. What

you don't use in the presentation will be divided among the three caucuses for their questions. As you begin, please state the names of both of the delegates who are at the table.

Mr Reno Melatti: My name is Reno Melatti. I'm first vice-president of the Windsor-Essex secondary unit. To my left is Michael Haugh, who is our liaison officer from the provincial office.

I'd like to thank you for giving me the opportunity to speak on behalf of our teachers and the concerns of teachers not only in this area but also in the province of Ontario.

The Ontario English Catholic Teachers' Association represents approximately 650 teachers who have chosen a career with the Windsor-Essex Catholic District School Board since its amalgamation in 1998. The local OECTA, Windsor-Essex secondary unit, is a sub-unit of the provincial Ontario English Catholic Teachers' Association, which represents 34,000 men and women teaching in Catholic schools throughout Ontario.

"We're extremely concerned about the corrosive climate that persists among the Ministry of Education, the district school boards, and board staff, particularly teachers. This unhealthy atmosphere needs to be dispelled immediately, before our students' education is jeopardized further ... " This is from the EIC report, December 2000, page 5.

The funding of public education in Ontario is now, perhaps more than ever in history, a matter of intense public interest and controversy. The climate that the EIC noted as "corrosive" has not improved. If anything, the atmosphere in public education has deteriorated as a result of funding practices which have fallen short of meeting the needs of our students.

We believe that fundamental flaws exist in the current level and method of funding public education in Ontario. The 5% budget cuts initiated in November 2001 by the Minister of Finance represent approximately \$700 million on top of the \$1.3 billion in cuts to education funding over the past five years.

The initiation of funding allocation through targeted amounts in envelopes has resulted in severe hardships in our schools as boards are forced to choose between programs and student needs. Monies generated from arbitrary formulas for allocation to targeted envelopes have proven insufficient to the ongoing requirements of school systems. The equal amount of funding for all is inadequate to meet the needs of local vagaries.

1600

The inadequacies and deficiencies in educational funding are failing our students now. Denied funding has translated into increased costs to taxpayers for remedial measures in the form of social services. By denying our students now, we deny the full potential of Ontario in the future for all citizens.

The funding mechanism predicated on class size in the aggregate is a disservice to students. The advantages of smaller class sizes for instruction have been well documented, yet despite provincial dictate regarding class size

targets at kindergarten through to secondary schools, there are still significant numbers of classes of 30-plus students in schools.

Curriculum, in both elementary and secondary schools of Ontario, has undergone significant revision. However, the resources needed to ensure the successful implementation have not been forthcoming as the result of lack of adequate provisions in the educational funding mechanisms.

Special education programs vary from school to school. Funding for these programs must go through the identification placement review committee, yet when the process is completed, there is an 18-month lag period for the funding to actually be released. Over the past four years, decline in schools reporting access to board psychologists and speech pathologists, reduction of staff, time and programs, have all been enacted in order to save money at the expense of special-needs students.

The result of cutbacks dictated by the inadequacies of the educational funding formula has also reduced the number of specialist teachers and educational support workers, such as educational assistants, school secretaries and custodians. Specialist teachers have been victims of funding cutbacks since 1997-98. At a time when the curriculum emphasis is on career planning and the production by students of an annual education plan, guidance teachers have dropped 6%. At a time when the focus is on literacy, there has been a 15% loss of teacher librarians in schools.

Additional areas of concern are also evident in resource provision for texts, materials and equipment need for a successful implementation and delivery of the revised curriculum. Inadequacies in funding are becoming increasingly pronounced in these areas. Since 1999-2000 there has been a 28% increase in fundraising for textbooks, computers, classroom supplies and library books. I know, I have been one of them. This is hardly the equality of educational opportunity which is purposely ensured by the funding formula.

Portables form the learning environment for Ontario's students at 45% of schools in Ontario. Moreover, a vast majority of secondary schools were built over 30 years ago and require general upgrade, as well as renovations or additions. We need to provide a safe, permanent and healthy learning environment for all Ontario students and staff.

In 82% of Ontario's secondary schools, students are bused from five to 100 minutes one way. In 19% of secondary schools, students ride for over two hours per day. With respect to my school, Cardinal Carter in Leamington, 20% of the student population is within the range of one and a half hours per day. While fuel costs to school boards have increased significantly, grants to boards have not increased at the same rate, thus compelling boards to shortchange other areas of the educational system.

Like many sectors of Ontario's workforce, the teaching profession is in the midst of profound changes to its composition. Teachers have been and will continue to

retire in large numbers over the next few years, well beyond the present capacity of the teacher training institutions to replace losses. Quotas enforced upon the enrolment of teacher candidates at faculties is part of the problem. Insufficient funding limits the number of student spaces required to provide the much-needed supply of teachers. Compounding this problem is the marked increase in the utilization by school boards of unqualified or underqualified personnel as classroom teachers.

Funding allocated to school boards for the maintenance and improvement of collective agreements governing wages and benefits is dictated by the funding formula. We see this as an intrusion on free collective bargaining when arbitrators must adhere to the ability to pay in awarding settlements. The imposition of three-year collective agreements, despite the fact that boards are funded on an annual basis, further constitutes an erosion of local autonomy in collective bargaining. Make no mistake, many out-of-province jurisdictions have lured and will continue to lure Ontario-trained teachers elsewhere unless better working conditions, salaries and respect for their professionalism is provided and ensured in Ontario.

In closing, our association is committed to a healthy, well-funded public education system which serves the students of our province. It is false economy when the funding provisions relate to cutbacks which limit educational opportunities for our students. Educational improvements grounded in research which supports reform is a goal we all support and favour. We all understand that the resources from the public purse are precious and finite. Perhaps in light of the present climate, prudence, coupled with a vision which recognizes the inherent potential in our schools, may ensure a better future for all our citizens.

Thank you for the time and allowing me and my association the opportunity to present our concerns to your committee.

The Vice-Chair: Thank you for the presentation. We have a maximum of two minutes per caucus, starting with the government side.

Mr Spina: Quickly, Mr Melatti, you were in the Catholic system five, six, seven, eight years ago?

Mr Melatti: I've been in the system 30 years.

Mr Spina: Good for you. What was the funding condition like seven, eight years ago?

Mr Melatti: If my memory serves me correctly, that's pre-Bill 160.

Mr Spina: Yes.

Mr Melatti: I think the funding was somewhat inappropriate from the standpoint of the government, but at least it allowed a common decision-making process, whereby school boards who felt the need negotiated those contracts.

Mr Spina: But on a per capita basis, weren't Catholic kids funded about 25% less than public board kids?

Mr Melatti: If my memory serves me, that's correct, because of the commercial funding. They were only getting the residential, yes.

Mr Spina: OK. Now the Catholic school boards are on an equal funding basis with the public boards, aren't they?

Mr Melatti: Unfortunately, when you try to apply pressure to do different objects, you can't do it. What you try to do is, you stabilize the same object and now you can apply pressure to both Catholic and public schools in the same way.

Mr Spina: But the reality is the separate school boards have experienced basically a net increase of anywhere from 20% to 30% in their overall funding.

Mr Melatti: That's a shortfall. The crunch is coming.

Mr Spina: But it's still 20% to 30% more than it ever had before that, isn't it? What did it do with it?

Mr Melatti: It's trying to equalize what it's been trying to offset for the past years.

Mr Spina: I understand that, but what I'm suggesting to you is that if the separate school board had problems or OECTA had problems in dealing with its contracts, and we know that—

Mr Melatti: And we dealt with them at the local level.

Mr Spina: Yes.

The Vice-Chair: We'll have to move on to the official opposition.

Mrs Papatello: I guess my colleague from across the way is trying to suggest that you ought to be happy because the Catholics made out like bandits with the funding formula and the public school system got buried with the new funding formula.

Mr Melatti: I should be thankful I'm alive, after 30 years.

Mrs Papatello: Exactly. I think that's the point he's trying to make.

Mr Melatti: I got that.

Mrs Papatello: I would say it more clearly than he would.

The Vice-Chair: Question?

Mrs Papatello: What I'm trying to say is, if that were so, why would that board be facing a \$3.2-million deficit this year? And we heard from the board directly. We also heard from teachers who work in both systems that the school environment has changed dramatically, that in fact what they've gotten headlines for has been around new disciplinary measures, when the reality is that the effects in the classroom have much to do with social services that the government has neglected in most of southwest Ontario, including health services, children's mental health services and educational services, all of which are affecting the classroom, and the teachers are facing the brunt of that. You don't have a speech pathologist to send the student to in order to improve this child's speech; you don't have a psychologist to send the child to and this child is very disruptive in the classroom. These are realities we are seeing that I hear about in my constituency office in the Windsor area every day. The government is ignoring the reality of what is happening in the classroom for the sake of looking at everything from a macro level and saying, "You should be happy

because you didn't get cut as your coterminous board got cut."

1610

Mr Melatti: I agree. Please make no mistake: I know what the educational system has. The unfortunate thing is that my daughter has undergone cancer for the past 12 years in order for her to get an EA, and now she has to share with another student. She is physically and mentally disabled, but she is not a problem-maker. She's not problematic in terms of behaviour, but she has a full EA. Unfortunately, the reason she has it is because she is brain-damaged. But I know, because I see it in my school, that her EA is being shared with somebody else who needs it. I'm aware of that.

It's one thing for the commander, the generals to make the charge but it's another to tell them how to use the bayonets, how to dodge the bullets and how to get that hill. If the generals want it, tell them to get into the trenches and do it.

Mr Christopherson: Thank you for your presentation. It's interesting that the question you heard from the government member you'll probably find in that little blue book they have. Every one of them has a nice little three-ring binder that's given to them by that staffer over there who makes sure they have as many questions as they can, and rather than—

Interjections.

Mr Christopherson: Hang on, Joe.

Mr Hardeman: We think for ourselves.

Mr Christopherson: Well, we've touched a nerve, haven't we? Are you worried somebody might look at your little blue books, is that the problem? Through you, Chair, are they worried? I have a question.

The Vice-Chair: Address your questions to the delegation, please.

Mr Christopherson: All right. Don't you think it's interesting that they carry these little blue books and now they're all upset just because I mentioned that they have them? In there, what they have is an analysis of everybody that comes forward—there, he's holding it up, see?—and they have best questions you can ask. I make the point again: everybody that has come in here so far and raised an issue about funding in schools, not one of them over there finds it in their little blue book to admit that it has got to do with funding, that the crisis that exists is funding. And why? Because they know that they're going to be short \$3 billion to \$5 billion in the upcoming budget, they want to maintain the tax cuts that are going to cost about \$2 billion and they want to have a balanced budget. The way they're going to do it is to, at the most, leave you where you are.

I caution you that there's a real potential they're going to find some way of cutting back on money, and that's why you got a question about the funding for the Catholic system as opposed to dealing with the real issue. I asked the teacher who was good enough to come out here earlier today, and I want to ask you, if the trend lines continue, where are you going to be in the next few years, if this government doesn't stop saying it's every-

body else's fault and admit there's not enough money in special ed? If they don't do that, where are you going to be in two or three years when we come back here?

Mr Melatti: They'll probably have a charge card as they come into the office because, basically, with the vouchers they're bringing in and the charter schools they're bringing in and the large business, that's what will happen. You read some of the reports that have happened in the States. I wondered why I wasn't asked or wasn't given the statement, "Are you one of those big union bosses?" I've been a classroom teacher for 30 years and I'm proud of it and I still teach in the classroom.

The Vice-Chair: Thank you very much for your presentation. We appreciate you coming forward and presenting to our committee.

WINDSOR-ESSEX FAMILY NETWORK AND RESOURCE CENTRE

The Vice-Chair: Our next presenter is Michelle Friesen, Windsor-Essex Family Network and Resource Centre. Thank you very much for coming forward. Twenty minutes have been set aside for you. After your presentation, whatever time is left will be divided equally among the three caucuses. As you begin, state your name, along with the names of the other members of your delegation, for Hansard.

Ms Michelle Friesen: I would just like to introduce the other folks who are with me. Actually, all three of us are parents of children and/or adults of people with disabilities and we tried to represent the various generations. Beside me is Michelle Bracewell, who is a parent of a toddler; I have four children, one of whom is disabled and is 21 years old and still in school; and next to me is Frances Colvin, who is my mentor and a senior parent whose son is now 40 years old. We really feel that there are issues our families are facing across the generations that relate directly to the kinds of supports and funding that families can't get access to right now.

I'm going to open it up with Frances. You may think we would end with Frances, except that it was her generation that decided to stop sending people to institutions initially, and we thought that was the best place to start.

Mrs Frances Colvin: Good afternoon. My son was born the year that SRC was opened and the thrust then was for placing them to fill up this institution. But I'm of the generation of parents that had started to bring our sons and daughters home and raise them ourselves. They were our children, and why should we treat them any differently than any of our other children?

We felt that it would be better for them to be in home environments with the love of family members. We never asked for any government help. The parents of my generation took it as our responsibility to raise these children as we raised our others. It wasn't until we started coming into our mid-60s, when we started to have problems and were no longer able to cope with looking

after them completely and we needed help, that we started asking for some in-home support in case of illnesses, which I had happen to myself. My son is in the emergency waiting room while I'm in the emergency room and they want me in the hospital, and I said, "I can't go because my son is out in the waiting room waiting on me." They finally brought him into the room while they made a decision. So from Friday afternoon until Monday morning, I had to go back to the hospital every six to eight hours to go on antibiotic intravenously.

It was then that I went to some of our senior families and said, "I don't want to see this happen to any other family. I hope we can get some support in the home." So now some of these seniors still continue to have to support their son or daughter at home. Some of them are single-parent families. They're getting to the point where things are happening. We've had one instance where a mother passed away. Her son was living with her and sat at her bedside for over a week, waiting and wondering what had happened to her, before they were discovered. We have other parents who are having to go into nursing homes and the child has to be placed someplace.

So we want to see that there is support for these people. These parents do want to continue to look after their son or daughter, as long as they are physically and emotionally able to. But it's getting more difficult, and they want assurances that as long as they keep them home, in case of a catastrophic illness or if they have to go into a home or should suddenly pass away, there will be support provided for their sons or daughters should anything happen to them.

Though they are providing the in-home support, they need help now to have some support to get them out into the community because they are no longer able. Another thing our young people need is planning to get them out into the community. The needs of these people are not going to get less because the sons or daughters of my parent-age group, and some older than myself, are also coming into their 40s and up into their 70s. The chances of them needing more support than what they're getting now is going to become greater, not less. But the more they can be got out into the community with support to keep them stimulated, the more that is going to help them to remain active. It's the same as they're advocating for all of us seniors: that we stay mentally and physically alert to help avoid the aging process.

In summary, families want to know that there will be financial support and the placement of supports that they require through planning, that will be set up in case something happens to them; and implementation of supports for the sons and daughters for the transition period, whether it be into a group home run by an agency, which families have been used to, or into supported independent living. But there would be options there for them.

I thank you for your time.

Ms Friesen: Michelle Bracewell is going to speak next.

1620

Ms Michelle Bracewell: I want to thank you for having this meeting. I was called about an hour ago to do this presentation, so bear with me.

Ms Friesen: Our other young mom had a crisis, which is very typical to life.

Ms Bracewell: Yes. I want to introduce my son Chad to you. He has overall global developmental delay. I don't know why. This is Chad. We were put on the family respite services waitlist when he was about a year and a half. This is Chad now, and he'll be four next week. We're still on the waiting list.

It can be very, very frustrating for parents and caregivers of children who are in need of services. Currently, there are 212 children on the waiting list for family respite services. A year ago, there were under 100. So it has more than doubled for the same time of year. Just to give you an idea of what the waiting is like, last May Chad was 50th on the list, and we thought we were getting a little closer. I called today, and he's still 50th on the list. So everything has stopped. We have been receiving special services at home, which is more of a support service.

I don't know if you know much about special services at home; it's a little different. We were on a waiting list for that for six months, and got off it and had services for 12 months. Due to an increased number of families in need, we are now back on the waiting list. I called about this, and the gentleman said that it's because there are 340 new families in need of services and there is no new funding.

As you know, early intervention is the key. I feel like we're in a race against time to get him OK before he hits the system. I am a teacher. I have chosen to stay home to help him as much as I can. To be brief, there's more of a need here, and I think if we have a higher number of families, we need to increase the funding.

Ms Friesen: Michelle's story is very typical of many families in Windsor and Essex county.

I thought I would do a general pulling together of things. One of the things that is common for all families is they are saying, "How can we include our children in their community and in their schools without the proper supports?" A number of years ago, many of us thought we had fought the battle around people being included and valued, and won. Now, people are saying, "Are we moving backwards?" Those people aren't just families. Those people are the agencies that are supporting families, and many educators. More importantly, I guess it may even be, "How can we include our children in our homes without the proper support?"

Although years ago, families decided to do it on their own when the only option was institutions, we're finding that the severity of disabilities has changed as well. So what we're asking families to do goes well beyond the word "exhaustion." I am here to tell you that many families and individuals with disabilities are living an existence, and not necessarily a life. "Beyond exhaustion," again, is a good adjective to use. That exhaustion

can be physical, mental and emotional. In the 21 years that our family has been thrust into the disability world, never have so many parents and others asked me, "Are we going backwards? We've never seen things so bad. Whatever happened to being included? Whatever happened to being valued? What is happening to the most vulnerable people in this province?" People say this with regard to the lack of funding and support so badly needed for their families to experience some small sense of normalcy, and for opportunities to be included. They say this as mothers who have to opt out of the workforce to coordinate services and care for their children—and those stats go well beyond Michelle. They say this as parents who take vacation time to attend medical appointments, therapy sessions, hospital stays and meetings of all kinds, and to be home when their child is suspended from school, unofficially, for three days.

They ask if things are going backwards with regard to the education of their school-age children, as years of inclusive supports deteriorate. As parents thought the individual education plans were supposed to be meaningful and lead to a good education and inclusion, they claim they have become tools for the schools to meet their own systems' needs.

The ISA funding: they are required to jump through numerous hoops to get assessments and all kinds of things done and then in turn find out that, yes, the ISA funding doesn't necessarily go to the child. Everybody understands that we want our resources to be spread thin, but there's something about the integral use of ISA funding, or applying for it and then not even having enough ISA funding in one school where you have claimed people, and then the supports are not there.

Then what we get are teachers who say, "I would prefer a segregated class," because their full experience has been all the problems around not having enough support for children. There was a day when there were school boards and there were best practices around this province where inclusion was considered vital and important for people.

At this point in time, it seems that even the public doesn't understand what families are going through with kids with disabilities, with mental health needs, with all kinds of vulnerabilities. What we find is, you have people concerned about education in general and health in general, but we can't seem to get people to understand that we have families whose backs are breaking, whose hearts are crushed, who are worried about how much longer they can continue.

Fifteen to 20 years ago, we were fighting for the supports that would make life more inclusive for our children and prevent their becoming part of systems that congregated them away. We understood that some of these congregated programs were for a time and were necessary for those families who first said, "We don't want the big institution."

We can't forget those seniors of today. They fought for their children to be recognized and that's why we could continue to fight and ask for more, and some of

those programs still exist. But at the time we asked for in-home support 20 years ago, and special services at home came in, we didn't think it would be a battle 20 years later to get a few families a little bit of help.

We fought for early intervention, the infant programs started by families then became something the province was proud of, only to find out infants are waiting for help. We built models of respite that meant someone came into your home and you didn't have to send them away, and now 212 children are waiting on a list for respite. Nobody thought that there would be this day.

In needing to take the public education and what parents call "a fight for our children" further, of course, we looked at including them in the schools. We learned that we needed to stop talking about labels, we needed to stop talking about their deficits and we needed to say, "These are children. What do we need to do to support them?" and whatever it took, they got.

That's not happening, that's not ever going to happen with the ISA funding model because people have to prove how deficient their kids are. It's never going to happen. It's very difficult. It's difficult for the educators who have to speak that way about children, it's difficult for the families who then, after years of learning to look at their kid, first for their beautiful smile and their blue eyes, all of a sudden have to start saying, "My kid has this and this and this."

Today, parents struggle to have our children educated without those labels. We know that money has tightened and we feel that a lot of that has to do with the valuing, or the devaluing, let me say, of people.

The bottom line here is that supporting families is important, and we can all coexist respectfully across the generations and learn from each other. But what is really needed is individualized, in-home respite dollars, infant and pre-school home visitation and outreach programs

and planning support for teenagers and adults, which Frances referred to. The seniors in this community have said, "We've got plans. We know what we want for our sons and daughters." They've got alternative housing, they've got siblings involved, they've got wonderful plans that will cost this government less money than popping them in group homes automatically.

All that was offered last year across this province were group home spots. But I hear Frances and her crowd saying that all we want are planners who will help us and dollars to put our plan in place. We need hours of support through special services, at-home funding and individualized funding for people who need more than that. We need funds for those living arrangements of choice that the senior parents have talked about and we need more funding for special education. But we need things that are meaningful and appropriate and we need some way to enforce how to ensure that people are getting educated.

Sandra said it; it's very true: there are many families in this community with their children home. They got tired of fighting without the Ministry of Education's backing them up, being jerked around by school boards, without enough funding and supports, with everybody frustrated at the seams. They're home. The only recourse is a lawyer and some of these families can't afford a lawyer.

So where we are is, everybody's spread thin and they start fighting with each other instead of looking at families as whole, children as whole and how we just support them to be who they are: people and children.

The Chair: Thank you very much. We've used all the time for the presentation. On behalf of the committee, thank you very much for your presentation this afternoon.

This committee will stand adjourned until 10 o'clock tomorrow morning in Toronto at Queen's Park.

The committee adjourned at 1630.

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