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**Official Report
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(Hansard)**

Wednesday 6 March 2002

**Journal
des débats
(Hansard)**

Mercredi 6 mars 2002

**Standing committee on
finance and economic affairs**

Pre-budget consultations

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

Consultations prébudgétaires

Chair: Marcel Beaubien
Clerk: Susan Sourial

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

**STANDING COMMITTEE ON
FINANCE AND ECONOMIC AFFAIRS**

**COMITÉ PERMANENT DES FINANCES
ET DES AFFAIRES ÉCONOMIQUES**

Wednesday 6 March 2002

Mercredi 6 mars 2002

The committee met at 1000 in the Columbus Community Centre, Cobourg.

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.

Mr Doug Galt (Northumberland): On a point of order, Mr Chair, if I may: Just to welcome the committee to the great riding of Northumberland and in particular to the town of Cobourg. I appreciate the fact that the subcommittee saw fit to have one of the stops here in Cobourg. I think it's maybe four years since we've had a standing committee visit our community and, on behalf of the constituents of Northumberland, we really appreciate it.

The Chair: It's always interesting to see different parts of the province; there's no doubt about it. Thank you very much.

**AUTISM SOCIETY OF ONTARIO,
UPPER CANADA LOCAL CHAPTER**

The Chair: Our first presentation this morning will be from the Autism Society of Ontario, Upper Canada Local Chapter. I see that the presenters are comfortably seated. Welcome, on behalf of the committee. Could you state your names for the record, and you have 20 minutes for your presentation.

Mrs Joy Seguin: My name is Joy Seguin. I am my son Andre's mom. Sitting next to me is my son Andre's grandma, Annette Bickerstaffe.

Good morning, most honourable members of the committee. First I'd like to take this opportunity to commend you for releasing funding for our most vulnerable citizens and recognizing the need to do so.

I am here today in the hope of bringing to your attention a current policy that restricts a select group of our most vulnerable citizens from becoming integral members in our communities and affecting the health and development of children with severe behaviour. The 701 RST guide, Transportation for People with Physical Disabilities, dated May 2001, is very restrictive toward my son Andre and individuals like him, who are considered non-physically disabled.

My son is 15 years old, a young man with autism. Andre has serious behaviours, which limited his and my outings into the community. Andre would not walk by my side to go for a simple walk down the street, grocery shopping or simply to the corner store. It wasn't unusual for Cornwallites to see me on the floor in the middle of a shopping mall, legs wrapped around my son to protect him from smashing his head on the concrete floor or biting through the skin of his hands, all while I sang gently and prayed that no one would report me to children's aid, all because unexpectedly and unpredictably he had an outburst.

After a few of these episodes, I thought, "There has to be a better way." Sure enough, I was able to acquire a heavy-duty steel stroller. Of course, an application was completed with my son's pediatrician's support. Now we were going to paint the town red. We'd go for our walks, not side by side or hand in hand, but nevertheless we still went for our walks. We'd stop to watch other neighbourhood children playing or stop to talk with other children and their families whenever we met them.

Then came winter and, unlike this winter, we had snow, lots of snow. I sat Andre in the car, buckled him up, folded what felt like a 50-pound stroller into the trunk—it didn't matter; the freedom this stroller provided outweighed its clumsiness—closed the trunk, got into the car and away we went shopping. We arrived at the shopping mall; I parked the car in what seemed to be the only available spot in the parking lot, retrieved the super-duper freedom stroller, placed Andre in the stroller and began to make my way to the shopping mall doors.

I looked up and, to my dismay, I realized that I had found the only available spot in the parking lot, and of course it was in the last row. It must have taken me 15 minutes to plug through the parking lot in 3 centimetres of snow. By the time I arrived at the entrance doors of the mall, Andre was fit to be tied. He was flipping out and not a happy camper. After a few of these adventures, again I thought, "There has to be a better way." Sure enough, I applied for and received a handicapped parking permit through the Ministry of Transportation. I didn't always need it, and I still only use it when it's absolutely necessary.

Through the years, my son grew and grew to 5 feet, 4 inches, and 190 pounds, and so did his behaviours, which became more intense and powerful. His outbursts continued to be for the most part unpredictable. Our outings

in a regular vehicle became limited. I was no longer willing to risk a concussion or his head going through the passenger window, or a blood-splattered vehicle by his hitting his face on the dash, or to risk a serious accident with his legs and arms flailing, causing me to lose control of my vehicle. Again I thought, "There has to be a better way."

Sure enough, upon discussing with friends who have a child with a disability, they suggested that as long as we purchased a van for transporting our son, we would be eligible for a retail sales tax refund. In January 2000 we were in need of purchasing a family vehicle anyway. It had been 10 years since our last purchase, and 2000 was the year to invest for another 10 years. My husband and I discussed the benefits of purchasing a van. I, as the main chauffeur for my son, would be more willing to risk going out in the community with him. I was no longer physically able to position Andre in the back seat, the centre of a regular vehicle. Trips from Cornwall to Ottawa to specialists would be less traumatic, visits to grandmas or aunts and uncles would be more frequent and I, as the driver, would be safe from losing control of the vehicle. If—no, when—Andre had another outburst because of my turning right rather than left, I thought, "So what? Big deal. He can't hurt himself or me when seated in the middle seat of the van." His head couldn't reach the sliding door of the van, and I'd have time to find a safe place to pull over and calm him down before proceeding to our destination.

My husband and I weren't prepared to spend an extra \$1,833 to upgrade to a van, but with the retail sales tax refund we would have been on budget. We thought, "Wow, what a wonderful province we live in. Our government recognized the need to assist us with our freedom stroller and then a handicapped permit, and now we are going to continue to help our son with help from our government by being reimbursed for the retail sales tax on our van." Not.

In February 2000, we purchased the van, because that's what you have to do before applying. We completed the application with my son's pediatrician's support, and two years ago less two days, on March 8, 2000, we received the Ministry of Finance statement of disallowance of refund claim. Yes, I appealed the decision, not once but twice.

In August 2000, the response from the ministry office stated first that Ontario regulation 1012 of the act was never intended to assist all persons with varying degrees of infirmity but only those severely disabled persons whose condition satisfies the requirement of the legislation. Second, a vehicle is not considered a personal mobility aid similar to a wheelchair, required both inside the home and out.

The Ministry of Finance was right on both counts—half right, that is. My son's condition may not satisfy the permanent physical disability requirements of the legislation, but I assure you he is considered to have a lifelong, permanent, profound disability. True, the van is

not a mobility aid that is required inside the home, but I assure you the van is required outside the home.

From September to December 2000, I continued to send letters to my MPP, who in turn sent copies to the then Minister of Finance, Ernie Eves. By this time, I was told that my next appeal would have to be to the Superior Court of Justice. All I could envision was dollar signs. I had already spent quite a bit on long-distance phone calls and faxes, plus I knew I could kiss my \$1,833.60 out of my brand-new Windstar window. Financially, I wasn't willing to incur more costs associated with this common sense cause. That's when it no longer became about the \$1,800 but about other families like mine in the province of Ontario. My family can't possibly be the only family who applied and was denied the RST refund.

This got me thinking. How many parents will apply and be denied the RST refund because their child doesn't fit? How many parents like myself will think long and hard before bringing their child 100 kilometres to a specialist or simply five blocks away, and in turn not receive the necessary treatment for that child's well-being? How many parents will think long and hard before leaving their house to visit family or friends? How many parents will choose to stay imprisoned in their home rather than risk their child's head going through the car's window, or feet and arms flailing causing near-tragic accidents?

Then, another potential glitch: in January 2001 my heart skipped a beat when I learned through the news that Minister Eves was appointed to a new position and that the newly appointed Minister of Finance would be Jim Flaherty. You can imagine how I felt: an entire year of communications possibly being misplaced in the shuffle. Being a somewhat skeptical person—and most parents who have children with special needs are skeptical, you know—I faxed a year's correspondence to the office of the newly appointed Minister of Finance, Jim Flaherty.

1010

From January to September 2001, I continued to communicate with the minister's department, although I admit I was starting to lose some momentum, playing telephone tag and somewhat getting the sense that "Sooner or later Mrs Seguin will go away." I almost did. With all other doors to open for my son and children like him, I almost did give up. But then I was asked to attend an Easter Seals conference in Toronto. Then I met W. Mitchell. Not only was Mitchell a motivational speaker, but he had overcome unimaginable obstacles. His statement to the audience was, "It's not what happens to you; it's what you do about it." This is exactly what I needed to hear at that time. It's not what happens to me; it's what I do about it. This empowered me to fuel the momentum.

I contacted my local Upper Canada autism chapter and explained the situation. They, in turn, supported my endeavours. As luck would have it, that same month, October 2001, I noticed in our local newspaper that Minister Flaherty was attending a function in my hometown of Cornwall on November 1. Somehow, I had to be invited to that function.

I attended the dinner event and met briefly with Minister Flaherty upon his entering the room. I provided a brief verbal summary and a package for his perusal. Minister Flaherty acknowledged the restrictiveness of this act. He assured me that within a few weeks or so, someone would be in touch with me. This is how I learned about the pre-budget consultation process here today. I submitted my proposal to the clerk of the standing committee and crossed my fingers that I would be selected to have a chance to bring this issue to your attention.

Most honourable members, certainly we have all at one point been humbled into asking for help in some shape or form. As a parent of a child with a disability, I have been humbled on several occasions, and I can say one doesn't get used to it. So once again, I swallow my pride. I'm not asking to be reimbursed the \$1,833.60. A decision was made under the current legislation. I may not like it, but I will live with it. I'm not asking that potential new legislation be retroactive in any way whatsoever. What I am asking is that you seriously consider modifying or adjusting the Retail Sales Tax Act to include families like mine. Find a means to fit our children within your current budget consultations so that families are encouraged to participate in their communities.

Over a 10-year period my family's disallowance of refund claim would amount to \$183.36. This amount is worth the investment in the long run. This will enable families to transport their child safely to and from much-needed doctor's appointments to receive much-needed treatment. This will enable families to get out in the community and be less prisoners in their homes, and believe me when I say that I know what it's like to be a prisoner in my own home.

Most honourable members, you have the power to make a difference for several families within our province of Ontario. You have the power to help us be in full sight and in the minds of our society. Help us to help our children.

Finally, most honourable members, thank you for providing me the opportunity to bring this issue to your attention.

The Chair: We have a couple of minutes per caucus, and I will start with the opposition.

Mr Ernie Parsons (Prince Edward-Hastings): Through our experience as foster parents, we've had a little involvement with children with autism. In my role in the Legislature as the Liberal critic for disabilities, I am increasingly convinced that this government likes visible, but not invisible, disabilities. I would note that although this meeting is open to the public, it is not open to an individual who is deaf.

For your son's autism, I can't picture the challenges you're facing in your role. I'm struggling because what you're saying just makes common sense. I really can't question you, but rather applaud you for it. I'm sure you find it frustrating, and I suspect you would agree with me that we need to completely redefine what a disability is.

Mrs Seguin: Most definitely. In the case of autism, we're finding more and more that often they don't fit in many areas. As recently as last week I received a notice that children like my son no longer fit the mandate for community care access service.

Mr Parsons: There is a program that government funds to support children with autism, but I note that ironically it ends at age six.

Mrs Seguin: That's right.

Mr Parsons: So obviously autism ends at age six. It cures itself at that point.

Mrs Seguin: Exactly, and then they're cured.

Mr Parsons: But you're telling me it doesn't.

Mrs Seguin: No, it doesn't end.

Mr Parsons: I think that people with disabilities are poorly served by the definitions in the current legislation. Thank you for coming.

Mrs Seguin: Thank you for hearing me.

The Chair: Mr Parsons, there's one thing I would like to clarify. If anyone wants to present in front of this committee at any time and they have disabilities, if they notify the clerk, they will be provided the services by this committee to make sure they are heard in front of this committee, and I think that would apply with any standing committee of the House, just to clarify the record.

Mr Parsons: On a point of order, Chair: I note that if an individual who does not wish to present but is a full Ontario citizen wishes to come and hear the presentations, they would not have access to interpretation, and I believe they have the right to simply come and hear, as does every other citizen in this province.

The Chair: The point is, the committee has to be notified that people need these, and we'll leave it at that.

I'll go to the government side.

Mr Galt: This is the third year I've sat on this committee. I'm not sure how many hundreds of people and presentations I've heard, but you have presented in such an exceptional way one of the better presentations I've heard. It could have been extremely emotional—and we've heard very emotional ones—but you were very measured, very calculated and laid the facts on the table, and I congratulate you for it.

Yes, we're responsible. We've been here for six years plus. A lot of these things have evolved over time. Parties of other stripes have been in office and could have changed it. I for one, sitting on the government side, am very empathetic to what you're telling us. You've come with a message, not so much for you personally right now, as you said at the end, but just please change it to recognize a particular group. I think that's very honourable on your part. You're not pleading. You'd love that \$1,800, and I can understand why. I'm sure that having a son with a challenge has been very expensive for you and your family, and this is one area that, as a government, could be looked at. I can understand that whenever this regulation was written, and probably research could tell us—I don't think it matters that we point fingers at who did it, but I can understand how it

got written, and probably you can. As time goes on, you start to identify some of the cracks in regulations or legislation that need changing. Certainly with my comments on the record, that will go forward; staff are here. I'd be prepared to take it even further, if need be.

I don't know that I have a question for you. I'm not sure what I would ask you, but I just wanted you to know how impressed I've been with the presentation. I don't think I've ever said that to anyone else making a presentation to this committee.

Mrs Seguin: Thank you. I appreciate that. You're absolutely right: I think that just bringing this to your attention—I'm not sure that any other parent has ever done that before. We're accustomed to being denied. It is just a daily routine. I don't think many parents have taken it to a first appeal and a second appeal. Then to go to a third means money right away, and who can afford it? I am also a literacy worker during the day, and I know for a fact that one in four Canadians cannot even read their social insurance number, so they won't pursue it to this degree. I'm hoping maybe I can be a representative for those people and those families who really need to get out in the community.

The Chair: We've run out of time, but on behalf of the committee, thank you very much for your presentation this morning.

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UPPER CANADA DISTRICT SCHOOL BOARD

The Chair: Our next presentation will be from the Upper Canada District School Board. Could you state your name for the record, please? On behalf of the committee, welcome.

Mr Arthur Buckland: My name is Arthur Buckland. I'm a trustee on the Upper Canada District School Board. I would like to give a little background first, and then make some comments on financing and grants, on amalgamation, on new education and finally on a problem that could mean millions of dollars for our board, which you can help us with and which won't cost you anything.

Thank you for allowing me to be on the agenda. It is an honour. I'm always filled with trepidation as to whether this is a good idea or not when I hear the Chairman tell me how many sessions and how many presentations are all thrown into this hopper and then having to follow such a personal and poignant presentation by Joy Seguin. You realize that she is quite a leader in her own community, a spark plug in the special-ed area.

I feel personally that I'm a success story from public education. I have graduation certificates and degrees from Mohawk College, Ottawa U, Carleton U and OCE. I have children in the system and I now have grandchildren in the English public system.

Our board, in terms of background, is a very large board that runs along the St Lawrence River, from Gananoque to the Quebec border, and then circles around

Ottawa, up to touch Renfrew county; about 34,500 students; pockets of growth near the Kanata area; declining enrolment in the communities all along the river. We suspect it's the water; we're not sure. Three sizable communities only: Cornwall at 47,000, Brockville at 20,000 and Smiths Falls at 10,000, and the rest is spread out. So we're quite a spread-out board and a rural board.

I would like to make some comments about grants. I know you are giving the money, granting the money, budgeting the money for education. It flows into that department and then it floats down the river to us. I would like to make some comments which are particular to our board.

One of the problems with grants—and I do congratulate you on the learning opportunities and the continuing education grants which are in place in the education field—is comparison. When we compare with a board in our same boundaries, we're at \$246 less per student and another, sister board is at \$1,832 more per student. This is the conseil scolaire de district de l'est de l'Ontario. It's a board which grew out of our old Stormont, Dundas and Glengarry board. So it would mean a difference of over \$8 million, or over \$60 million, and wouldn't that make Ottawa-Carleton jealous, if we had that extra money that they have? In one sense, thinking about the \$1,800 more that the French public board gets, which really came out of our own board, we might have been better to follow them rather than moving where we are.

Educational change seems to take a long time. For example, I just want to comment on the rural and remote grant. When it first came out we looked at it and said, "It doesn't seem very fair. Here we are a rural board, 110 buildings, 49 wells in our schools, and yet we don't get anything for remote and rural. We look at Kingston, with its high cultural centre of Queen's University, St Lawrence College, all the prisons, and they got one and we didn't." So we tried to make our point through the director, through our trustees' organization, through individual trustees. As chair and vice-chair, in five years I was never able to meet the people who were Ministers of Education to present our case.

Then last year the grant came out. "Yes, you do get a rural and remote." So we looked at the grant regulations and we had received \$29 per student. A board with the same geography received \$49 per student and another, sister board in our area had \$103. So we began to question not having a grant and then questioning the actual allocation.

There are several specific areas I just wanted to mention. One is transportation. What has happened? Yes, we're happy with the increase you've given us. It puts us \$1 million from balancing at the moment. Transportation is a very complex issue. Before the amalgamation it was a different set-up. There were only two boards then. The separate board received a high percentage of 90%, 95% funding and we received about 40%. After amalgamation, with a 3% cut, 3% of 5% is quite a bit less than

3% of 40%. So we have suffered since then on that particular one, transportation.

We have economized. We have sold our fleet. We've gone to double busing, we've gone to combining routes, yet we still can't balance our transportation budget. We have increased the walking distance to two miles while our sister boards, our neighbouring boards, have front door to school door transportation. In the case of youngsters, when you are considering winter travel and so on, program doesn't become as important as transportation, so we've lost 300 students. If this continues, in 10 years there really wouldn't be an English public board in this area. This is a serious problem for us. We see there has been some change and we hope—and I recognize it's a complex thing—that there is further change from that.

Another area is school operation. We have 110 buildings, fairly old buildings, some in serious need of maintenance. We need some new buildings. You know about the heating costs and high energy and so on, so that's an area that would require special consideration for us. In one area of budgeting where we had the maintenance, we said, "Let's sacrifice some long-term maintenance and put it into programming." So we did that and the ministry said, "Aha, you didn't spend the money we gave you for maintenance on maintenance," and they cut us back the next year, which did not seem to be a reasonable sort of thing.

Administration is another area we need some help on from you people. We are a very wide, spread-out board. We have reduced superintendents from 15 to eight, so there is less administration. We are crowded in a particular admin building. There is no funding for any new admin building. It would be helpful to have some amelioration there.

Another area in programming I would like you to look at is immersion. Half of our board is in the east, the Glengarry-Stormont area. Retailing requires the French language, and moving into other positions of government requires the French language. We would like you to look at that immersion and, in the area of busing, in the area of programming, be willing to provide some extra funding so that the motivation would be there for programming and for our students to begin the immersion and continue the French immersion.

Another area is special education. Tied into transportation, it becomes a problem for us. As group homes have moved into our area, in some cases we're at a stage of \$35,000 for a wheelchair van to transport a child to Ottawa, or from Ottawa to Cornwall, or in our own area, after the budget has been struck, after the grants have been set forth. At times there is a transfer of students in the special-ed category from other boards to ours. We agree that we're specialists in it. We're willing to perform that. We do hope we would receive the funding we need for that.

Amalgamation: I would like to deal with the next two areas as something sort of longer-term, as something you're going to have to be watching for in terms of socio-

economic problems. The amalgamation in our area was four school boards, eight counties, coming together over this 170-mile east-west axis and running into the north. It was really an educational earthquake in 1997 when this happened in our area. As a result you have several types of people, people from the offices in Perth and Hawkesbury and Cornwall, when the office was established in Brockville, who then began to move to work in those head offices, to travel back and forth. Some of the younger ones without seniority were laid off and some received transition funding. Those who travelled, you could see the extra hours—two hours from Hawkesbury per day added—having an effect on quality life in family life. The people left behind, who had run out with their transition severance pay at 50, 55, found they really weren't able to pick up a job in the Cornwall and Hawkesbury areas, and so there has been a decline in employment opportunities. It has been estimated that \$10 million came out of Cornwall as a result of moving to the head office in Brockville, perhaps \$2.5 million out of Hawkesbury and more than that out of Perth. Some might say that's good management because the money moved from Liberal areas to Conservative areas, but it really has had a serious socio-economic effect on the area.

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I'd like to look at the new education as a longer-term thing as well. If we are moving to have external tests on all things, we're going to have to be aware of the special-education student and what we call "the low-general student" as a graduate. These people are going to be moved out of the stream, and the funding opportunity is going to have to be there for those students. The transitional approaches of special ed, through your continuing-ed funding, would be good as some approach which would allow special-ed students to be working and to be supervised, not necessarily in total inclusion but in separate agencies as well would be useful.

The final thing is the area of the court case at the federal level. Perhaps you're all familiar with it, but I would just review it. A group said there's a glitch in the income tax and perhaps school boards could get a rebate on GST. We looked at it, and we said, yes, busing really is a private enterprise and so there should be a rebate on GST. Our former board, Stormont, Dundas and Glengarry, opted into this court case. Boards from across Canada appealed, and the court said, "So many people have appealed that we'll just take one block and that decision will be applied to all others." We did win the appeal, that the GST was to be rebated to the first group, that is, the 29 school boards in Quebec. Then Mr Martin and his boys said, "Just a minute. This is a \$70-million case. This is not good. What we're going to do now is make this retroactive to the beginning of GST."

We have appealed that through Jean-Marc Lalonde's office, and I would ask, particularly the Liberals, if you could speak to your federal people to at least say those boards which applied for this GST be permitted to have the rebate even if they're not all going to get it. The 29

school boards in Quebec have received it. We applied at the same time, and we should also be part of that.

That concludes my presentation, gentlemen. Thank you very much for giving me an opportunity to say a few words to you about some of our problems.

The Chair: Thank you very much. We have time for questions. I'll divide the time equally among the two parties, about three minutes per caucus. Mr O'Toole.

Mr John O'Toole (Durham): Thank you very much, Art, and thank you for your service as a lifelong learner and as a trustee. I was a trustee for a couple of terms, also with a very large board with the same kinds of problems: diverse, large geographically but sparse population, bus-ing is a major issue, transportation is a huge issue. I certainly appreciate and understand many of the points you're making.

I read with interest the reference you made to the GST rebate. Not to be in any way partisan here, but we were watching it. Grant Andrews, the director of education for our board, actually wrote the lead memo and has responded to the ministry federally and provincially. I'm quite aware of the issue on his behalf. You're right, they retroactively cut you out. Even though you won the case, they retroactively passed legislation, which is not the right thing to do, because education is not just a community issue, it's a provincial issue. It's a very important part of the infrastructure in fact of our future lives. Without that kind of knowledge-based economy—we're all going to need those kinds of productive people in the future to help generate the opportunities for us to have a tax base, really. It's that simple.

I want to refer to a couple of things. As I said, as a trustee I watched the issues quite intensely, including the amalgamation of school boards, which was referred to as the Sweeney commission. John Sweeney, who was a former member of the Peterson government, was appointed by David Cooke of the NDP government to look at governance in Ontario, the number of school boards, how much we're spending on all of this paperwork and meetings. That process was started before 1995. You're aware of that, the Sweeney commission?

Mr Buckland: I'm aware of that. The Sweeney commission proposed us amalgamating with Prescott and Russell and then Leeds-Grenville-Lanark—

Mr O'Toole: We had the same issues in my area where the municipal boundaries didn't quite line up, and we came up with quite a surprising response to that whole thing. We ended up with four boards, which are French, English, public and separate. Some would argue that there should be some harmony in those boards. I, for one, would support that there's some more efficiency in that administrative model.

The budget for education is about \$14 billion—\$13.8 billion actually—and there are about two million students. That's \$7,000 per student. If you have a typical school of 500, that's \$3.5 million for that school of 500 kids. I ask you, as a trustee, to go back, with the class sizing issues, and I put to you—and I've chaired four

school budgets—that you can't spend the money. You can pay for a new school—

The Chair: Question, please.

Mr O'Toole: —but it goes in at the top and there's none left for chalk in the classroom. My question to you is, is there another way—

The Chair: I'm sorry, Mr O'Toole, but there's no time.

Mr O'Toole: —school-based funding.

The Chair: I have to go to the opposition. Mr Parsons.

Mr O'Toole: There's no third party here today.

Mr Parsons: Thank you. Interesting presentation. The mantra for going to the new funding model was equity of funding, that every student would receive the same number of dollars across the province, or equity of opportunity, that every student would have access to the same. You're saying that neither one exists for your board.

Mr Buckland: When we compare with the others, yes; when you think that funding for the French public board would give us over \$60 million more.

Mr Parsons: Neither has been achieved and in fact there's not equity. The students in your system don't have access to the same busing, the same services as they do, have perhaps older buildings.

Mr Buckland: No, and this is killing us, because we are in competition now. It's set at \$7,000 for each student you get. If you lose one in kindergarten, then you've lost it for 12 years times \$7,000.

Mr Parsons: You said it's 170 miles from one side to the other.

Mr Buckland: Yes.

Mr Parsons: I'm struggling to find the efficiency in running an operation that's 170 miles from one side to the other.

Mr Buckland: It's a heartbreak. The 64 trustees went to 10, so it doesn't have the local connection any more.

Mr Parsons: You've been a trustee for how many years, Art?

Mr Buckland: For 25 years; three different boards.

Mr Parsons: Special education is now funded, if I understand it right, as kind of a snapshot. They look at the number of students with their special needs and there's funding provided for them individually on an ISA grant. As the year unfolds and students move or come in or change their needs, is there an opportunity for you to resubmit to recognize the needs of the student that day?

Mr Buckland: I think there is once a year. There's a tally, and then after that time it's at your own expense.

Mr Parsons: If a child is identified with a special need in October, then they better not demonstrate that need or you can't serve that need till the following year.

Mr Buckland: Another problem is being able to identify it. For example, we had three speech pathologists for our little board of 12,000. Now we have one speech pathologist for 34,000. The child may be transferred or may come into your board and may not be identified for a year and a half.

The Chair: With that, Mr Parsons, 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 morning.

1040

TOWN OF COBOURG

The Chair: Our next presentation will be from the town of Cobourg. I would ask the presenter to please come forward; if you could state your name for the record, please. On behalf of the committee, welcome. You have 20 minutes for your presentation this morning.

Mr Ian Roger: My name is Ian Roger. I'm a professional engineer and I'm employed by the town of Cobourg as its director of operations. I'm the municipal official responsible for the town's transportation infrastructure. I'm here on behalf of the town of Cobourg and the transportation organizations, which the town is a member of, to explain why municipalities like Cobourg need greater funding for transportation infrastructure.

I'd like to start with our transit service here in Cobourg. I understand you gentlemen have already heard the presentation from the executive director of the Ontario Community Transportation Association and the Canadian Urban Transit Association. I would just like to give you a few facts here on what the transit subsidy has meant in the past for Cobourg and what increased subsidy would mean as well for the continued well-being of our transit service.

Prior to 1998, when the transit subsidy was eliminated, the town of Cobourg ran a conventional transit service with two vehicles on the road with a spare vehicle, and we ran a parallel service for people with special needs. We carried almost 120,000 passengers per year up until that point, but when the transit subsidy was eliminated, council was faced with the decision of having to increase funding to the transit budget by approximately 33% or reducing the service. They reduced the service to maintain the same level of funding as in past years. Our two services were amalgamated into a single, accessible service which would still be able to provide door-to-door service for people with special needs.

To do that, we required two buses which were low-floor and wheelchair-accessible. We were able to purchase these in 1997, the last year of the 75% capital subsidy from the province. That got us off on a good footing in terms of providing an accessible service, but because these buses are smaller and were designed for specialized service, their life is limited. Right now, they're four years old and we're finding they're breaking down regularly. This is causing a problem for our service because we only have two accessible vehicles. If one of the accessible vehicles comes off the road, our contractor—we have a contracted service—provides a spare vehicle, but it's not accessible. If people have been waiting for a bus for an hour with a walker or a wheelchair and the bus shows up and they can't get on, this causes problems for them and causes problems for us.

We were thankful for the announcement that the province was getting back into the subsidy business this year with the announcements regarding transit subsidy and had indicated, like all the other municipalities, our five-year needs. We had indicated that we need an additional bus to provide us an accessible spare vehicle, and because of growth in the municipality we are now looking for an additional vehicle.

We recently found out, with the announcement of the amount of funding that's available, that the town is expected to receive approximately \$24,000 for the 2002 budget year. That is on \$400,000 worth of capital needs. The operating budget for the whole transit system I administer is \$350,000. You can imagine the dilemma for council, that we need \$400,000 worth of capital infrastructure for our transit service over the next 12 to 18 months and they're only spending \$350,000 a year right now on operating the existing system. What it means is the town is now going to have to look at a couple of options which will have major implications for the residents and riders of our transit service here in Cobourg.

We currently run a service four times a day between Cobourg and Port Hope, because we have services in the two adjoining municipalities which residents use that aren't available in each other, which we're going to have to look at cancelling. We're also going to have to look at eliminating door-to-door service for people with special needs to give us additional capacity in the system to expand our service. I don't know if you noticed coming into town that we have a new health care centre under construction. There's expansion in employment and commercial in that area and our riders and residents are looking for expansion to that area. We can't do it with the existing rolling stock we have right now.

In terms of transit funding, we appreciate the announcement that there is going to be funding but, like CUTA and OCTA have mentioned, we really feel the need for a stronger commitment in terms of ongoing funding for transit and we need funding at a greater level. We understand there are still discussions with the federal government about their involvement, but from both higher levels of government we need greater input in terms of funding if we're going to maintain our transit systems.

In the area of roads, bridges and other like transportation infrastructure, the town of Cobourg has tens of millions of dollars worth of needs. We have roads that need to be reconstructed, bridges to be repaired and we need a new bridge constructed. A lot of these items have little or no component relating to development charges funding and all of these would have to be funded through the general levy—the local taxpayer.

Prior to the elimination of the transportation subsidy, we had connecting link agreements; we had an urban road rebate, where the county refunded a portion of the funds to the town; and regular road subsidies. With all of those gone now the town is in an awkward position where we're having to look at debenturing on an annual basis the cost of maintaining and upgrading our roads. I believe all the parties agree—federal, provincial and

municipal—that our infrastructure does need major investment for renewal and upgrading. In order to achieve these objectives, municipalities need an ongoing infrastructure program and the program needs to be funded annually. Having some experience with OSTAR and SuperBuild and previously the Canada-Ontario infrastructure works program, the best model we've seen since that time was the original Canada-Ontario infrastructure works program, in terms of funding level and administration.

I would just like to summarize: on behalf of the town of Cobourg and its residents, we would like you to consider increased funding so that the town can maintain its transportation infrastructure and keep our town economically viable like the rest of Ontario. Thank you.

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

Mr Galt: Thank you for the presentation. There was something you didn't mention, and I'll just bring it to your attention: with the new dialysis clinic being opened in Port Hope, the need for transportation between the two communities, especially for handicapped, is probably more important than it's ever been with the need to get people to that clinic—I expect, anyway. I haven't had a call specifically from Cobourg, but I have from Port Hope about the services to be able to access it.

You made reference to the roads. I'd like to just compliment Cobourg on what they've accomplished recently. The main corner up near my office—extensive renovations to Division Street recently, as well as the main street, and what has been accomplished there. You've come a long way over the last couple or three years with the changes in the roads.

The thing I did want to mention to you is, maybe that wasn't a large amount that came to you as a direct grant, but in the county of Northumberland, as of last year, the business education tax for industry was down \$1.5 million for the county and also a reduction in education tax for the average household was \$51, which does leave some tax room for communities such as Cobourg to work within. But we appreciate the request you're making.

I'd just make one more comment, about Calgary. They run their rapid transit by wind. It's called Ride the Wind. It's totally operated by the municipality and the downtown core is free ridership. It's roughly 50% supported by fares and the other 50% comes from the municipality; nothing from the province. It's just a comment.

1050

Mr O'Toole: If there's enough time for just one comment: what's the population in the area you're trying to serve? I commend you. I noticed this morning coming in the size of the buses. I think that's smart. I drive around Durham, and 98% of the buses are empty, yet they have to work eight hours, so they drive around. Anyway—no, I'm serious. I watch relentlessly. I commend you for the bus sizing issue.

On the issue of people with special needs: there shouldn't be a route. There should be direct calls and scheduled pickups and it should be a special van. The

idea of one-size-fits-all—you're an engineer and you're able to figure out that spending that kind of capital to pick up two people on a route is totally inefficient and wrong. In fact, it should be a specially equipped van. I'm not trying to tell you how to run it, but I sat on a municipal council for eight years. When the grants were there, the buses were there, and they're empty.

The Chair: I'll go to the official opposition.

Mr Parsons: First I'd like to talk about your roads. As I understand it, when the province downloaded roads, they fixed up and did certain grants. I would like to concur with you that I think the bridges in Ontario are a ticking time bomb. You can skip fixing a pothole but you can't skip doing maintenance on a bridge, and there are horrendous costs associated with it. I'm pleased that you recognize that.

The main issue for me, though, is your transportation for the disabled. At the present time you have door-to-door service.

Mr Roger: We do; that's correct.

Mr Parsons: They have to order how long ahead to have one?

Mr Roger: Generally 24 hours.

Mr Parsons: They have to have their life planned 24 hours ahead, as opposed to the general population who can say, "Let's go to a movie tonight." They have to say, "Let's go to a movie tomorrow night."

Mr Roger: If they want door-to-door. If they feel they're reasonably mobile to go out to the bus stop, then they can go out in their wheelchair and get on at the bus stop at the scheduled time.

Mr Parsons: What does it cost them for the door-to-door?

Mr Roger: The same as getting on at the bus stop: \$1.60.

Mr Parsons: You're saying that, given the funding, given that you haven't even enough to replace a vehicle, that whole program is at risk?

Mr Roger: That's right. Basically our service operates on a fixed route for 40 minutes of every 60 minutes, and in the 20-minute period we'll allow the bus to then make door-to-door pickups. If we're going to be able to expand routes into the growth areas, we lose that time we can use for door-to-door pickup.

Mr Parsons: So the question you have to be asking yourself is, if you cannot pick them up at the door, what happens to them? How do they get to the doctor? How do they get to the hospital? Have you an answer?

Mr Roger: I don't have an answer to that. No.

The Chair: Thank you. Mr Christopherson.

Mr David Christopherson (Hamilton West): Thank you, Mr Roger, for your presentation. I just want to point out how much I disagree with Mr O'Toole's comments about concerns that there are buses running that only have a couple of people and that it's not efficient. That's the whole philosophical difference in how one sees public services. It's one of the difficulties of privatizing a lot of public services because the first thing that goes out the window is anything that's not efficient. If you've got

a really safe community, your police aren't nearly as active in terms of arrests and other situations they're dealing with. Quite frankly, it's rather inefficient to have all that money tied up in staff and capital and it's not really doing anything.

That's kind of the absurdity of it in my mind. If you're a citizen who lives in areas where buses maybe aren't as filled but you're a full citizen paying full taxes, you're entitled to have bus service as much as anybody else. If you can't afford a car or if there are medical reasons why you can't take a car without that bus service, in many ways in terms of a quality of life you're a second-class citizen. The whole idea of public services, at least our concept here in Ontario and Canada, is that as much as humanly possible people are treated equally. I have some real concerns with that concept and I just wanted to get that on the record.

I want to follow up where Mr Parsons left off with your disabled public transit system that you'll have to eliminate. Are you saying that's something you'll have to do or that you have already done?

Mr Roger: No. We previously had a separate accessible service which we wound down in 1998. It was combined with a conventional service. We started operating low-floor, accessible buses on a fixed route with limited door-to-door pickups in a 20-minute window once an hour. Instead of having a bus, an accessible van, like Mr Spina was saying, we stopped running those in 1998 when we lost the subsidy.

Mr Christopherson: I represent a riding in Hamilton. It includes the downtown, where a lot of the disabled and elderly disabled seniors live. We're running into similar problems. Ours hasn't been eliminated but it's been cut back, and the criteria cut back to the point that for a lot of people it might as well not exist.

Again, it's difficult for some of us to accept that we just had the biggest economic boom we've ever had in North America in all history, and during the course of that the disabled in your community and my community are receiving a lower quality of life while others have seen their quality of life increase dramatically because of the thousands of dollars they benefited from with the tax cuts.

What do you think your chances are of getting any increased funding? You weren't getting adequate funding when the boom was on. Now that we're into tougher times, what do you think your realistic chances are? I realize you're not a politician, but as comfortable as you can be in responding to that, what do you think your chances are of getting these problems addressed?

Mr Roger: In terms of dealing with our council on this issue now for the past four years, it's something that, honestly, is 50-50. When council weighs the number of needs it has—police, fire, roads, garbage, all the issues—then they have to make decisions. If this is one, economically, where we're spending a lot of money for a small segment of the population—it's been discussed before and probably will be discussed again—it might be one of the first ones to go.

Mr Christopherson: I gather that's a decision that council reaches reluctantly?

Mr Roger: Yes.

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 morning.

NORTHUMBERLAND FAMILY BAR

COALITION FOR LEGAL AID TARIFF REFORM

The Chair: Our next presentation will be from a coalition supporting tariff review and the Northumberland Family Bar. I would ask the presenter to please come forward, and if you could state your name for the record. On behalf of the committee, welcome. You have 20 minutes for your presentation.

Mr Wilfred Day: My name is Wilfred Day. I practise law in this county. My topic is Ontario's legal aid crisis.

"No work of intellectual value can be done by a lawyer for less than \$150 per hour," said the judge. What judge? On January 24, Quebec Superior Court Justice Jean-Guy Boilard ordered the Quebec government to pay \$150 an hour for lawyers defending nine Hells Angels and associates. That's what the judge said while explaining his decision for a Montreal trial to start this month that could last nine months. The lawyers had threatened to quit unless their legal aid fee was doubled.

Today I'm speaking for the Northumberland Family Bar and for the Coalition for Legal Aid Tariff Reform, adding to what Carol Shames told you in the Soo. She gave you the coalition's report and I've given your clerk more copies. By the way, I'm not here for the Northumberland Community Legal Centre, although I happen to chair that board. They have their own presentation.

Northumberland county is a small example of what has happened to the family bar across Ontario. Our young lawyers are gone. We used to be proud that, unlike some places where only young lawyers take legal aid cases, our whole bar shared the profession's responsibility. As Justice Linden wrote last week, "Access to justice for everyone—regardless of income—is a fundamental principle of democracy and the rule of law." But the 15-year rate freeze has made legal aid work unaffordable even for most young lawyers.

The scary thing is that young lawyers are not only fleeing legal aid, they're fleeing family law. Of all lawyers in private practice in Ontario with five to 25 years' experience, 14% have family law as their primary area of practice. Yet of those with less than five years, the juniors, only 8.2% have family law as their primary area.

Outside Toronto, real estate and family law are the two times when people need local lawyers most. Northumberland has 48 lawyers in private practice. Our family bar includes 25 lawyers who either primarily do family law or at least have a substantial family law practice. We range in experience from eight years to 32, with an average of 21 years. So our youngest is eight

years out—no juniors. They call this the greying of the family bar. Over the last few years we've seen six fine young lawyers leave family law, and leave this county, to better themselves in other fields of law.

Senior counsel wonder whether we are being responsible professionals or whether our professionalism is being exploited. When we were asked to take up the cause for a few cases, we did. After all, others need money more than we do. A few years ago we all took some legal aid cases. Today, of the 25 of us, eight don't, only 17 do, and some of the 17 take very few.

1100

The provincial picture is the same. From 1995 to 2000, the plan lost 26% of its participating lawyers. More have dropped out since then. Most lawyers on certificates practise alone or in firms of two to four lawyers. Given their small business scale, they can't absorb volumes of low-paying work. Family lawyers on legal aid panels devote, on average, 33% of their time to legal aid clients. They just won't keep subsidizing legal aid to this extent.

What does this mean for clients? Some clients find it hard to get any lawyer to take their certificate. In Durham, in 2000, one out of five family law certificates were never accepted by any lawyer. In Northumberland we're better off than in Durham and a bit better than in Peterborough and Kawartha Lakes-Haliburton, because we're still sharing the burden to some extent. But our senior lawyers do more than their share. If they walk away, the plan collapses; the few younger lawyers won't be able to pick up the slack. The court won't normally force people to go on without counsel. Cases will be adjourned and a backlog will develop and grow. Not only legal aid clients but all clients and courts will suffer.

Legal aid advice counsel and duty counsel are also at risk. The Unified Family Court started here in November 1999. Its new Family Law Information Centre has, three afternoons a week, advice counsel for people looking to start or defend a case on their own and to advise them on settling out of court. At court, we have two lawyers as duty counsel for cases where both sides have no lawyer. Negotiations through duty counsel settle many cases on the first court date. A few of us rejoined the advice lawyer or duty counsel panels in 1999 to help give the new court a good start. However, many of us aren't continuing, and won't, if rates don't increase. Of the 25 of us, 15 do some duty counsel or advice counsel work. They have an average, again, of 21 years in practice: greying again. Both Peterborough and Kawartha Lakes find duty counsel even harder to recruit. Without duty counsel, a court with 20 or 25 cases on the docket would face a long, frustrating day, few settlements and many unnecessary adjournments.

In criminal cases, lack of legal representation would either paralyse the justice system or at least make it inefficient. It would increase unrepresented defendants who delay and prolong cases. Generally, trials take twice as long with an unrepresented party. The Ontario Crown Attorneys' Association agrees: unrepresented defendants cost the system more. Also, they increase the number of

appeals and perhaps wrongful convictions. An increase in the legal aid tariff, then, is an investment in an efficient justice system.

Family law affects many people. A family that doesn't get timely possession of property will often have to stay in a women's shelter at public expense. If they don't get timely support, they'll be driven to rely on social assistance. But family law legal aid is starting to crack. Child protection cases are the worst. Throughout central-east region we need more lawyers who take legal aid in these cases. Only about six lawyers in Northumberland do. In Durham region, few lawyers take legal aid. Even fewer take child protection cases. In one such case last year, a Durham judge threatened to order a lawyer to act at government expense, as Justice Boilard did in Montreal. Courts can do this because of the Charter of Rights.

In 1999, the Supreme Court of Canada decided, in *New Brunswick v J.G.*, that the charter gives parents in a crown wardship case the constitutional right to legal aid. Chief Justice Lamer wrote for the court, "The right to security of the person protects both the physical and psychological integrity of the individual from state actions." The charter then "guarantees every parent the right to a fair hearing when the state seeks to obtain custody of their children.... A fair hearing requires that the parent has the opportunity to present his or her case effectively. Effective participation enhances the judge's ability to make an accurate determination. Here, the statutory scheme allows a parent to present evidence, cross-examine witnesses, and make representations but does not provide funds for indigent parents to retain counsel. In the circumstances of this case, taking into account the seriousness of the interests at stake, the complexity of the proceedings and the capacities of J.G., the right to a fair hearing required the government to provide counsel." In other words, this is no job for the United Way.

One other example from Durham: at last October's sittings, the children's aid society had three crown wardship trials ready to go. They had counsel ready for all three. The court had three judges ready. But all three had the same defence counsel. No one else would take the trials. Two of the three trials had to be adjourned to the next sittings, leaving those children in limbo for months more.

Changes to the Child and Family Services Act and the family law rules direct courts to expedite child protection cases. When a children's aid society apprehends a child, the parent has 30 days to file an answer and a detailed plan of care. The parent often has trouble finding a lawyer to take legal aid. Unable to meet the 30-day deadline without counsel, the parent may have to agree to a temporary order leaving the child in the society's care. This may not even have been the society's first choice. For example, we may see a case where they are asking that the mother's partner stay away from the children but the mother won't agree until she reviews her options in depth with her own lawyer. Months can pass before she has found a lawyer and they reach agreement, or, if no

agreement is reached, she files the necessary response. A time lapse of months can have profound implications on the child and his or her family relationships. As well, the child will have been maintained at government expense unnecessarily.

I'm on the central east region bench and bar committee of the Superior Court of Justice from Northumberland's family and civil bar. Central east knows we're very lucky: the only judicial region with the Unified Family Court in every centre. We've already congratulated the provincial and federal governments for that.

Our wonderful new court mediator, Monica Walsh, has helped settle many cases that would have been bitter battles. I'm sure Mr O'Toole is happy with Durham's mediator too. Monica's notes always state that any agreement is subject to their lawyers' approval so that people don't compromise their rights without first knowing what they are. People still need lawyers, but her cases usually take much less lawyers' time. As to mediation being mandatory, there's really no need. With a court mediator, most people gladly use the service, as the duty counsel and judges generally recommend. In a few cases, one spouse is a victim of abuse or is too assertive or too submissive to be a good candidate for mediation.

Legal aid is not a partisan issue for most lawyers: we put access to justice above party. The point is not to blame anyone but to solve this very serious problem. Legal Aid Ontario in April 2000 appointed the Honourable Fred Kaufman and the plan's past provincial director Bob Holden to review the tariff. They reported in November 2000. As you know, the coalition seeks an increase from the current range of \$67 to \$84 an hour to a range of \$100 to \$125 an hour. This is already a compromise request. Justice Boilard, for one, would find it inadequate. The legal aid board then compromised the compromise by requesting only 8% per year for three years. Frankly, this is a band-aid solution. It may slow down the number of lawyers leaving legal aid, but it won't solve the problem because it's still so very far below market rates. Last fall, cabinet approved the new costs grid, part of the rules of court. It states that when a court orders one party to pay the other's costs, a lawyer's rate with less than 10 years in practice is up to \$300 an hour, 10 to 20 years is up to \$400 an hour, and over 20 years is up to \$450 an hour.

"Adequate funding for legal aid is a top priority for the Ontario Bar Association," says OBA president Jim O'Brien of Belleville in a recent call to action to all OBA members. I'm the regional coordinator for Durham, Peterborough, Northumberland, Kawartha Lakes and Haliburton on the OBA family law section executive. But this isn't just about legal aid lawyers. For the study day, April 17, the OBA has encouraged all members to schedule no conflicting court appearances and to take part in 11 study sessions across the province. Last May's meeting of the presidents of all the county and district law associations, like Lambton, Durham and Northum-

berland, discussed legal aid. They passed a resolution supporting action on legal aid if the province failed to commit to reform the tariff by the end of last year.

What will it take to save legal aid? Legal aid says this year's budget will require another \$10.6 million for this year's 8% increase. Still, if the government simply gives 8% and appoints yet another committee, senior lawyers won't come back to legal aid, nor will young lawyers stay in family law. We need a longer-term solution.

The new act brought in by this government—an excellent act—mandates a three-year funding cycle for legal aid. Legal aid says this three-year cycle must allow for a 25% rate increase over the next three years. Even that will bring rates only partway back up. We're asking the government to recognize that a tariff rate of \$100 to \$125 is necessary, to commit to funding that increase within a reasonable time—we know we're not going to get it this year—and to create a permanent tariff review process to ensure we're not in the same situation 15 years from now.

Thank you.

1110

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

Mr Monte Kwinter (York Centre): Thank you very much for your presentation. I was in Sault Ste Marie when I heard the other presentation.

There is obviously a discrepancy between what legal aid will pay a lawyer and what they can get in the free and open market, and as a result they tend not to take these cases because it isn't economical. You mentioned that even with the 25% increase you're looking for over three years you're still not going to get close. My question is this: unless the whole system is put on a more equitable basis, is this just going to give those people who do take legal aid a little bit more money but still not be an incentive to get others who don't take it to get in? Is that going to be enough of a difference to get them to do it?

Mr Day: That depends on whether we can see light at the end of the tunnel. The profession knows that we have an obligation professionally to take legal aid cases at lower-than-market rates. Even on a purely economic basis, you would give a discount for legal aid because you're guaranteed payment, unlike private cases where you may or may not ever collect in certain cases. So there's no doubt that legal aid rates can be somewhat lower than market rates on economic grounds and then on the grounds of the contribution that the profession has an obligation to make.

The question is the degree. As you say, 25% still won't bring us up to even the figure of \$100 to \$125, let alone the benchmark of \$150. And \$150, of course, is the very bottom of the range for market rates, as you know.

Do we expect the discrepancy with market rates to be completely closed? No, not at all. Will 25% and the promise of a tariff review so that we don't have to wait, a regular tariff review at least every three years, bring the

senior lawyers back in? The Legal Aid Ontario board says yes; the profession is saying, “We’re afraid that it won’t unless there is a commitment from the government to recognize that even the 25% increase is not going to be the end of the line.”

The Chair: Thank you very much. Mr Christopherson.

Mr Christopherson: Thank you for your presentation. Like Mr Kwinter, I was also in Sault Ste Marie when Ms Shames made her presentation. I think we were all pretty shook, actually, because it was put in pretty stark terms. I don’t think any of us realized things were quite that critical.

Just an observation: isn’t it curious that all three parties state that the most important thing in society is families, and yet the shortage of professions are family doctors and now you’re saying family lawyers? Somewhere we’ve got our rhetoric and our action disconnected.

I was upset to hear you say that there are children left in limbo for months. Can you just expand on that a little bit; also, just how frequently does that happen? Is that rare or does that happen with some regularity?

Mr Day: Just to comment on your two points, the shortage of family lawyers is quite scary because it started, obviously, five years ago as young lawyers started fleeing family law, so that it now shows up in the statistics for the past five years. We’re not going to solve that overnight. That’s going to be like a baby bust in the demographics, and that’s why I say it’s a long-term problem.

Certainly, the situation of three trials having the same counsel is unusual. I was startled to hear about that, and I heard about it from the judiciary, by the way. The judiciary were very concerned about it. It certainly is not something that I’ve ever heard of happening before. Whether it will happen more in the future, yes, and that’s what is so scary. With only six lawyers in Northumberland county taking children’s aid cases on legal aid—and most of them don’t want to have more than one or two, for economic reasons. Children’s aid cases are pretty time-consuming, and when you’re doing it virtually for nothing, because the legal aid rate just about covers your overhead—and we shouldn’t complain about that, because in Toronto the legal aid rates don’t even cover your overhead; you’re not only working for nothing, you’re making a contribution. It’s actually costing you money. At least in our case it covers our overhead. But you don’t want to do that too many times. So we can only take about 10 children’s aid cases. If we get more than 10 children’s aid cases—and there usually are more than that—there’s somebody going without a lawyer. So it’s going to happen sooner or later here too.

The Chair: Thank you very much. Mr Galt.

Mr Galt: Welcome. Thank you for your presentation. Listening to your presentation, it’s very obvious I went into the wrong profession, looking at what a lawyer can make. You’re indicating the difficulty of getting them attracted.

For the animal review tribunal that we have for the province, we offer \$80, not per hour but per day. Obviously, it’s pretty difficult to get veterinarians to sit on it unless they’re retired, and then they do it as a volunteer; at least that’s their consideration. But I’m certainly impressed with what lawyers can make and are making.

The question I have has to do with mediation and how much it can help. I know there’s mediation there. What’s the level? Is it mandatory, and if it was mandatory, would that help more with some of these family situations that arrive in court?

Mr Day: Mediation is one of your success stories, as I think you know, Doug, and I’m pleased to confirm that. We were saying for years that we needed a court mediation service. Of course when the federal government took the provincial judges off the payroll as part of the Unified Family Court, the province then paid for the mediation service, and it’s wonderful. It doesn’t need to be mandatory because Monica Walsh is there for free if you do mediations at court, as most people do, and if you need an off-site mediation, the rate is highly subsidized; there’s a contribution on a sliding scale for those who can afford to, but it’s very affordable.

Mr Galt: So it’s working well.

Mr Day: It’s working very well, and it’s working well thanks to the provincial government, and we give credit for that.

Mr Galt: Thank you very much.

Mr O’Toole: How about any form of mandatory arbitration? The problem is that this thing goes to the courts. It’s an emotional issue in many cases, family law, and there really may not be a reason to settle. Eventually, somebody is going to win and somebody is going to lose. How about looking not at adding more lawyers to the problem—my son’s in law school, so I’m not opposed to them—but at mandatory mediation and arbitration before you even get to the court process? What do you think about strengthening that? Lawyers could go on and do more things for more money.

Mr Day: One of the good things about the Unified Family Court is that you’ve got judges who are doing nothing but family law. I don’t know where you would find an arbitrator who’s as good as the two family court judges we have.

I understand the virtues of arbitration as an option, but in family law in this area, you’d never find an arbitrator any better than those judges, and they are essentially doing that now. So I don’t see that as an option here; it may be an option elsewhere.

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

THOMAS A. STEWART SCHOOL COUNCIL

The Chair: Our next presentation is from the Thomas A. Stewart school council. I would ask the presenters to please come forward. If you could state your name for the record, please. On behalf of the committee, welcome,

and you have 20 minutes for your presentation this morning.

Ms June Goodwin: My name is June Goodwin, and my colleague is Lucinda Hage.

Honourable members of the committee, I think we can agree that we all want the very best education for our students, whether they live in Pickle Lake, Toronto or Peterborough; that education and health care are our highest priorities. We would also agree that we need to be fiscally and socially responsible. Education has evolved, and should continue to, over the years to equip our future citizens with the ability to compete in a demanding world. The funding formula, new curriculum and other major changes in education implemented by the current government were to address these concerns. The intentions were good, but I think you would agree we have problems and they need to be solved.

Our intent in appearing here today is to share our observations and experience at Thomas A. Stewart high school in the hope of contributing toward a solution; it is not to assign blame, point fingers or accuse. Change is a challenge; it can also be an opportunity.

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The TASSC brainstorming last September, item 1 in our package: you can see the expectations of our community for the ideal school. TAS was originally two schools in one building, one of which was a technical school. We have the facilities to offer more shop courses. Our country needs skilled tradespeople. I have to ask if you think our ideal school is unreasonable. Subsequent discussions to problem-solve and achieve this school identified many concerns that parents cannot solve. They require professionals, time, support, resources—in essence, money.

It is difficult for us as parents to know how well the funding formula actually works for education. Boards were far from equal when it was introduced. Under the funding formula, boards now essentially have a fixed income, and that income varies every six months according to how many students they have and what allowances they can qualify for. It was implemented after numerous funding cuts and concurrent with the amalgamation of school boards. The former boards addressed cuts in a variety of ways, from cost efficiencies, reducing programs, reserve funds and raising taxes. Technology, a high-ticket item, was at differing levels of implementation and was financed by various means, and transportation has not really been addressed in the formula.

But as with our homes, past commitments have to be honoured and bills have to be paid regardless of how many children are in them. On a fixed income, when the cost of living and utilities rises, money gets shuffled. Repairs and maintenance are a priority only, and the investment is devalued. In education, with current funding, this means our students lose resources, equipment, programs and morale. It too is devalued.

Since 1997 we have seen a reduction in our staff at TAS: teachers, resource, support, office and technicians. Last year, we shared our library technician with seven

other schools. There is more ebb and flow of teachers each semester to adjust for enrolment and credit count. User fees have been part of our students' education for over seven years, and more have been added and some have increased. Course selection has been reduced, and some of our programs have been cancelled. Late busing was cancelled in 1996 for 200 of our Victoria county school board students, and now Kawartha Pine Ridge allots a dollar amount for TAS to use to best advantage, but our coterminous students still have no late busing. Teachers are expected to do remedial work for students before and after school, but if a student has no transportation, he cannot comply.

Our school budget has varied and this year was reduced by \$30,000 as part of the KPR's deficit management. There is a shortage of textbooks. Some courses don't have any, and Xeroxed notes are made up by our teachers—and Xeroxing costs have gone up. The textbook funds from the government were for core subjects: English, math and science. Next year's funds are expected to be less than this year. Equipment and supplies in laboratories and workshops are also difficult to maintain and/or fund. Technology has been problematic for both administration and students. The teacher advisor program, an excellent initiative, was enthusiastically embraced at TAS, which spent two years planning this program. The teacher advisor program was severely undermined with the passing of Bill 74. It is into this climate that secondary school reform was introduced and continues at TAS.

The new curriculum is not an issue, but support is. Our students have a tougher curriculum, for which they have not had all the prerequisites. They have to pass a grade 10 literacy test and take transfer courses to move from one stream to another. Students are expected to make educational plans, but guidance counsellors are in short supply. There has been little assistance to help these pioneer students; remedial help is triage at best. A student who is ill for part or all of the literacy tests fails. Too bad, so sad, take it next year. But there's no contingency plan for students who fail this test, nor if they have to take transfer courses. Summer school seems to be a third semester.

Funds subject to enrolment are announced yearly with minimal notice and are adjusted every six months, but three-year contracts for staff must be negotiated. Planning for student needs—educational and life skills—is a continuing process for which stable funds are vital if this is to be done effectively and with cost-efficient use of funds.

We have always been very proud of our school. We have an excellent staff, many of whom have been acknowledged with awards, including the Prime Minister's award for excellence in teaching. We are proud that we offer not only a mix of academic and technical subjects, but also LLS, the learning and life skills program, and we are proud that our student body is a successful mix of rural and urban students. TAS graduates have gone on to a multitude of both blue- and white-

collar work. Some of our teachers and a custodian are TAS grads. We have 200 identified students and 26 in the LLS program. My eldest son is an identified student who would not qualify under the present funding formula.

Ms Lucinda Hage: I'm the parent of a son with a developmental disability. In this short portion of the talk, I would like to emphasize the importance of funding special education in high school. My point is simple: the measure of a society can be found in how it treats its weakest members. On behalf of the students who are marginalized, those who have poor communication skills and those who can't talk at all, I ask for your consideration.

As June said, at Thomas A. Stewart we have 26 students who have developmental disabilities, and they are in the learning and life skills program. There are a total of 146 developmentally disabled students in high school in Peterborough. In addition to having developmental disabilities, these students have a number of medical conditions ranging from autism to seizure disorders to Down's syndrome.

The second group at TAS is those students who are identified as having significant special needs. There are 200 of those in this one high school. They have been assessed as having severe learning disabilities and problems related to lack of maturity, lack of confidence and lack of ability to accurately assess social situations. They require ongoing coaching to help them stay on track and act in an age-appropriate manner. In addition, they often have conflicts with their peers due to their lack of social skills.

This group is supported by teachers and three educational assistants—not many resources, given the high needs. They not only have problems at school; they have problems at home. One student I know lives at the Brock Mission, which is a place for homeless men. Another is living with his father, who, at the age of 39, has had three heart attacks and is waiting for a transfer to Toronto for an operation. The head of the special-ed department at TAS feels that three additional staff are needed to work with this group of students. Without that staff, there is less support for work placement assistance and follow-up. Without monitoring, a student is at risk of not succeeding in their work placement. If they fail their work placement, they are at risk of leaving school without any skills at all.

Funding for transportation to work placements for these students has been cut. Students who attend TAS, which is at the edge of the city, rely on city buses to get them to their work. Unfortunately, many of them cannot afford to take the bus on a daily basis. A dollar and forty-five cents per trip doesn't sound like a lot, but if you multiply that by five days a week, and it's a round trip, that's \$15 a week. That's a lot for a family on social assistance. These students are at risk of losing the work placements that have been set up because they can't get to them.

Thomas A. Stewart is in pretty good shape for educational assistants in the learning and life skills clas-

ses. In other schools, however, I am aware of situations where the number and hours of educational assistants have been cut. This means there is less support for in-school inclusion activities and reduced support for work placements. The result is that only those who are highly independent can be accommodated into a work placement.

The direct consequence of cutbacks for both groups of students means that their chances of having independent, or even supported, community employment and contact once they graduate are severely diminished. Unlike most students, those with special needs require direct instruction in life skills and job training. It cannot be taken for granted that the students will be able to generalize their in-class experience into community settings. They need to have that instruction in the community. Without it, we will have hundreds of students leaving our high schools without the skills, maturity or confidence to become contributing members of society.

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As boards of education amalgamated and staff and resources were severely cut, the classroom felt the effects. The losses have been felt in the reduction of competent special education administrators and program consultants who were knowledgeable about programming and specialized equipment. There is no one left to help classroom teachers and EAs learn how to use specialized equipment. My son had a computer dedicated to him in the fall, but his teacher didn't know how to use the software and there was nobody at the board who could help her. The person who had the expertise was on maternity leave, so here was this expensive piece of equipment sitting idle.

Paul's teacher has been in the special education field for almost 30 years. She is concerned about the lack of administrative support and what will happen when experienced people like herself retire. She fears that the strong program that has been developed will become fragmented and that new young teachers will not get the support they need to maintain the viability of the program. It can take years to develop a strong educational program, but as you know, it only takes the stroke of a pen to eliminate it.

Funding cuts have been felt in the loss of special programs like swimming, skating, Camp Kawartha outings, and community busing programs for learning and life skills students. Many of these kids come from disadvantaged homes, so school outings may be the only ones they get. The situation becomes a vicious one: these students don't get out into the community, the community is not aware they exist and then they are not accepted into the community after school.

In an attempt to address this problem as a parent, I have developed a credit program called Heads Up for Inclusion. This program trains high school students to become peer advisers. Their role is to help students with a developmental disability to develop their communication and social skills and to become more included in their high school community. Through a small private

grant—I'd like to emphasize the word "small"—the program is operating at Thomas A. Stewart and another high school in Peterborough. It involves three weeks of training and then matching peer advisers with students in learning and life skills classes. Ongoing training for peers takes place one day a week, and a follow-up session one day a week is devoted to group discussion; this will take place for the rest of the semester.

You may say, "Good. It solves the problem. As a parent you've come in and you've found a solution." You might say, "Very good," in that this program should be expanded to include other schools in the province, because through peer advising programs, both groups of students stand to benefit, the peers in their opportunity for personal growth, the development of leadership and interpersonal skills, their knowledge of disabilities and the chance that they have to make a difference in the lives of other students. The students with a disability have the chance to learn valuable skills from their peers, they have increased social interaction with other students and they have the opportunity to be more included in the life of their high school. Research in this field has shown that peer programs of this kind can encourage students' sense of civic responsibility, social awareness, concern for humanity, and the ability to identify with and advance the goals of others. These are worthwhile values on which to build community.

At Kenner Collegiate, the peer advisers are special-needs students themselves, part of that identified group that I mentioned earlier. Initially, this was not my choice for peer advisers, but after four weeks of training, I can see the merit of having these students work with their disabled counterparts. They are learning valuable communication and social skills themselves. They are learning how to relate to teachers in a new way, how to support a disabled student in a learning environment and how to express themselves appropriately. In four short weeks I've seen progress in both groups. Wouldn't it be wonderful if there was funding to support this type of program and have it become part of the high school curriculum? Goodwill and political will can make this happen. It has the potential to give all our special students a voice.

Ms Goodwin: There can be no doubt that the changes in education have had an effect on our students. The double-cohort and post-cohort years will be a challenge to maintain the diversity of courses parents and students require at the secondary level. It is estimated that KPR will have a decreased enrolment of 200 secondary students next year. This decline increases to 1,000 students for 2003-04. A decrease of 200 students means a loss of 11 teachers or \$1.2 million in revenue; 1,000 students equals a loss of 55 teachers or \$6 million in revenue. There can be no doubt that schools will close, but boards' commitments must still be honoured and bills paid. Programs like music, drama, art, family studies and outdoor education will be compromised by enrolment declines. Today would be a good day to invest the projected savings from the elimination of OAC to education.

It is our students in our schools now who will be supporting the future economy with the largest number of retirees in history. Don't they deserve the best? Pierre Elliott Trudeau said, "Look into my face and you see what might have been and too late." Let's not look in the face of education and see the same. Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much. We have one minute per caucus. I'll start with Mr Christopherson.

Mr Christopherson: Thank you for your presentation. I realize that you said you didn't want to place any blame, that's not why you're here. Some of us aren't restrained by some of those niceties. The fact of the matter is that everywhere we've gone we've heard about the funding formula in education causing crisis after crisis and now it really doesn't seem to matter whether we're talking about Toronto as the major urban centre in the province, the north—Sault Ste Marie—down to the south in Windsor or here, moving east, in a small community. It's all the same. People are being hurt. I note that you don't have enough EAs. You have about half the number of EAs you should have to provide proper support, and after you lose these 200 students, I gather you're going to be in an even tougher situation.

I've got to tell you, there are still people who come into this committee, though, like the bankers yesterday—they only had two recommendations and both those recommendations were for more money for them. I've got to tell you, it's so important—yes, it's hard to believe but their only recommendation was on banks.

The Chair: Question, please.

Mr Christopherson: My question is, do you think that's fair? Do you think that should be the priority of the government in the upcoming budget or should they be focusing money on education and health care? A pretty straightforward question.

Ms Goodwin: I think it should be focused on education.

Mr O'Toole: I'd just like to put on the record a couple of things. The background on the changes in education all started with the NDP, to their credit. They had the Royal Commission on Learning, they also had the Sweeney commission, they also had the curriculum changes—all announced in 1994. They also had announced the elimination of OAC. These are all documented things. Mr Christopherson seems to forget.

Mr Christopherson: It's not our funding formula; it's your funding formula.

Mr O'Toole: One of the things that you did—it's my time, please.

The Chair: Order, please.

Mr O'Toole: I do really respect the peer mentoring program. Being a parent of five children, I completely endorse that. It's an excellent idea. I will certainly be trying to champion it along. But it also fits into the 40 hours of community service.

The Chair: Question, please.

Mr O'Toole: Making other people—

Interjection.

Mr O'Toole: In fact, it does. It's been widely championed that the 40 hours of community service is helping vulnerable people, making us aware that we are our brother's keeper. We are responsible for one another. My point to you is, what could I do—Mr Christopherson thinks that he has the corner on compassion. In fact, he makes a fool of himself, actually, almost daily—

Mr Christopherson: It's just like you to malign the—

The Chair: Question.

Mr O'Toole: —trying to place values on other people. He hasn't really got a clue. That's the bottom line. My question to you is, what can we do to champion your suggestion of the peer mentoring, using adults and young people to work with people with special needs?

Ms Goodwin: Put more money into education.

Mr O'Toole: A specific program or—

The Chair: Thank you very much. I'll have to go to Mr Parsons.

Mr Parsons: An excellent presentation, and I think a very damning indictment of the funding formula that is clearly not working and has been fatally flawed. Reference has been made to reports that were done during the NDP era and it is unfortunate that only parts were picked out of it and not all. When you only do part you in fact have not implemented it.

We have a son who is now 24 and developmentally handicapped. As he went through school we sat down and had the opportunity as parents to talk to the decision-makers, to the people who would decide where the funding would go and what would have to happen in the classroom to support him. We now have a four-year-old with ADH who is entering school and we're trying to convince someone in Toronto whom we will never know or see of his characteristics. The people who know our child have no opportunity to influence it. Are you experiencing that same frustration, that your son has to be described on paper for someone in Toronto to decide what your son will need, while the people who know him best won't decide for—

Ms Goodwin: I don't think it goes as far as Toronto, but it does go to the school board. There's a lack of qualified, experienced staff at the school board. Those people that make the decision have been eliminated.

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Mr Parsons: But the funding grant is approved on a per pupil basis out of the ministry? The ISA grant is not decided by the school board?

Ms Goodwin: No, you have to apply for it and qualify for it.

Mr Parsons: But that's not your board.

Ms Hage: It's in Toronto.

The Chair: With that, I have to bring it to an end.

Ms Goodwin: But if you don't have the administration to actually do the qualifications in the first place, then you don't get the people identified. That is a problem too.

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

FRIENDS OF GILLBARD

The Chair: Our next presentation is from—and I hope I don't massacre the pronunciation too badly—Steven McCahon. Please come forward and state your name for the record—properly state it, I guess. On behalf of the committee, welcome. You have 15 minutes for your presentation this morning.

Mr Steven McCahon: My name is Steven McCahon. For those of you who are of Irish descent, it's "McCahon," but I'm not holding it against anyone who doesn't pronounce it that way.

I'd like to make a very brief presentation to the committee. I know that the committee has a number of worthy presentations. I'm also aware that you probably want to stay on schedule.

It's interesting that I follow in the footsteps of a group that has just talked to you about the funding formula for the Ministry of Education. This is actually one of the areas I want to speak to.

I'm the spokesperson for a group called Friends of Gillbard. Thomas Gillbard Public School is a local public school and is in the crunch as it relates to full-time-equivalent students and the funding formula. I guess I don't have to go into great detail, given what I've heard already today. The ministry-rated capacity of full-time-equivalent students for operational funding—this formula is flawed and has a great deal of problems associated with it. Our local school is the only downtown public school for elementary students, yet it has been selected for the school review process. What we have found in this process of going through a school closure review is that school boards are funded on an aggregate basis for full-time equivalents. Where a school is not at its full-time-equivalent rating, what happens is that the school boards are subsidizing schools for certain types of essential personnel: custodians, secretaries, educational assistants, principals, librarians and so forth. I say that as it relates to the operations because that's where the dollars and the students come together.

There are two other funding envelopes, one of which is the capital funding for new schools. Clearly, the way in which the ministry rated capacity and the school information system provide a range of difficulties for school boards. With the freeze on the number of schools, the only way boards can effectively bring new schools online is to close other facilities. Almost without question, older schools in areas of declining enrolment are becoming surplus and are being closed. This is the only way in which the reserve funds which are available to school boards to open new schools can be accessed. These perpetual reserve funds serve as an incentive, in some ways, for new schools and certainly act as an incentive to close other schools.

It's my recommendation that this committee look at three specific things as they relate to the budget this year. One is additional operational funding for public schools during the 2002-03 fiscal year. I expect I might get some questions on this, but one of the key issues related to this

is where the money is coming from. My suggestion would be that it may have to come out of the new capital projects funding; rather than looking at new schools, we should be looking at the existing problems with the funding formula and allocating out of that in the short run until these problems have been resolved.

Secondly, I would suggest that funding of a government review for the funding formula be undertaken and that these monies be used to facilitate a review as soon as possible in the fiscal year. Clearly, the situation we face at Thomas Gillbard is one that is not going to be helped in the 2002-03 budget year. It is going to be a situation that will be resolved within this budget year if the school board proceeds, as we expect, to close the school.

There's a third element to my presentation, and while it has budget implications, it's not directly a budget item. I'd like to point out to members of this committee that we have a situation that has arisen out of the change in the funding formula and the way in which funds are collected for education which I think was not anticipated at the time in which it was brought forward.

In our situation here in Cobourg, we are most likely going to lose the only downtown public school—we have five schools that are on the periphery of our town—yet our town's priority is downtown revitalization. As a result of the funding formula, and as a result of the choices made by the school board, it would seem that issues of local economic development clearly start to come into focus when we look at the ability of boards to close schools without any consultation with local municipalities, irrespective of the fact that local municipalities are the only ones who are given powers under the Municipal Act and the Planning Act for economic development issues. Clearly, if a town's priority is to revitalize its downtown, one of the keys to that would be having a downtown school. If there is no accountability for the school boards to their local municipalities, something I would suggest at least in a tacit way existed under the old funding system where municipalities paid for the school boards—there was at least some check against that kind of arbitrariness, and now we have no check against it.

In this particular town, with the school board that we're looking at trying to convince to keep the school open, they have a growth area in the west which is very significant. We have declining enrolments here. At the elementary level we have 100 FTEs over capacity as it stands right now. We are underutilized that much elementary-wise, but at the secondary level we're 200 under. Clearly, closing one school is not going to solve that problem, but we're looking at issues as they relate to school boards where they are not mandated under the Planning Act to make decisions that affect the ability of local governments to plan, for regional governments to plan, and yet the effect of the funding formula and the way in which the capital reserve funds for new schools is laid out—in fact what happens is that power, the power to designate a school in a local area as surplus and therefore take away the ability of the municipality to

plan, usurps a power that clearly it was never intended to usurp.

Those are my three recommendations. I'd be happy to take any questions from the panel.

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The Chair: Thank you very much. We have a minute and a half per caucus, and I'll start with Mr O'Toole.

Mr O'Toole: Thank you very much, Steven, for bringing your concerns forward. I don't live in Cobourg or in Northumberland, but I'm quite aware of the issue as I read the papers. It has received significant coverage, and I know the superintendent involved, Mr Hubbard, quite well. I know your trustee, obviously, Gordon Gilchrist.

Just the history of school closures: 1980-84, there were 317 schools closed in Ontario; 1985-89, 168 schools; 1990-94, 131 schools; and 1995 to the present, 206 schools. It's not a new phenomenon. It has always rationalized its way as populations moved out of downtown cores and more efficient—it's certainly a problem in my riding of Durham, which is right next to that of Dr Galt. The problem there—it's strange. We've had more new schools than the whole eight years I was a trustee. The problem is, it's even disruptive there because of new neighbourhoods, and border streets get split.

I'm not sure if there's another way. It is allocated on students and on where students live. As the growth moves, it's important to make sure that we have the schools as close to students as possible.

I guess my question to you is, do you have any suggestion in terms of mandating or formalizing the public input process? They have had public meetings on the Gillbard school.

Mr McCahon: I do have a couple of suggestions. The first is that clearly the issues we're facing in this community are being faced by virtually 120 other communities in the province at this point in time, whether it be actual municipalities or two or three schools being looked at in a particular municipality.

One of the problems with the input in terms of how it's been designed, and partly it's also related to the process, is that you have a school review program that targets a school at a time. In September, school boards have to identify those schools. By the end of June, they have to have made a decision about those schools, and clearly they are planning, with the capital funding envelope for new schools, on what they're going to do with the funds. So you've got a process where in September they have to identify schools; by June, they have to designate what they're going to do with the schools they've designated as possibly being surplus; and then in September they have to have a new system in place to deal with the school that's missing.

In the planning process for Kawartha Pine Ridge in terms of the school closure review, at this point the public has had no direct input. There has been a series of fact-finding meetings, yet the definition of what the actual problem that this ad hoc committee is trying to solve seems to be still very much a guess. If it's a matter

of having enough full-time-equivalent students in the school to support the program, that could easily have been arranged. It could have been dealt with and we would not be looking at a school review. We have one school in our area that is significantly over in terms of the number of students in it, and yet it's ironic that that particular school is the most new school and also took part of the catchment area that affects our school. That problem was clearly within the ability of the board to deal with.

My suggestion is that this is an issue that's facing many communities and that school boards, rather than targeting a school, should be coming to the community and talking about what needs to happen. We need, over the next few years, to come up with a manner in which we address the overcapacity of this area to provide for 300 students. That will likely mean closing at least one facility, probably two, but I think it has to be done in consultation with the local community. It is ludicrous to say, "Well, we've got the school review process. We'll do it a school at a time." We've heard from Mr Hubbard that we are going to be in this process of eliminating schools over the next 10 years.

The Chair: With that, I have to go to the other side.

Mr Parsons: The funding formula says ideally we would have one school located in a geographic centre of Ontario with an enrolment of about 800,000 students. That way, you'd need only one principal.

Mr McCahon: Yes, and certainly a lot fewer school boards, I might add.

Mr Parsons: Right. The problem with the schools is, unlike a store, the enrolment of a school is dictated by where the boundaries are drawn for that catchment area, and they can change. But school boards are forced now to really manage by crisis on a very short-term basis. Their funding changes every six months. They don't have a long-term commitment on it. In 17 years as a school board trustee, I can recall schools that were slated for closure—which did not happen—because enrolment was down, and 10 years later kids are hanging out the windows and there are portables out in the yard, because neighbourhoods change and neighbourhoods go through phases. School boards can't respond to that. They have to look at the immediate thing, and there's no opportunity for long-range planning.

Taking a school does have a devastating effect on the community and an effect on the students who can't stay after school for academics or for sports. But I started doing some calculations. If you close the school, you get the immediate savings on it. You spend a little bit on busing. Have you done any analysis of how many years you have to bus the students before the busing money would have paid for keeping that school open?

Mr McCahon: Ideally, the students out of Gillbard would be bused, and then we could actually do that analysis. Unfortunately, the school board we are dealing with has a fairly significant expectation of students at the elementary level in terms of how far they can walk: it's 1.6 kilometres. In our town, if you drew a circle from

Thomas Gillbard, 1.6 kilometres would take you to just about every other school.

The reality is that, for example, our two kids will cross Division Street, a very significant roadway, and they would cross D'Arcy Street to come to the local school here. Our kids would be able to manage that—they will be eight and six—if this goes through. They'll obviously need a parent to go with them. That's fine. But one of the things that has been argued—and I think there are very few in the school board who would suggest that this is otherwise—is that there are a disproportionate number of not only special education students in this particular school, but also students who are availing themselves of poverty intervention strategies. We're going to be asking those students and those families to get their students to school, after probably a 45-minute walk, for a breakfast club that might start at 8 o'clock in the morning. Beyond that, we also have a large number of people who live downtown who do not have vehicles; whether it's an economic issue or not, they don't. So you've also got the impact on students for a family member to come and get them if they're sick during the day and so on.

Clearly, the economic impact on our community will be significant. Let's not mince words about that. The other thing is that this school board has a criterion of six acres for an elementary school. Our current school is on 2.3 acres of property, and to find another six acres in our downtown core for a new school if we ever need it is not going to happen. Generally speaking, we can look at what is the cost-benefit analysis as it relates to busing. Unfortunately, in our situation, our students are just going to have to walk much longer distances to the local community school.

The Chair: I have to go to Mr Christopherson.

Mr Christopherson: Thank you, Mr McCahon, for your presentation.

Once again, Mr O'Toole would have you walk away with a distorted view of reality. The fact of the matter is that, yes, schools have closed in the past, but no school has ever closed in the past just because of dollars. Students move and demographics change, but I know in the case of Hamilton, the schools that have been closed and were looked at for closure were not on a review because of demographics; there wasn't a review going on. The only thing that sparked the review was the government saying, "We're not going to give you one cent for new schools until you close a whole slew of your older schools." Like you, in my riding a lot of them are in downtown Hamilton, and our downtown renewal is a priority also. It's a huge issue for us.

My question to you is going to be the similarities, because the factors that affected us—and what I want to know is whether yours are similar—were, of course, the economic activity downtown, but also bringing people downtown. Also, it's a centre and a source of community strength. It's not just a school. It's where adults meet, it's where kids go after school and, in many cases for us, it's the only open green space in the immediate area. Just

your thoughts on how much that reflects what you're going through here in Cobourg.

1200

Mr McCahon: To say it reflects exactly what we're going through here in Cobourg would be something of an understatement. Actually, when the Friends of Gillbard came to look at this issue, the local school council had been somewhat hamstrung by the fact that they were involved in the process, that they had representation in the process. I think the objectivity that's required of a school review committee really went a long way to making it almost virtually impossible for the community to be able to respond. Friends of Gillbard came along. Our slogan as it relates to our school is, "Thomas Gillbard Public School: More than Just a School."

Mr Christopherson, you are fully correct in indicating that not only is this a local community school, not only is it almost 100 years old, not only was it the only central school in Cobourg, not only does it represent a significant economic interest to our community, but it is a green space, there is a sense of community there, there is a sense of camaraderie among the staff there, there is a knowledge of parents and students at every level as it relates to the teachers, the staff, the principal. There is no way a kid gets lost in this school, because there is just too much connection with the community. So, yes indeed, we are seeing exactly what you're seeing in Hamilton.

The Chair: With that, I would like to thank you on behalf of the committee for your presentation this morning.

KAWARTHA PINE RIDGE
DISTRICT SCHOOL BOARD,
EASTERN REGION SCHOOL
COUNCILS ASSOCIATION

The Chair: Our next presentation is from the Eastern Region School Councils Association of the Kawartha Pine Ridge District School Board. I would ask the presenter to please come forward, and if you could state your name for the record. On behalf of the committee, welcome. You have 20 minutes for your presentation.

Ms Heather Ballarin: Thank you. For the record, I think your agenda probably shows that I am Heather Ballarin. That is correct.

Mr Chair and committee members, indeed your agenda informs you that you're now to hear from Heather Ballarin, chair of the Eastern Region School Councils Association, Kawartha Pine Ridge District School Board. So who is she and why is she here? That would be your question. I am Heather Ballarin and I would like to initially spend a moment or two painting a picture for you of exactly who I am before I set out to explain why I am here.

I am a parent of a five-year-old son who is in senior kindergarten and a nine-year-old daughter who is in grade 4. I became involved in my children's school immediately upon my daughter entering junior kinder-

garten. I've chaired the school council at Armour Heights for three years, co-chaired last year, and continue my involvement as the school's representative to the regional association, of which I am chair. My children are both A students who have had exceptional teachers. I tell you this so you will understand that I am not newly involved with school councils and have no vested interests, my children do not have high special needs, and I have had no particularly bad experiences to date.

I am married. My husband has a university degree, as do I. Neither of us are teachers. We have both been active volunteers within our children's classrooms and on field trips. We do our best to sell the chocolates and the muffin batters, sponsor the students in their walk-a-thons, and make ourselves available to do the ground prep work before the playground installation. We spend a fair chunk of each evening supervising our daughter as she completes her homework, and reading to our son, because we all know how important this is to his early literacy skills. I tell you this so you will understand we are middle-class parents involved in our children's education and doing our part.

I'm a registered physiotherapist working part-time within our public health care system. If you know any physiotherapists, you know we are creative and critical thinkers, always questioning the norm. We strive to provide client-centred care in a fiscally responsible manner, using evidence-based practice. I tell you this so you will understand that I get the concepts.

I have survived amalgamations and cutbacks to health care. I tell you this so you will understand that I do not take anything I hear or read at face value and I question facts, whether they come from the government of the day, the opposition, my school board, associations, unions or education advocacy groups.

I have worked hard to try to educate myself with respect to this government's funding formula, as well as with respect to my school board's budget process. I ask many questions and am not afraid to make suggestions or recommendations that may be, well, a little out there. I tell you this so you will understand that I always feel there is room for improvement and I do not believe that the way it has always been is the way it should always be.

I used to think that I was perhaps unique in my expectations of our province's education system and its funding, and I admit I have been told that the imaginary glasses I wear may be a little too rose-coloured. However, upon becoming involved in our board's regional association three years ago, I quickly discovered that I am not unique. I am not alone. I am pretty close to the norm in terms of involved parents. I tell you this so you will understand that the voice you hear is a voice of many, in hopes that when you hear or read "Parents have told us" in a Ministry of Education speech or publication, you will question, as I do on a regular basis, who exactly these parents are.

Lastly, in my role as regional chair, I have attended many Ministry of Education focus groups, input sessions

and roundtables and I have had an opportunity to ask the questions posed by the members of the region, provide our input and outline our concerns. I tell you all of this so you will clearly understand why I am here. I am not me, but rather we, and we the parents of the 22 school councils that comprise the eastern region do not feel we have been heard. This is a consultation, a hearing, an opportunity to provide input. Thank you for again consulting us. We would like to provide input and we would like to be heard. We would like to convey some of our expectations of the funding for our public education system, advise you of some concerns we have with the current level and method of funding and share our feelings as we continue to struggle to have these views heard.

First, what are our expectations with respect to the funding for public education in this province?

Equity: equity for all students, not only within each school and each board but also within the province. We feel all students should have the opportunity to experience school in a positive, safe environment that has the people and material resources to meet their needs and enable them to achieve their own personal best. They should graduate feeling good about their first real job: being a student. If they don't succeed at school, it will be increasingly harder for them to succeed at life.

Stability and recognition of inflation: at the very least, stable funding so our trustees can make plans year to year; more importantly, funding that on a yearly basis reflects the increasing cost for consistent services and resources.

Adequate funding: adequate funding to provide the basics, and, believe me, our definition of what is basic has been reduced with each year that passes under the new funding formula. As parents, we try to teach our children to differentiate at a very early age between a want and a need. We have had to take a very close look at our schools and within our board at what constitutes a want and what constitutes a need.

One of our expectations is support for a holistic, student-centred, needs-based approach. Funding needs to include monies that are aimed at programs and resources that have obvious subjective value to the students' educational experiences and growth as good citizens, even if government-approved or government-determined objective measures are not yet in place or not yet available to measure their effectiveness, cost benefit or outcome. Just because it isn't being measured does not mean it is not important.

Another expectation we have is financial consideration for board-specific problems. We expect the ministry to listen carefully and with an open mind when budget nightmares are faced by boards through no fault of their own but, more importantly, have arisen as a direct result of legislative changes in ministry initiatives. We expect one-time funding injections when a board—ours or others—can show that a hardship has been created that will affect funding in other areas if it is not dealt with expediently.

1210

Lastly, but most importantly, we expect investment in new initiatives; not just investment but substantial investment. The initiatives in which we are asking for investment are not those of our individual schools, although our front-line educators do have some pretty awesome ideas for new initiatives; and they are not those undertaken by our boards, although they have implemented some initiatives with which parents have been exceedingly pleased in the past. No, these initiatives for which we as parents expect substantial investment are those that have been introduced by the ministry over the past few years, things like the common curriculum, standardized testing and new accountability measures. Those are the biggies.

With respect to our expectations, may I now outline some of our main concerns with the current funding levels and methods.

With respect to equity, the current funding formula needs serious alterations in order to level the playing field province-wide for all students. Small schools are good examples. Equity will not be achieved as long as fundamental requirements are financed based on the enrolment level of a school. We've all read the reports—or if you haven't, you should—that outline the facts: 364 full-time equivalents to generate funding for a full-time principal; 769 to generate a full-time teacher-librarian; 272 to generate a secretary; and the statistics that prove that 51% of larger schools have phys-ed teachers whereas only 29% of smaller schools do. Music teachers are available in 59% of the larger schools but only 27% of the smaller schools. You get the picture. Then there's the decreased access to professionals, such as psychologists, social workers and speech-language pathologists.

If boards actually provided only to those who are eligible, the numbers would look even worse. Only 42% of Ontario schools actually qualify for a full-time principal. In reality, 86% have one. The basic services that are not being funded under the current funding formula are being provided within individual school boards because administration is again stealing from Peter to pay Paul.

I should mention that the reason these issues come to the forefront for organizations such as regional school councils is not because we as parents are seeking out reports and analyzing the figures out of curiosity.

I started to ask questions when I heard during the budget process last year from a parent at a school in Warkworth who was upset because their school library is going to be closed for the vast majority of her children's time at school, and the local community library is only open three to four hours—that's two days a week. When I touched base with her in the fall, after a long fight, things had been resolved. The library now remains open to students, but only because the 0.3 teacher-librarian now brings the classes that she teaches in the other 0.7 part of her time to the library to teach them. Science and technology, history, whatever the class is, come to the

library, and that's the only way the library can stay open. A solution, yes; acceptable, no.

As parents, we are not critical of our boards' attempts to fund shortfalls by robbing one program to provide resources for another, or of our individual school administrators' attempts to creatively solve real-life situations. We actually applaud these moves. They are doing the best they can. But at the same time, we are appalled that the government cannot see these blatant inequities and make adjustments accordingly.

Am I aware of the small-school allocation within the special grants? Yes, we all are. It doesn't work.

With respect to stability in funding and recognition of the effects of inflation, we have concerns again as to how our board is to compensate for the lack of ministry adjustments for ever-rising costs. The funding benchmarks are based on levels that were adequate when the funding formula was introduced in 1997-98. It is now four years later. Our board has seen a 20% rise in energy and fuel costs, yet at the same time the funding has been at a fixed rate. Again, the underlying concern is that when the funding is not available via the current formula, it must be found somewhere. It is found through the elimination of programs and decreases in resources, not because it is in the best interests of the students but because it is inevitable.

We have an expectation that there is adequate funding to provide the basics. Our concern is that this expectation is not being met.

One parent conveyed to me her woes the other day regarding the lack of textbooks in her son's grade 8 class. There aren't enough science or geography textbooks to go around and the existing texts are in danger of falling apart, hence a rule that they have to stay at school. She feels this is a ridiculous situation that does not enable her son to learn in an appropriate manner.

Our concerns are that parents increasingly are funding the basics from their own pockets. User fees are everywhere. It's just that some are more obvious than others. There are the blatant user fees. At our high schools, as is the case, we understand, with most boards, there exist user fees: \$10 for a grade 12 math workbook, \$3 for an OAC geometry and algebra workbook; even in the elementary schools: \$8 to purchase a recorder for grade 4 music, \$5 for the accompanying book. Those are the blatant examples. But we also consider that there are hidden user fees. There are lists that are handed out at the beginning of the school year for supplies, and increasingly these supplies are including things that parents say are basics: a box of Kleenex, glue, art supplies, paper.

Fundraising: fundraising is essentially user fees; be it hidden, it is still user fees. A common message being heard from parents who have been involved with parent organizations and fundraising within the schools for 10 years or more is that the message is clear: we used to fundraise for extras—the field trips, special happenings within the schools, things that made being at school more fun. Now we are fundraising for textbooks, calculators,

manipulatives, overhead projectors, computers, novels—the list goes on and on.

With respect to support for a holistic approach, let me explain our concern. Basically it's this: student achievement is of course important. Looking at outcomes is of course important. The discrepancy is that when I listen to Ministry of Education people talk, they say that test scores are so important to parents because they are the measure of a good school. But when I listen to parents talk, and I talk to a lot of parents, there is so much more that is important to parents than just marks: soft skills, life skills, social skills, safety, school spirit, community involvement. I have yet to meet one parent who would exercise their right to school choice based on test scores.

With respect to financial considerations for board-specific problems, this is a very simple concern. We feel that there are exceptions to every rule, but these exceptions are being ignored. Every board has its own unique situations that require consideration for financial help. I'm sure that Mr O'Toole and Mr Galt could provide you with the details with respect to our computer leases or our exceptionally high retirement gratuities. These are two examples within our board of things that have not been covered with the funding formula. The computer leases were in existence before the funding formula came into effect. The taxpayers agreed to support the computer technology that the board was willing to put in place. With the new funding formula, there has been no compensation for those leases and it continues to be an incredible drag on our budget process.

Substantial investments in new initiatives are important. No comment on whether parents agree or are happy with these initiatives. Obviously, within a region of 25 schools, there are varying opinions, and they vary dramatically. The commonality, however, between all camps is that if it has to be, it must be funded, not partially funded—by this, I mean underfunded to the extent that boards are forced to channel funds into new initiatives from other programs—but rather funded to ensure success. We know that underfunding is a reality, because we see the symptomatic results every day in real ways.

At my children's school, two of the three outdoor staircases leading from the upper-level playground to the lower-level playground have been boarded up. They have been deemed unsafe, but there's no money in the maintenance budget to properly remove them, so they're boarded up. Last year, my son's JK class had 29 children—29 three- and four-year olds—and one teacher, no EA. Not only did this make functioning next to impossible, it meant that space difficulties resulted in no ability for these students to rest, as is the norm. There wasn't physically enough space in the classroom for them to lay down and have their rest.

Because of pediculosis programs and lunch-hour supervision programs that have been discontinued to save money, I hear from parents that EAs who are supposed to be providing assistance with high-needs children are not

doing so but rather have been pulled from the class to pick nits. I hear that because of the decrease in staff and lunchroom supervisors, one school has resorted to having one teacher responsible for two portable classrooms for a half hour in the afternoon so that contractual agreements can be met around teachers' lunches.

How do we feel? Frustrated, angry, disappointed and disillusioned, but mostly burnt out. Also, we do feel hopeful. We are hopeful that if we continue to be involved, and that's what we're being told makes a difference, things will be better; hopeful that if we attempt to make ourselves heard at every opportunity, perhaps someone will begin to listen.

I hope this standing committee has listened and will continue to listen very carefully to all who are presenting their concerns regarding education funding. There are commonalities in all of our presentations, to be sure. Some will undoubtedly lean more on facts and figures than I have chosen to. Others, like myself, will try to help you see the real face of underfunding in the hopes that you will be able to envision the dangers to our children's futures if this continues. Thank you for your time and consideration.

1220

The Vice-Chair (Mr Doug Galt): Thanks very much for the presentation. We're down to about a minute and a half left in the 20 minutes, so I think I'll give that to the Liberal caucus rather than rotate.

Mr Parsons: That was a great presentation. As long as I can recall, there used to be parent councils in schools, and their primary function seemed to be fundraising. The government said we need to expand the role and get beyond that, so they created school councils, and thanks to the funding formula, your main focus is fundraising, which seems rather ironic.

Ms Ballarin: Doesn't it.

Mr Parsons: The other thing that has bothered me is that the rhetoric has said it is to empower parents, and so now we have school councils that don't have any power. At one time, when school boards made the decisions and made the funding determinations, parent councils, or now school councils, could meet with the school board and lobby and advocate, and the school board could assign priorities or put the tax rate up five cents a house or something. Now you're in the position that the funding comes in an envelope from Queen's Park, so you don't have contact with the decision-makers now. You have contact with individuals who are lobbyists, much as you are, in a sense. That has to be very frustrating, as a parent who is evidently very committed to the school and to the school council. What needs to happen to give you some power to effect the priorities within the province, within your school board or within your school?

Ms Ballarin: I don't think I entirely agree with you when you say that we are not as empowered as perhaps we used to be. I think the process within our school board certainly is such that if I'm looking to be involved and provide feedback and have an advocacy role, it's there. I attend all the budget meetings. We can do that. I think the

problem becomes that in order for us to be empowered to make any significant change—we can voice our concerns, we can give our input with respect to what programs, what resources, what areas are priorities—the bottom line is, if the money isn't there, the money cannot be spent on those things that we set as priorities unless we steal from things that are at the bottom of the priority list, and those are still very important things. We're down to basics. We're not talking about swimming pools.

The Vice-Chair: On behalf of the committee, thank you very much for coming forward and giving us a very comprehensive presentation.

Interjection.

The Vice-Chair: We started at 12:03 with this presentation and it's now, according to this, 12:23. The last presentation went overtime.

BRUCE MELNICHUK

The Vice-Chair: Our next presentation is Bruce Melnichuk. A total of 15 minutes have been set aside for you as an individual presenting. What's left over from your presentation will be divided equally among the three caucuses for questions. As you begin, please state your name clearly for the record.

Mr Bruce Melnichuk: Good afternoon. My name is Bruce Melnichuk, and by character I am a quiet, keep-to-myself type of person until there is something to say, and then I'll speak my mind. I live at lot 11, concession 5 in Cramahe township in Northumberland county. I moved here in 1991. Before we took possession of the property, I checked with the county who was in charge of waste services for the entire county. I was told that the closest landfill site was 12 kilometres away, down on Telephone Road, and it was to close in a couple of years, so we moved in.

Ten years later, we found out eight months ago that there is a dump within 150 feet from our well. This dump has never been tested or certified. One of the many things I've found out about this landfill site is that it was recommended that Cramahe township put a holding zone on all properties within 500 metres of a landfill site. They were told this a year before the property was severed and two years before it was built on. I'm not here just for our benefit but for anyone who lives near a landfill site or who doesn't even know that they do. To my knowledge there were 2,334 closed landfills in Ontario as of 1988 with a C of A from the MOE.

In 1991, there were only two landfill sites shown on the lists from the MOE for closed landfill sites in Cramahe township and yet there are suspected to be 10 landfill sites or dumps in Cramahe township. Just because a landfill site is closed doesn't mean it's gone. If the aquifer's contaminated, it may be unusable for decades. In residence time it could be anywhere from two weeks to 10,000 years.

There's talk that the Bay of Quinte is clearer. Just because the water is clearer doesn't make it clean. With all the landfill sites near the headwaters that feed into the

Bay of Quinte, could it be that all the open and closed landfill sites that feed the waters that go into the Bay of Quinte are polluting it and chasing off the fish? After all, fish are very sensitive to their environment, even if some humans are not.

What I would like to see is that all landfills be found, tested and disclosed, as well as the MOE be in charge of all the landfill sites and put proper holds on every last one of them.

This is the Lower Trent Region Conservation Authority's and this is what the closed landfill sites look like. The closed landfill sites are represented by the red dots. There are 33 landfill sites. Victoria county has 16, Peterborough has 28, Northumberland has 30, Frontenac has 30, Lanark has 8 and Hastings has 53.

OK. I can take questions now, a whole bunch.

The Chair: We have approximately three minutes per caucus and I'll start with Mr Christopherson.

Mr Christopherson: Thank you for your presentation, sir. What happened when you approached your town council? I'm assuming that's probably where you started.

Mr Melnichuk: We did. I've been there five times and each time they tell us it's our problem, it's not their fault.

Mr Christopherson: Whose land is the former—

Mr Melnichuk: The landfill?

Mr Christopherson: Yes.

Mr Melnichuk: The dump actually belongs to Cecil Dale and our property was severed off his in 1989. Our property was actually built on in 1990 and I checked with the county in 1991 before we moved in. We were told that there was no dump and the closest one was, in actual fact, 14 kilometres away.

Mr Christopherson: What's the attitude of the current landowner?

Mr Melnichuk: Really, we haven't approached him, more because he's about 80 years old and he has Alzheimer's now. We don't really want to take him on as far as a court case because it wouldn't be fair to him. In actual fact, to me it's Cramahe township that's at fault. The Ministry of the Environment told them to put holds on the properties and they refused to. Now that it's come up that there are dump sites around, they are more or less telling us it's our problem.

To do proper tests on a landfill site is up to about a half a million dollars because they have to do test wells and all that stuff. There are actually 10 properties within that 500 metres.

Mr Christopherson: I represent a large urban centre—downtown Hamilton and the west end—so I don't deal with this an awful lot on a personal basis in terms of individuals. I know that we have uncovered former sites and there are serious concerns, exactly the leachate concerns that you're raising here. Our regional government at the time took it upon themselves to just take total ownership regardless of who owned the land. The reason I say that is I don't know what the legalities are as well as maybe other members here who represent

rural areas, but it would seem to me that you've got a public health issue and that some level of government, some responsible entity, should be—

Mr Melnichuk: Helping.

Mr Christopherson: —yeah—assuming the accountability here, because how can you be expected to do testing on a piece of land that's not even yours? That just doesn't make practical sense to me, so I'd be interested to hear what some of the other members say. But it would certainly seem to me that you've got a legitimate beef with government writ large and that somebody should stop handing you the bureaucratic runaround and give you some help.

1230

Mr Galt: Interesting. I live in Cramahe township as well. I'm intrigued with your presentation. Looking on the map at your location, do you have any feeling, on the information you've picked up, how big this landfill is or was at the time it was operated, what the footprint is?

Mr Melnichuk: We have looked at it; I've looked at it through the lower Trent aerial photos as well. There is documentation from the MOE in this, dated 1987, and it says, "Site 1 is the only contentious site. This uncertified site located on lot 11, concession 5, is privately owned by Cecil Dale. It would appear that this site is identified as a waste disposal area on schedule A. The site has accepted domestic, commercial and solid, non-hazardous waste which has been deposited over an area of approximately 60 by 110 metres. Currently, the site has an accumulation of scrap metals, the surface of which is covered by soil with mature grass growth, indicating that there has been no recent activity." Keep in mind that was in 1987 and the Canada Colours fire was in 1977, and I know for a fact that they had dumped dog food there. That Canada Colours fire was a \$2-million fire.

Mr Galt: I moved to the township in 1971 and at that time it was the main site and, as I understood, the only site—just north of Colborne on Telephone Road. I was impressed at that time with how it was operated, from what I was familiar with landfill sites. To my knowledge that was the only one, but you're saying commercial material went in there as late as into the 1980s, from what I'm hearing from you.

Mr Melnichuk: From what I understand, that site actually opened in the early 1950s and closed in 1975. Keep in mind that the Canada Colours fire, which was Tri-Plex Manufacturing and then it turned into Ciba Geigy and now into Canada Colours as it is now, was in 1977. And there was actually canned dog food dumped there.

Mr Galt: Have you been doing any testing of your well, or has MOE—

Mr Melnichuk: We only could do the bacteriological tests.

Mr Galt: And that's not going to tell you anything about the landfill and the contaminants.

Mr Melnichuk: In actual fact, bacteriological tests are done for landfill sites, and ecological—

Mr Galt: I think you'd be wanting to look for chemicals, not bacteria.

Mr Melnichuk: True enough, but chemical tests cost a lot more money. We are going to an ARB meeting to try and get our taxes reduced, to use that money to do our testing.

Mr Galt: And there's nothing from MOE to give you assistance on that kind of a situation?

Mr Melnichuk: No, because Cramahe township chose not to follow the MOE's recommendations and the MOE is more or less saying it's Cramahe's problem.

Mr Parsons: Fascinating report. The first thing I did was look for my house on the map, to see if it's in your red dot, and it's not. Where did you get all the information? How did you access it?

Mr Melnichuk: The MOE was most; I also went to town planners and Ministry of Natural Resources and the Lower Trent Region Conservation Authority.

Mr Parsons: You're one of a number of property owners affected by this dump. The tests that you need for chemical analysis are over \$1,000—well over.

Mr Melnichuk: We can do a water test once a year. A water and soil test will cost us about \$2,000 each time.

Mr Parsons: You're telling me that the Ministry of Environment, which is responsible for safe water, won't test your water.

Mr Melnichuk: That's true.

Mr Parsons: There's a fundamental flaw there. I'm missing something.

Mr Melnichuk: There's bigger flaws than that. The Ministry of Health does septic systems and well systems. The Ministry of Health will come out and site-plan where the septic is going to go, and yet the Ministry of Health will stay up in Peterborough and say, "Put it there. It's up to the driller." Sooner or later a driller is going to be drilling through a landfill site that he doesn't know is there and possibly be smoking and hit methane gas and, bye.

Mr Parsons: I accept what you say, but there's an insanity to it.

Mr Melnichuk: There's a bigger insanity near the end from Cramahe township. This house was built last year, in 2001. It is well within the 500-metre circle of effluent and yet Cramahe council overrode our building inspector, who didn't want to give a building permit. They overrode her and passed the resolution allowing him to build, providing he takes responsibility for any water contamination. At the time the house was completed and she was going to give him the final occupancy, Cramahe council told them, "Don't worry. He's not within the circle," yet the aerial photos clearly show he is within the circle. When I asked council about that, they said, "We paced it off; it passed."

Mr Parsons: But fire departments don't put out fires only if they're the ones who start them. The Ministry of the Environment is in the same boat, in my mind. They may not have caused this problem, but their role is to help fix it. I'm very disappointed.

You mentioned urban areas and certainly safe water is an increasing priority, as it should be, but it's just as important to you drinking the water out of your well as it is to someone out of the tap in Hamilton. I'm very disappointed to hear that.

Mr Melnichuk: That's right.

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.

Mr Melnichuk: Thank you. I appreciate your time.

NORTHUMBERLAND COALITION AGAINST POVERTY

The Chair: Our next presentation is from the Northumberland Coalition Against Poverty. I would ask the presenter or presenters to come forward; if you could state your name, please, for the record. On behalf of the committee, welcome. You have 20 minutes for your presentation.

Ms Deborah O'Connor: My name is Deborah O'Connor and I'm with the Northumberland Coalition Against Poverty. Our other speaker is Mr Jim Guy, and he will be speaking when I am finished. I hope you gentlemen do get a break for lunch today and you're not going all day.

Interjection: Yes, we are.

Ms O'Connor: Non-stop.

Our own MPP, Doug Galt, is quite familiar with us, but I wanted to just quickly tell you who we are. I should tell you first that I'm a community legal worker with the Northumberland Community Legal Centre. We're one of the 70-odd legal clinics in the province. Part of my job as outreach is to work with community groups, and that's why I work with the Northumberland Coalition Against Poverty. I'm also a poverty survivor myself. I raised two kids on mother's allowance and part-time income. I spent six years on the board of the National Anti-Poverty Organization, three of those on their executive. So I like to think I do know something about poverty in this province and this country.

The coalition against poverty has been around since 1993. Some of our highlights have been a regular committee that met with the administrator of the welfare office to try and find policies that worked for everybody; we've done presentations to our county council; we've had frequent meetings with our member of provincial Parliament; and we are also members of the Ontario Social Safety Network, the Ontario Coalition for Social Justice and the National Anti-Poverty Organization.

We have joined with a campaign that is in the province that I think you've already heard about. It's called Feed the Kids AND Pay the Rent. I understand you've heard about this campaign in Ottawa, Sault Ste Marie and Toronto. The focus of that campaign, which we heartily endorse, is that we need a raise in the shelter allowance of welfare benefits. Since welfare rates were cut in 1995 with inflation added in, people on Ontario Works have lost 31% of the value of the benefits they're

being paid. Even the disabled, who are paid at a higher rate, have suffered a loss of 13% since 1995.

1240

Just last night I read a report by the Daily Bread Food Bank in Toronto, and it was quite shocking to me. They are finding that in the last year they are seeing more working poor needing food relief, more seniors needing food relief and more hunger. People are paying more rent for less desirable accommodations with fewer amenities. One of the reasons people are forced to use food banks is because they are spending too much of their welfare benefits on rent. We have numbers on average rents in our own region: Cobourg, Port Hope and Brighton. For a single person who is allowed \$325 a month for shelter allowance—even a bachelor apartment runs \$400 to \$450. A one-bedroom runs \$450 to \$600.

I don't want to go over time, because I want Mr Guy to have a chance to speak. So I'm going to be very brief.

NCAP is asking you today to raise the shelter portion of the welfare allowance to make it match Canada Mortgage and Housing Corp's average rent for the province of Ontario. Second, we are asking the province to build affordable housing. We understand that, right now, Ottawa has a national housing program, and it has \$680 million set aside for Ontario to participate. If Ontario will pay \$244 million, combined with Ottawa's portion, we could build 9,000 units of affordable housing.

Of course the question is, how do you do this, facing a deficit? We would respectfully suggest that you forget the proposed corporate tax cuts, which amount to \$2.2 billion. We believe that if you leave those corporate tax rates alone, that would afford you the money to raise the shelter portion of welfare allowances and to build some affordable housing in this province, which we desperately need—I can't tell you how desperately.

Mr Guy is a member of the coalition against poverty, locally. He has asked me to introduce him as a disabled person. Jim has run the gamut of misery to get where he is now. He is in receipt of Canada pension plan disability benefits, with a top-up coming from the Ontario disability support program. I'll turn the floor over to Jim. He is going to expand on the points I've made, with his own observations.

Mr Jim Guy: I'd like to thank the standing committee on finance and economic affairs for granting me this time to make a presentation. Hopefully, you'll find some of this information useful.

As I understand it, the Northumberland Coalition Against Poverty wants me to tell my story and, in doing so, put a face to welfare and disability.

I was raised in a middle-class family and was in the process of raising a middle-class family when, in the mid-1990s, the bottom fell out. Almost overnight, I went from sitting in my comfortable home, worrying about RSP contributions, to sitting in a cockroach-infested motel room, penniless. The Salvation Army had to come to my rescue to ensure that I had a roof over my head. As I recall, I could barely scrape up the price of a phone call to the local welfare office. At that time, I could only

manage to get an answering machine and a voice which assured me that they would call me back within 24 hours. Unfortunately, I, like a large number of potential clients of welfare, had no phone number that I could leave with the office for follow-up.

I was eventually approved for assistance, and received \$520 a month. Rent on my new home was \$425. That left me with a grand total of \$95. That was for everything: food and basic necessities, such as soap, laundry detergent and transportation. I could go on and on, but what's the point? The \$95 was long gone back at the food stage.

The very first challenge for a single person on welfare is to feed themselves. During the three or four months that I received assistance in 1997, I did not eat properly. I noticed that my energy level was very low, and my ability to deal with common, everyday events was slowly being compromised. Those things that many of us take for granted, such as doing a load of laundry, became major challenges. The nearest laundromat was about a kilometre away; a round trip of two kilometres carrying laundry bags is especially trying when a person is weak and run-down from not eating properly. Sometimes I would cheat and use one of the six monthly bus passes I received from welfare—I say "cheat" because those bus passes were designated for use only on the job hunt. I rationalized by telling myself that a person needs to be clean and to have clean clothes for a job interview. Anyway, they must have found out about the abuse, because the six bus passes were withdrawn as probably the only perk of being on workfare or welfare.

After about three or four months I did find a job, albeit low paying, but a job nevertheless. Before I move on, though, I wish to point out that the rent at that establishment, which is one of the few alternatives to homelessness that we have here in Cobourg, was raised to \$450 per month. I would challenge anyone in this room to try living on \$70 per month. Take my word for it: you would become physically ill, and I'm sure your psyche would suffer too.

I worked for about a year at that low-paying job. When my hours were cut back in the spring of 1998, I got in touch with the welfare office to see if I qualified for any sort of top-up. Since I was earning the princely sum of \$140 a week, I was told I did not qualify. I was no longer living at the motel at this stage, but I was definitely a member of that group you have no doubt heard about before: the working poor.

In the spring of 1998 I returned to my old profession of carpentry. I kept an employment insurance claim active and religiously reported my earnings from construction. The reason I did that was because I was hoping to avoid a period of no income and the hunger pangs that go hand in hand with poverty. Unfortunately the construction job ended with no more in sight, and the time period was awkward enough to allow for a two- to three-week wait for any employment benefits. Honesty, in this instance, was going to cost me. I did have clear conscience, and that and a buck will get you a cup of coffee, as we all know.

My health had been declining steadily over the past 18 months, mostly due to an improper diet and the stress that accompanies financial distress. In late July 1998, I contracted pneumonia and then suffered a pulmonary embolism. I was in a coma for over a month and was not expected to live.

On October 1, 1998, I was discharged from hospital. I weighed 150 pounds and quite literally had to learn how to walk and talk again. It was in this sad shape that I attended an intake interview for ODSP. At that time the office was located in Port Hope, and I recall the intake worker telling me that while my claim should go through without challenge, she wouldn't guarantee anything with the way things were going lately. She confided in me that numerous so-called worthy claims were being rejected out of hand. She exhorted me to remain steadfast and not give up. Little did I know how much that morale-booster would come into play in the months ahead.

In the meantime I was given a medical deferral and placed on welfare. I had been fortunate enough to get an apartment in a geared-to-income building, so my monthly cheque from welfare came to \$340. Once again, by the time I had met other expenses, there was not much left for food. You can imagine my chagrin when that amount was further reduced to \$270 per month.

During my recovery in hospital, my doctor had told me that the recovery process would take about a year, and that among other things it was vital that I eat properly during the process. Another thing that would take about a year was the approval process for ODSP. During that time I received numerous computer-authored reminders that I was not considered disabled. I was not eating properly, owing to my income, and my recovery involved many setbacks.

Finally, late in the summer of 1999, I was approved for ODSP. Because I had found geared-to-income housing, I received \$600 per month and, yes, a rent increase went along with that. I'd like to jump back to welfare for one moment to point out that while I was on a medical deferral on welfare my medical transportation costs were covered. But once my ODSP was approved, my transportation costs to Port Hope were not covered because of some kilometre clause, I imagine—I don't know. Apparently I live a kilometre too close to my doctor.

Just this past summer I started receiving Canada pension plan disability benefits. Apparently the three-year delay was owing to a computer error. The good news was that I would now receive \$723 per month, an increase of \$123 per month over what I was getting from ODSP. The bad news was that my rent went from \$58 per month to \$156. The good news was that I was still \$25 ahead from what I was receiving from ODSP. Once again, we go back to the bad news: I was almost immediately cut off from my medical and dental benefits.

Ostensibly the denial of benefits was owing to some formula that had left me about two dollars richer than I ought to be in order to qualify. Just recently, I managed to get my benefits reinstated. The prescription coverage

is vital for someone like me, who has to take several prescriptions on an ongoing basis. I'm somewhat concerned about the delisting of certain drugs, and cutbacks in the dental coverage have impacted on me as well.

1250

Owing to my ordeal, I have become more involved in the issues surrounding poverty. I can assure this panel that there is plenty of poverty out there, and not a whole lot of relief. Last week a middle-aged single woman who has never been on workfare was forced to apply after she had received an eviction notice from her landlord. Since her rent is \$500 a month, she is now facing the gloomy prospect of surviving the month of March on \$20.

Last spring I found a man in his 30s living on Cobourg beach. He had been there for a couple of weeks when I learned of it. He had been turned away from welfare and was too weak and discouraged to find an alternative to living outdoors. When I came across him, he was wrapped in a thick blanket, sleeping beside a fire. The blanket had several burn marks in it. I'd say he was lucky he didn't either freeze to death or burn to death. With a warm shower and a good night's sleep he bounced back and later that same spring had returned to his profession of house painting.

Those are just a couple of examples of a very extensive problem. I submit to you that the answer is not in more cutbacks or disqualifications. Contrary to popular opinion, most people do not consider welfare as an attractive alternative to a productive lifestyle. I maintain that persons who hold that opinion do so through ignorance, media misinformation or political posturing.

We as a community are only as strong as our weakest link. The current government's agenda does not appear to offer much hope or help to those who need it, our weakest link.

Unfortunately, a large percentage of those citizens who are currently suffering the many indignities offered up by poverty are children. They're not alcoholic, drug-using, bingo-playing deadbeats; they're our future. I'm here to tell you that many of our children are going to bed hungry tonight because of a penny-wise, pound-foolish approach to social programs. Going to bed hungry isn't much fun. It can literally make you sick, whether you're young or old.

Ask yourself this question, please: does the money saved in cuts to social programs equal the money spent on health and court costs down the road? Without benefit of a consultant's study or an accountant's cost comparison, I'm going to answer that question with a resounding no.

I'd like to thank the members of this committee for listening to me this afternoon.

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

Mr Galt: Thank you for your story. My apologies for not being here right at the beginning of your presentation.

Thank you for telling us about your recent life. I knew you a few years ago and respected the profession you

were in at that time. It certainly gives us a better understanding of the situations some people find themselves in.

I really don't have any questions at this point in time, other than to say thank you for sharing that with us.

The Chair: I'll go to the official opposition. Mr Parsons.

Mr Parsons: I appreciate your wanting to put a face to the situation. I have a role as the Liberal critic for persons with disabilities, whom I have always said have been sentenced to a life of poverty. The maximum of \$930 a month has not been increased since 1990. I don't know what loss—it's at least a 25% loss in buying power over that period.

You're right: 50% of the people on welfare are children, in many cases hungry children. It strikes me as ironic that we don't want to spend 20 bucks on food for them, but with the new jails we can lock them up for only \$40,000 a year once they become young offenders. And at \$40,000 a year, that's a very good deal if they're hungry—very short-sighted. "Government knows the cost of everything and the value of nothing," is an expression that's used.

I want to thank you for advocating for real people.

Mr Guy: Thank you.

The Chair: Mr Christopherson.

Mr Christopherson: I can appreciate that Mr Galt doesn't know what to do or say. I would suggest that, on behalf of Mike Harris, maybe he might want to say, "Sorry." There's nobody else in our society that I'm aware of who's had their income cut by 22%—certainly not MPPs and certainly not most of the professionals who come before us seeking more tax decreases. That's what's so damned unfair about this whole situation.

If you were with us previously, you would have heard group after group who already benefited tremendously from the economic boom and from the cuts to social assistance. That money was transferred from the poorest of the poor to the richest of the rich. What's obscene is that the only real interest the government has is which tax cuts they can afford to do next, not which programs need the funding.

I listen to them ask questions and talk about recommendations. One day I watched them ask the petrochemical industry: "You've got three or four recommendations. Which one would be your priority? We can't do them all, you know." But I never hear that being asked of poverty groups, education groups or health care workers. That's what's so frustrating about this process: the wealth of Ontario is gauged by just how rich the rich are and not by how well the average person lives.

I want to ask you how you feel about the idea that there's \$2 billion on the books to go toward more corporate tax cuts and nothing that we've heard so far toward the issues you've raised here today.

Mr Guy: I feel that it's a political philosophy, that it's the old trickle-down theory, but the trickle isn't there. For an analogy you can use the Fram oil "Pay me now or pay me later," because these children who are being raised in

poverty are going to come back to haunt us, this generation.

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

PROVINCIAL COALITION ON SPECIAL SERVICES AT HOME

The Chair: Our next presentation is from the Provincial Coalition on Special Services at Home. I would ask the presenters to please come forward, and if you could state your names for the record. On behalf of the committee, welcome. You have 20 minutes for your presentation.

Ms Beth French: Hello. I'm Beth French. I'm the chair of the Provincial Coalition on Special Services at Home.

Ms Audrey Cole: I'm Audrey Cole, a parent of a 37-year-old son with a significant disability who is presently receiving special services at home support.

Ms French: Thank you very much for providing us with this opportunity to present to you today. I'm going to begin with some information about the special services at home program and some issues that we've identified, and then Audrey is going to speak from her personal and parental perspective about those issues.

Let me begin with just explaining that since 1982 special services at home has been a key funding mechanism that has been a very creative one and available to families to access support for their family member living at home with a disability. It's a program at this point for adults and children with intellectual disabilities and children with physical disabilities. In fact, it's the only individualized and direct funding program available to families, and it's available to families in all areas of Ontario.

Currently, SSAH provides \$60 million of funding to more than 16,000 families living across the province. With that funding it allows families to be tremendously creative and flexible with very small amounts of money. We believe this makes it an extremely cost-effective program for the government, yet in fact it's tremendously valuable to parents. It's a very popular program with families, and in the year 2001 families requested \$20 million more in funding than was allocated to the program.

The Ministry of Community and Social Services we believe has been quite visionary and quite strong in its leadership in implementing this program, because it's creative and unique, and we also believe that the ministry deserves credit for its continued investment over the past 20 years. Certainly Mr Baird himself has pointed to the program as being one of the most cost-effective support programs and one of the most meaningful support programs in his experience with the ministry.

The special service at home coalition is comprised of individuals, families and agencies dedicated to ensuring that families in Ontario have access to meaningful support through this kind of program, and we believe that special services at home is a vital support. In providing

support it helps people to live meaningful lives in the community, which is what concerns us the most, obviously. We believe that it should be a program of first choice for families and that the funding should be increased at a bare minimum by that \$20 million that was requested by families last year in addition to what was allocated. We believe that it is cost-effective and efficient and provides the kind of help that families need.

We also believe that the program needs to change and evolve to respond to families' needs and that families must have a say in how a program like this works. So we'd like to take a bit of time to highlight some of the information, facts and issues with the program.

1300

A few of the details about it: SSAH in the year 2000-01 provided funding to 12,000 children and 4,915 adults living across the province. There was a waiting list of 585 families who were not able to receive funding but who qualified.

As we've already pointed out, this is a very cost-effective program: 12,000 of those families receive between \$1,000 and \$5,000 a year, then 191 families received funding in excess of \$10,000. In fact, I must say that \$10,000 is really the upper limit of funding, and when we say that 191 families may have received in excess of it, it might be \$1,000 in excess of that, certainly not much higher.

There's a total of about \$900 million in funding from the Ministry of Community and Social Services for the developmental service field in general. There are approximately 45,000 individuals served through transfer payment agencies. Of that \$900 million, \$59.1 million was allocated to special services at home, so it's a very small portion of that overall large budget.

Requests, as I indicated, were approximately \$20 million higher. There were requests that totalled \$82.9 million. In fact, only \$56 million of the \$59 million that was allocated was actually used. So you may be wondering why a program that is so popular underspent by more than \$3 million. I want to take a moment to talk about that and identify some of the issues with the program.

First of all, there's a very serious issue of crisis proportions for families in finding workers. In recent years, families have found it increasingly difficult to find workers who can provide the kind of support that their sons and daughters need. This is a very serious crisis, and in the Toronto area, where you can appreciate that life is very complex and the cost of living is very high, the allotment to special services at home was underspent by \$2 million because families couldn't find workers. They simply can't find people who are prepared to work for the wages that are paid. The cost of living has increased, public sector wages have increased, but SSAH workers haven't had an increase in 10 years. The increases in the funding levels of the program have been used to add more families, not increase the amount of money available to the families receiving the service, so families haven't had the option of increasing wages and paying

competitive wages. In fact, the average wage is \$10 an hour and there are some families that currently pay minimum wage.

Another serious problem is underfunding. In fact, families requested \$20 million more than was allocated. The current maximum funding level is \$10,000. When families apply, that's what they're keeping in mind. They're not making applications based on their real needs. They're making their applications based on their knowledge that the funding upper limit is \$10,000 a year.

There are virtually no other service options available for families and I want to underscore that point. It's not like families can say, "Special services at home is one option, it's a good one, the one we prefer, but there are other options if we don't get enough support through this funding." There are no other options available right now to families in Ontario, so these additional needs are unmet and they create significant stress for families.

The organization I work for, where I'm the executive director and where Audrey Cole is the president, is the Brockville and District Association for Community Involvement. We help families with the administration of, and a lot of the work around, their special services at home funding. We've been doing that for many years. There are currently 49 contracts averaging about \$6,000 each that we help families with. Those contracts provide an average of 475 hours of service annually to the family or families. In 1985 the average annual hours of service were 504. This represents a loss of service to families rather than an increase. So the funding is further strained as a result of the increasing cost of living, which affects workers, the increased needs of family members with disabilities and increasing numbers of aging families with children who are at home who have very high needs.

Another issue with the program is that the funding is not annualized. Families are required to apply every year, despite the fact that it has been a program that the ministry has consistently supported since 1982. The ministry refers to it as a program of last resort, which means that families are required to apply each and every year after demonstrating that they've tried to access other services. I want to underscore again that this is particularly painful to families because, were other services available, many families might take advantage of them. So it's ironic that they're then required to turn back over a 20-year period to a program that's identified as a program of last resort.

The application process demands that families accentuate their child's weaknesses rather than their strengths. This is very stressful and negative, particularly, again, since there aren't any other service options available, and also problematic, because the families have no guarantee that they're going to get the funding year to year.

The impact of this is well summed up by a parent from Toronto, Gillian Chernets, who says, "Stress doesn't come from the disability, but from the fight that is required to get what we need so that our children can be included. We have to beg each year." I can say with a

great deal of authority that the other 15,999 families receiving this program would say very much the same thing.

Another issue is lack of portability. Special services at home funding is for families. We believe it's important to provide families with funding. We believe this is a good program. We certainly want it to continue. However, it is limited because the person with the disability has to live in the family home in order for the family to receive the funding. When the family member with a disability moves away, they lose their funding. Again, there is no other funding available. There are no other program options available to people. Waiting lists are huge. The contribution that the ministry is putting into our field, after a 10-year drought, is really not providing any additional service, frankly. There are virtually no additional services. That means adults with developmental disabilities who live at home with their parents can't move. They must remain at home because there are no appropriate support options available to them. This is very restricting, preventing people from moving on with their lives. Of course, it increases the stress faced by aging parents who are looking at the future knowing that they're not able to plan for the security of their sons and daughters.

I'd say again on behalf of the organization we represent that this is a key issue we've identified as being extremely urgent for many of the families who are members of our organization.

A fifth issue is that adults with physical disabilities should be funded through this program as well. In 1989 the ministry extended special services at home funding to adults with developmental disabilities and children with physical disabilities. It's certainly time that adults with physical disabilities should have access to this program as well. We believe there is nothing magic about turning 18. This is an issue in other funding areas as well for us. Just because you turn 18, your life doesn't change, your disability isn't fixed and your circumstances don't change. So 18 shouldn't be used as any indicator that funding can stop, because there is nothing equivalent available for adults.

We have some recommendations for the government about what we believe should be done at this point. If special services at home is to remain a vital resource to families, as it has been, then we think these recommendations are aimed at ensuring its continued effectiveness. We certainly believe it's important to address the challenges faced in finding workers. At the very minimum, \$800,000 should be added that would enable providing an increase in wages.

To address the issue of underfunding, the special services at home program should provide an additional \$20 million immediately, in accordance with the requests that families made last year. Such an investment makes tremendous financial sense as it saves these families from having to apply for support from far more costly programs, frankly. Future increases, in fact, should keep pace with families' requests for service in order to avoid

the need for more costly supports. We believe it's a good preventative program. It's cost-effective, and it allows for very meaningful and worthwhile objectives to be met.

1310

We believe the program should be annualized. The government should listen to families who say that it should be a program of first choice, because in addition to the many positive attributes and advantages of the program, it is cost-effective. Families like it, it's flexible, it works very well and it makes sense to expand this program.

We believe the funding should become portable so that when an adult with a disability leaves home, their support can move with them. We also believe that the funding should obviously be made available to children with physical disabilities.

Thank you for the opportunity to present this information to you. In closing, in addition to what Audrey is going to say, I have a couple of comments from some parents in other parts of the province.

Alison Ouellette in Windsor says, "SSAH have been a lifesaver for our family providing us with much-needed respite from the daily stresses so we can enjoy our son. By giving money to families it reaches those needing it most urgently, without a lot of extra cost for administration."

Harry Pott of Brockville says, "SSAH is a sound program of support partly because it enables people with disabilities and their families to control the quality of support received by the person with a disability."

Finally, another parent states, "This is the best type of support we have for our children."

Ms Cole: Thank you for giving us the opportunity to speak. I'm speaking here as one of those rapidly aging parents to which Beth referred. I should say that our son is 37, almost 38. I am almost 75. My husband is almost 84. Our son has lived at home the whole of his life. We must have saved the government millions of dollars because the only other opportunity or alternative that would have been offered to our son had he not stayed at home for much of his life would have been an institution.

We find special services at home has enabled our son to get out into the community with personal support, to be recognized in the community, to hold little jobs, none of which he is paid for but all of which contribute to his well-being significantly. Our son doesn't speak, he has very limited language mechanisms, but he communicates extremely well and people do understand how to communicate with him once they get to know him.

We're desperate at this stage in our lives because there are no alternatives that would in any way help him to continue that kind of inclusive life that he presently is enjoying. It is only for a short while that he has had that, because it took us I can't remember how many years of special services applications and appeals to reach a point where, largely because of my health problems and my husband's health problems, we reached almost that limit. So it's a constant struggle, and it's a very insulting process.

The problem is that if we don't have more money in special services to enable us to provide this kind of support for our son, the alternative is segregated programs. I'm going to just explain why that is no longer an option for us.

Until recently, our son was still in a segregated day program. During the 15 years he was in that program, he was sexually assaulted, he was physically assaulted more times than I can remember and recently, just over a year ago, he was left behind on an off-site visit. The staff simply forgot him, and he was found there by other people who made the necessary arrangements.

There is no accountability in those segregated services. The ministry can't even force the agency that neglected him and was so irresponsible and negligent so many times to pay us the equivalent to provide an alternative to what he was actually getting in that segregated program. It's over our dead bodies that he will go back to a segregated system. There is no accountability. There may be financial accountability, but there's no real accountability to the individual.

Special services at home is the one program I'm aware of in this province that provides that accountability, because you choose the staff, you decide what will be done and the staff become totally committed to the well-being of that person. That doesn't happen in programs that serve people in congregate styles. As in that quote from Harry Pott, it's the only program which enables the individual and the family "to control the quality of support" that they get, because the worker becomes accountable to the individual.

We are fearful in our family, because right now, unless there is portability to that program and unless that little bit of money we already get could go with our son once we were no longer here and he was out of our home, if that doesn't happen, there are no alternatives for him other than some kind of institutional care, and that to me is criminal. We work all these years to provide a decent, dignified alternative, and the best anyone can suggest to us, should we no longer be here to care for our son, is that he will have to go into an institution. That's the greatest insult that a government can impose on families such as ours.

It's very real. It's a very cheap program, and it's the best value of any programs I know, and I've been in this field ever since the day my son was born. There aren't any other programs in Ontario for people with intellectual disabilities that match this in value. It simply has to have more money, because to break people off suddenly, for example, at the death of their parents, and place them in a segregated, congregate kind of care facility would be absolutely criminal. Thank you.

The Chair: I must inform you that you've used all the time, so there won't be any time for questions. On behalf of the committee, thank you very much for your presentation this afternoon.

The committee will recess until 2:30 this afternoon.

The committee recessed from 1318 to 1429.

The Chair: Good afternoon, everyone. If I can get your attention, we'll bring the committee on finance and economic affairs back to order.

There's one order of business and I'm going to have to seek unanimous consent. We have one cancellation tomorrow morning at 10:40 in Waterloo. I did get a call last night from the Council of Ontario Universities. Is the committee willing to fill in the empty space with this group, or just leave it vacant?

Mr Christopherson: Not that's it's really that relevant, but who cancelled?

The Chair: Conestoga College.

Mr O'Toole: Who wants to apply?

The Chair: The Council of Ontario Universities. Do you have any problem with that?

Mr Christopherson: No problem at all.

The Chair: So we're agreeable to that? We'll inform them that they can take that spot?

Mr O'Toole: Do you need an official motion?

The Chair: No. As long as it's agreeable to the committee, that's fine.

Mr O'Toole: As long as you write it in the record, that's fine?

The Chair: I think we probably have it in the record anyway, through Hansard, but that's fine. I don't think we need a motion on it. Thank you very much.

ONTARIO SECONDARY SCHOOL TEACHERS' FEDERATION, DISTRICT 26

The Chair: Our first presentation this afternoon—and I did use one minute, so I'll give you an extra minute—is from the Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation, District 26. I see the presenter is comfortably sitting there. I'll let you introduce yourself for the record. On behalf of the committee, welcome. You have 20 minutes for your presentation.

Mr Greg McGillis: Thank you very much, Mr Chair. I'm Greg McGillis. I'm president of the teacher bargaining unit of District 26, and president of the district, as well. I've been involved with the federation for some years. I'm also a parent of a four-year-old girl, by the name of Brontë, who is currently studying at a French school. I've written this to some extent with her in mind. I hope you find it engaging. I really invite you to take the time to think about some of the thoughts.

Funding in the education area has become the issue that eats other issues. No area is unaffected by cutbacks entirely. Problems with the new curriculum are compounded by too little training and not enough resources or time. School facilities problems are exacerbated by an unrealistic pupil accommodation grant and no money for new schools or adequate maintenance. In order to provide a starting point for your reference, I thought it might be important to offer specific concerns that teachers and others have with the effects of government underfunding.

You always run into this problem making these presentations: do you go local or do you go provincial? Frankly, I know mostly the local. So I thought I'd better

come in and tell you what is going on where I am, and best give you an idea of what the needs and the concerns are, and somehow link that back to what's going on at the provincial Legislature. Because everything that is going on in education—teachers always used to say, “That's fine. They're changing the curriculum again. We're going to get one more policy memorandum or something like that.” Frankly, I read the document, prepare my classes, go in, close the door and do my job the best I possibly can. It's increasingly difficult to do that. That's the message I'd like to portray here.

Increasingly, teachers are suffering from LTD issues—extended health. I just found out recently—and really too late to give you the figures—that over the last three years we've had triple the number of deaths we've ever had in the last 30 years among practising teachers in our board. So our insurance rates have literally gone through the roof. It's caused a minor crisis in our board. Definitely, the idea that people in our classrooms are getting sick from their jobs is a problem. The fact that so many of the support professionals who are involved are getting sick as well, and that so few of them are able to continue to the extent that they can, is a problem as well.

The paradox of recent change is that few governments have had such an activist, perhaps even ambitious, plan for education, yet no government has ever undercut their own efforts with such enormous real funding reductions, increases in workload and excessive bureaucracy. I never thought I would say that about a Conservative government. I always thought that the idea was to run it lean and mean. Certainly, the mean part isn't out, but I'm not sure that the lean part is correct. The amount of reporting that's necessary at every level is surprising. As a president of a federation, I see what the board people and the support people have to do.

From the beginning, the ISA grant application process has been flawed in the extreme, for a very long time. How is that a funding problem, you ask? The main reason it's a funding problem is, first of all, the obsession with “accountability”—when I say that, I put it in political quotation marks. There is a real problem with trying to get every last possible cent to be accounted for in every possible way.

The fact of the matter is that you can't really explain, unless you take a student down to Toronto and sit them in front of someone, just how profoundly disabled they are in some cases. So many of those students are not getting help. Many of them are dropping out of the system. Many of their needs are not being met. They will form the vast majority of our prison population. I know you hear this a lot, but it is true. They will also form the vast majority of what is a growing underclass, I believe. I'm not one to talk about class warfare, but I am concerned about the social inequities in a way that I've never been before. So we should be awake to those.

I should point out as well that previously others have come with me to these presentations. The sense of futility has grown in the schools and the sense of morale is so low that people are simply, at some level, saying the only

thing that will fix this is an election. I do believe that if you're going to make cuts, if you're going to make changes of these kinds, and if you're going to destroy what was an admired system to the rest of the country, you should have to look those people in the eye. I'm one of those people. I came from the classroom; I will return to the classroom shortly. I have no intention of not making it clear that my colleagues and I are extremely concerned with what's going on.

I am submitting on behalf of approximately 900 members of the Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation. That includes a whole bunch of different people, including psychometrists, psychologists, teachers and others. Upper Canada covers 12,000 kilometres, 18 times the size of Toronto District School Board, and serves 40,000 students in total. The board is the result of the forced amalgamation of four predecessor boards: Prescott-Russell; Stormont, Dundas and Glengarry; Lanark; and Leeds-Grenville. Each of our 17 rural high schools serves an area larger than the boundaries of the Toronto District School Board, which has 14 high schools—114 high schools; pardon me. There's a Freudian slip for you. I wish that we had 114 high schools.

Whole areas of teaching have simply not had proper guidelines in over 20 years. Despite the perception of the government that suggested the curriculum hadn't changed in many years, OSIS was only really conceived in 1980. All of OSIS had still not been delivered. In fact, it was a previous Conservative government that first introduced OSIS. It had only been the previous government before the next change occurred, which was the Common Curriculum. The Common Curriculum was then almost stillborn. It provided five or six different guidelines. People were still adjusting to that and its entire change in philosophy—it was a radical departure from what had gone before—and then we had another radical departure from what had gone before, completely different from the other two.

So in 20 years' time, when the rest of North America and the world has mostly been concentrating on educational evolution in terms of curriculum and improving the practice in the classroom, we've had ministerial and regulatory tinkering on a grand scale so crippling to the system, so completely poorly implemented and then so completely underfunded, that there's no question that the students in this province are not being served by the policies.

It's the policies that are the problem. I go back to the American campaign line that Clinton had: “It's the policy, stupid.” It really comes down to the money and the policy—the rate of change, the lack of money—and you keep coming back to it. The funding formula, the lack of money and the way that this government implements its policies have become the major issue in education. That's for parents.

We were just down walking along the street here. We happened to go into a place. The woman at the insurance place—they own their local business—was very con-

cerned about her daughter in Canterbury High School, which is in great danger. We explained partly what's going on there and she rightly was outraged that some of these problems are occurring. She was very concerned and wanted to know more. Parents—and grandparents, in her case—are very concerned about what's happening in their children's education. But the government doesn't seem to have gotten the hint yet.

I'm going to leave it to the questions, except for one little bit. What I've done is I've given you a whole selection. I just called around the schools. Sometimes the first person I talked to went out to friends and colleagues and said, "Could you maybe help me? I'm going to sit down and write some stuff that we need. This is going to the finance committee." "What's the finance committee?" "Be quiet and just help me here. I want to write this up, OK?" That kind of thing. This was done on a completely ad hoc basis, not scientific at all, but it is, I think, valuable as an insight into what's going on in the classrooms.

I direct you to page 9 of 18, the professional student services personnel. These are the people who provide the ongoing help to special-needs kids. "Government red tape consumes a greater and greater portion of their time and most psychologists now almost never see students, they are so busy feeding the vast bureaucracy created by the government's funding formula. In particular, all ISA funding is dependent on these people working as a team to adequately document and justify every penny that comes to the board through this line. If PSSPs were funded based on pre-Bill 160 levels their numbers would have to triple. If enrolment increases were factored in, then the number would be at least quadruple. It is difficult to say what the level would be if the board were required to meet the needs of all students fully under the legislation." She has a bunch of suggestions here, and I hope that you'll take the time to go over them, but I'll accept questions about that.

The next one would be page 11, which is the Thousand Islands Secondary School, Gary Simons. He offers a wonderful summary here of why you need textbooks. It should be evident, except that it's not evident, because the regulations, the policies, the funding and the funding formula simply don't recognize the ongoing need for textbooks in classrooms—incredibly.

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Let's take it to where he talks about the textbook situation, on page 15. I'm going to skip over all that and go right to "The World According to Our Textbooks."

"The new grade 12 university stream Canadian history course will use *The North Americans*, by James Christopher, a text purchased in 1988 for the Can-Am course. It refers to the Cold War as an ongoing problem. The US president is Ronald Reagan and our Prime Minister, Brian Mulroney, has just started his second term. The Canada-US free trade agreement is about to be approved. Calgary will soon host the winter Olympics. René Lévesque is the leader of the PQ, and Mulroney is trying to gain approval from all provinces for the Meech Lake

accord. The text includes excerpts from two new books: Richard Gwyn's *The 49th Paradox* (1987) and Gary Willis's *Reagan's America* (1988). International relations issues include the US Iran-contra affair and the US attempt to end Daniel Ortega's government in Nicaragua. Mikhail Gorbachev's reforms in the USSR are not mentioned, nor is the fall of the Berlin Wall or subsequent changes in Europe. (Not to mention the collapse of the Soviet empire, the reunification of Germany, no mention of Saddam Hussein, the Gulf War, the collapse of Yugoslavia and the genocidal civil wars in Bosnia and Kosovo, NAFTA, globalization of trade, transnational corporations, gay rights, neo-conservatism, the Internet revolution, the Somalia and Rwanda UN fiascos, the Rio and Kyoto environmental accords, the 1997 Quebec referendum, and Jean Chrétien as Prime Minister.)

"Our grade 12 university stream World Issues course"—this is what prepares students to go and study at the university level; this is what we're proposing for people to leave high school to study at the bachelor's degree level, and there's no funding to change this—"still uses *World Prospects*, an OAC-level text purchased in 1987. Its final section examines South Africa and apartheid. The text expresses the hope that the repressive apartheid regime might end at some future date. The text also tells readers that the map of Europe has not changed since 1945. The USSR is still treated as a united country and the Warsaw Pact is the greatest threat to NATO. Germany is still divided, and Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia are still united countries. Recent examples of terrorism cited in the text include attacks at Athens and Rome airports in 1985 and US retaliatory air attacks on Libya in 1987 after the Lockerbie bombing. Mohammar Ghaddafi is the major international sponsor of terrorism. The section on energy issues includes coverage of the recent Chernobyl nuclear accident (1986). Major US foreign policy concerns include the Iran-contra affair, the aftermath of the invasion of Grenada (1983) and growing US opposition to Daniel Ortega's socialist government in Nicaragua.

"At least four of our current texts are so old that: IBM PCs and Apple IIs are mentioned as cutting-edge technology; eight of our present staff were in high school, and five were in elementary school when we bought these books; and two students whose names are in these books have since graduated from high school, graduated from university, graduated from a faculty of education, gotten married, had two children, and have worked on our staff for at least five years!"

That is the state of history education today in the province, and there's nothing that the government has done about it. I'm accepting questions now.

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

Mr Parsons: It's hard to get a question. Up until last year, I served on a school council. I left that because we have another child who started school, so I became a

parent in a different role. Is it fair to say that one of the crises you've faced is so much unplanned change so fast?

Mr McGillis: Absolutely. I guess the problem is a combination of the fact of unplanned change so fast without the proper supports, without even the conception of proper supports, and finally the fact that there's a belief somehow, somewhere, that you can actually create change by simply pushing a button and making it happen. It simply has never occurred. Governments are always bad, I think, at implementing things—every government is—but this government has taken the cake by essentially not even making an effort. The crazy thing is that when Mike Harris gets up, as he did recently, I guess yesterday, to say that he should have done things quicker, it puts the fear of God in all of us, I think.

Mr Parsons: I've always believed that a good place to learn is a good place to work, and vice versa. We've seen the role of school boards change dramatically, where as a federation you had more involvement in the budget process, negotiations and so forth. What do you see as the idealized role for school boards?

Mr McGillis: School boards ultimately don't have any accountability. It's a reversal of what the rhetoric or the alleged political status is from the provincial government's point of view. School boards should ideally be local citizens who make decisions locally about their needs, who have some control at least over what kinds of needs their children have, how they're going to prepare their children for the future and how they're going to run their community. I honestly believe that the more you make school boards viable, the better they will be. I think the role of school boards is that you should be taking your cues from them. I sometimes hear people say that school boards are, in some cases, overspending. I've heard that claim. I've heard the claim that they weren't accountable. I think there are local political reasons in every case for that, and that's part of politics.

Do I think that everything about the provincial government currently is working just fine? No. Do I think that any elected government in the last 200 years in North America has done everything perfectly? Absolutely not. The problem right now is not school boards, and I don't think it was before either. Full funding that was not properly funded for was a problem; it cost \$1 billion. There was a lot of change in the system. The social contract created a lot of problems. That meant there was defunding already going into the system, but at the same time boards had control over their own destiny. If they were going to raise taxes, they had to go back and be accountable locally to their local constituents and answer questions about that.

Mr Christopherson: Thank you for your presentation. It's going to be interesting watching you shadowbox with the government members because you're going to want to talk about the real issues, one of which is that there's not enough funding to do the things you're mandated to do, and they're going to want to talk to you about everything but, so be ready.

Mr McGillis: Well put. Thank you.

Mr Christopherson: Check Hansard; that's the history.

Just to follow up on the textbook issue, is it just one particular area, like just the poli-sci area, where you're behind, or is it right across, in all the subjects?

Mr McGillis: It really is right across, in all the subjects. In fact, when they say textbooks, they really mean curriculum materials. That includes buying the pickled pig that you get for the OAC course or the gerbil that you're to operate on or the frog for the grade 9 course, those kinds of things. It can be actually having the stuff necessary to run a Bunsen burner, those kinds of things. You're talking about a very large group of stuff in order to run a class and it comes down to math.

Surprisingly, the perception of people who are not experts in math—most of us—is that math hasn't changed in 100 years. Well, in fact math is exponentially growing and seems to change almost overnight, and even that has an effect in the classroom. We have to prepare students for more and more unusual kinds of concepts, things that have changed in math in the last few years.

It's true of science. It's remarkable the kinds of things that have been left out of science textbooks because 20 years ago it simply never occurred to them to put them in. Our students are not prepared, I think, in part for the content, but they're also not prepared for the kinds of concepts and for the kind of thinking that's going on. I gave you the history one because I think it's funny. It is funny, but it's also tragic. It's a tragicomedy here. It's terrible that it would occur this way. Hopefully we'll never have to laugh again about that kind of thing.

Mr Christopherson: We've had testimony that in some schools not only do they have to share books in the classroom or share the books between classrooms, but some of the principals have to pack up their texts and actually share them with other schools. In addition to hearing about dog-eared pages of photocopying, that is the best they can do in terms of dealing with lack of actual textbooks. Have you experienced those too or are they unique to elsewhere?

Mr McGillis: It's ironic. No, in fact some of the strange things that go on in schools now have become so common that we're forgetting they're unusual. You mentioned, and of course it seems ridiculous, that there is only one set of math books for a particular course that's taught in three different schools and it is literally shared between those schools because, based on whenever the school hits that particular section of the curriculum, they have to be able to pack them up and send them across. Everyone has to teach based on the scheduling of other schools of when they're having these courses and at what point this particular thing is offered.

It's rough on the books, it's rough on the kids, it's rough on the teachers. It doesn't work.

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Mr Christopherson: I can remember, and I'm going back, as time goes by, further and further, but when I was in school you were hard done by if you were one of those that had to use a book that somebody had used the

previous year so that it had one year's battering on it; it had a name in it. You avoided it by just being at the end of the line when they were handing out the books, because the teacher handed out the used ones first and then cracked open the new boxes and handed out the new ones. The worst that happened was that you were somebody who got the same book, same version, but just a year older. That seems like the garden of Eden compared to what's going on now.

Mr McGillis: Yes, the idea of new books seems really unfamiliar to us now. We're not used to the idea. Most of it is scrounging from other places. Some places will stop offering a course in a certain way and what you'll do is consolidate four or five schools to get one course of seven books.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr Christopherson. We've run out of time.

Mr Galt: Just in response to Mr Christopherson, if we didn't have to pay over \$9 billion in interest on the debt—we continued at the rate of an \$11-billion deficit every year, adding \$1,000 to every man, woman and child of their debt for the last six years of being in office. We'd be upwards of \$200 billion in debt. Have a look at what they did. Yes, they spent at the rate of \$11 billion a year. You went like crazy.

The question I want to ask you is, I see buses pull in, lined up at Queen's Park for students to do a tour of the facility. I think it's great. But they come to see the theatrics of question period, which really isn't very much about politics or governing the country. On this committee alone over the last three years we've been out to—well, I've been to at least 15 cities, maybe approaching 20. Probably during my term—from 1995, two terms until now—in the various committees I've served in, it's probably approaching 70 to 75 cities I've been in and out of and not once has a teacher brought some students to observe hearings. We're within four blocks of a secondary school that probably teaches politics. In this community there's not a single student as yet, and I doubt if any will come. I have never seen a student come to where real history, real politics, real decision-making is going on. Why doesn't this ever happen? I don't understand.

Mr McGillis: First of all, I'll admit to you that you always start students—it's no different from this committee as I try to make things familiar to you about what I'm talking about, because you don't live in the education system all the time; you're actually on the finance committee. I'm presuming that your main interest is probably budgets and the political aspect of policy-making. So I'm starting with what the specifics are.

Any time you meet with students and you're going to take students somewhere, you're thinking of the thing that's going to catch their mind, that's going to create an interest and is going to be dramatic.

I would say it's a great idea and I would propose it to all my members, except that they just don't have the money to make the kinds of field trips that they used to. Would I say that these can be very dramatic and very

interesting? Absolutely. It's a great idea. Right now the number of field trips is dropping substantially and there's a certain kind that's expected. Students feel if they don't get that particular field trip in their career, they've been very hard done by. It's just like the books. Every time we hand out the textbooks with other students' names in them, and the list keeps getting longer and longer and longer and you've got now 30 students in one textbook, that really sends a wrong message; there's a psychological problem.

The same idea: we're trying to keep the system together. It's a great innovative idea, let's take them to committee meeting and tell them how the inner workings of bureaucracy work. In fact, I'm not even sure that all teachers even understand the way this works, because it was a hard sell. I thought I was going to bring a teacher here today and they frankly don't believe that anybody's listening. So that's a main problem. There's a disaffection out there that's so great. I would like to counter it.

I believe in engaging everyone, regardless of whether I disagree with your ideas. You know, Mr Galt, I've come here for the last few years, and finance is not my expertise; I'll grant you that. I came here with John McEwen, before, when he used to present as well. I really did learn—there were some real discussions. I engaged Mr Beaubien, the Chair, shortly before the session, in a really interesting discussion about some specifics. But I don't see that education is going in that direction where you're seeing more visits to places that are unusual, different. That's not the kind of thing that's going on, and a lot of it is funding.

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

Mr McGillis: Thank you very much, Mr Beaubien.

OUR SCHOOLS, OUR COMMUNITIES

The Chair: Our next presentation is from Our Schools, Our Communities. I would ask the presenter to please come forward and state your name for the record. On behalf of the committee, welcome.

Mr Mitchell Beer: My name is Mitchell Beer, and I'm co-chair of Our Schools, Our Communities.

With your permission, Mr Chair, I would like to add a quick response to Mr Galt's question just now. Not only can our school board no longer afford any field trips of any note, and not only is our board now deciding to close down some of the very special and unique facilities to which those field trips were sometimes sent, but I would add that our students don't really need a field trip to see history in action or see the results of the policies in this province, because they go on that field trip every day. It's called going to school. What you need to know politically, as far as the condition of the education system is concerned, is that in our schools our children are getting an object lesson every day in how this government treats them and how defunding affects them. That's their field trip. I wish we could do better, but we need some money before we can start.

Back to my prepared presentation: we're a group of Ottawa parents and other community volunteers who are desperately concerned about the impact of a provincial education defunding formula that has taken \$93 million out of our classrooms over the past four years, just as it has looted \$3 billion from public school students across Ontario. We come before you today with a very simple, straightforward message for the province's next Premier, finance minister, and education minister: it's time to pay the bills.

In this statement I'll give you a quick update on the budget crisis in the Ottawa-Carleton District School Board and on the extraordinarily courageous stand our public school trustees are taking in response to provincial defunding. I'll tell you a bit about the campaign we've launched—we call it Shame the Deadbeat Province—to remind our local government MPPs of their responsibilities to their constituents and of their government's responsibilities under the Education Act. And I'll leave you with some practical suggestions on where and how you should begin to reinvest in a local public education system that is truly hanging by a thread just a few years after the government's first education minister, John Snobelen, promised to create a useful crisis in our schools. Need I even say the words: "Promise made, promise kept."

But first, a word on language: our group talks about the education defunding formula, because we don't think it has anything to do with funding education when a provincial government sets out to eviscerate special education, bulldoze viable community schools, leave thousands upon thousands of children in portable classrooms that may or may not be toxic and disfranchise a whole generation of students who will never again have a chance at the quality of education they deserve; and we cringe when the education minister talks about stable funding, because we're sick of trying to explain that a small annual increase in education spending is actually a decrease when it falls short of inflation and increased enrolment.

We've been quite deliberate in choosing the name of our campaign: Shame the Deadbeat Province. If we as parents were failing to provide the basics for our children, the province would call us deadbeats and come after us. If we as taxpayers were late paying our taxes, the federal and provincial governments would track us down and that D-word would probably come up again, sooner rather than later. After years of watching our schools and classrooms deteriorate and watching thousands of high-needs children fall through the cracks, we feel that someone has to be the grown-up, and so now it's time for parents and other voters to call the deadbeat province to account.

In Ottawa we face our own version of the school budget crisis that is playing itself out in public school boards across the province. Make no mistake: you need to know, especially on the government side, that we know we're not alone.

The government sent our school board out to negotiate contracts with teachers and other professionals, but set maximum salary levels that were lower than the negotiated pay scales that were in place when the defunding formula took effect. The result? The Ottawa public board is short \$4,000 for every teacher on its payroll and \$10,000 for every educational assistant even though teaching salaries are just about right on the provincial average. The situation with educational assistants is partly a matter of definition. The ministry assumes that EAs are paid to monitor lunchrooms when many of ours are qualified and needed to catheterize children and provide other forms of front-line support to students with profound special needs. This year the salary gap totals \$26.4 million out of a total budget in the \$500-million range.

In special education we have 3,800 children on waiting lists for assessment and many more who aren't even being listed. There was a time in our community, not 10 years ago, when there was no waiting list for special education. Parents and children are now waiting up to four years for testing, unless they can afford private assessments at high cost. Some parents have been told that schools are only prioritizing special-ed assessments for children who are suicidal. As for actual service delivery, we've heard of children with a tendency to throw furniture and others who must bring their oxygen tanks to class, for whom the board cannot afford one-to-one educational assistants.

Our funding for school maintenance falls far short of the amount that is really needed to keep a school clean, safe and in good repair. Our board estimates its maintenance backlog at \$280 million and rising, on capital stock of about \$1 billion.

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Our per pupil transportation funding has been far short of our coterminous Catholic board ever since the defunding formula froze transportation grants in the late 1990s. At the time the formula took effect, both public boards in Ottawa-Carleton had made their busing more efficient and reduced per pupil costs in order to divert local tax dollars—in the days when we had local tax dollars—to the classroom. The two coterminous separate boards had not taken the same step. This year, we receive about \$150 less per student to bus children along the same streets to essentially equivalent schools.

The other headline issue for us is the province's refusal to fund school boards in a way that recognizes inflation and enrolment increases. In Ottawa, truly stable funding would have meant a funding increase from \$556 million to \$627 million since 1997. This year's funding stands at \$504 million, and our board is being asked to cut another \$33.7 million this year and an expected \$14 million next year to balance its budget. We're here to tell you that our schools can't take it, our students deserve better and our community won't stand for it. Furthermore, if we keep hearing the minister talk about stable funding in the guise of further cuts, we're going to have to start asking which end of the horse she's trying to

sell us with her publicly financed PR campaigns and exactly which end of the horse she thinks we are.

There isn't time today to enumerate the dozens of other areas where our schools are underfunded, but there is one glaring disparity that we have to bring to your attention, and government members should also note that it's an easy one to resolve. As most of you probably know, until this year the province's pupil accommodation formula would only allow grants for new school construction in boards whose student population exceeded the rated capacity of the schools. We've had major problems with the requirement for 100% utilization. The capacity in many of our schools has been miscalculated, and no other kind of building, public or private, is expected to operate at 100% capacity.

But the other issue was that school boards like Ottawa, Hamilton, Halton and Kawartha Pine Ridge faced a peculiar problem. We had pockets of overcrowding with, in our case, thousands of children in portables, even though capacity across the board was below 100%. In Ottawa, the province's dogmatic insistence on a 100% capacity standard led to a three-year school closure process that pitted schools and neighbourhoods against each other and led to the loss of five viable community schools.

Meanwhile the government was hearing from parents, trustees and its own Education Improvement Commission that it would be a good thing to recognize pockets of overcrowding. Incredibly, somebody was listening. The May 2001 general legislative grant regulation contains a provision for new school construction grants where pockets of overcrowding exist. It's far from perfect, it doesn't cover operating costs and makes it harder for a growing school board to fund the next round of new school construction. However, the new provision would have given Ottawa students some immediate respite while the grown-ups slogged it out around the technical details of the defunding formula.

But there was a catch. New school construction grants in pockets of overcrowding are only available to school boards that are below 100% capacity. We assume the rationale is that boards that are above 100% can get construction grants by the usual means. In Ottawa the problem is that we recently slipped over the 100% threshold by closing those five elementary schools and gradually increasing our enrolment. Now that we are over 100%, we qualify for about a million dollars in construction grants over the next 25 years. But if we were still below that magic 100%, we would qualify for \$5 million a year, not \$1 million.

The bottom line is that Ottawa is missing out on \$100 million in construction funding just because our previous school board followed orders and closed more schools than it should have. We should have shovels in the ground on four new schools right now—today—if not for a bizarre and eminently repairable glitch in the formula.

Our good-news message for ministers Ecker and Flaherty, quite frankly, is that our community is on to them. In a Decima poll this past January, 76% of Ottawa

residents agreed or strongly agreed that our schools are underfunded and that the province is to blame. Even more significantly, in November 2000 school board elections, Ottawa voters cast their ballots for a marvellously courageous group of trustees who have spent the past 15 months gathering data, marshalling evidence and letting the province know that education defunding in Ottawa is no longer acceptable.

In July the Ottawa-Carleton District School Board refused to pass a budget that would have represented an abdication of trustees' responsibility to the children and taxpayers in our community. Trustees begged Minister Ecker to send in a financial investigator to satisfy herself that their numbers were right. The minister accused the trustees of political posturing and then went on vacation.

In October trustees published Formula Facts 2, a copy of which I've given you in PDF. It was a report to the community that documented a \$180-million gap between the provincial funding our schools receive and the dollars to which we're entitled. Formula Facts identified annual spending gaps of \$41.6 million in special education, \$3.5 million in English-as-a-second-language programming, \$3.9 million in French-language programs in Canada's bilingual national capital, \$9.4 million in guidance and library teachers, \$14.3 million in learning technologies, \$10.2 million in textbooks and school supplies, \$5 million in transportation, \$2.8 million in new school construction, and there were other items as well.

Earlier this week, in the wee hours of Tuesday morning, our trustees adopted an accountability budget that includes a \$50-million account receivable from the provincial government. The \$50 million includes the \$26.4-million salary gap, \$3 million for inflation, \$5 million for student transportation, \$5.6 million for textbooks and learning materials and \$10 million for school operations, maintenance and renewal. This budget is our community's only alternative to budget scenarios that would have cut another \$12 million from special education, eliminated junior kindergarten, increased class sizes, closed nine or more schools and eliminated most busing or charged user fees for transportation.

The accountability budget reflects our trustees' assumption that the government of the wealthiest province in what is supposed to be the best country in the world in which to live would be unwilling to abdicate its fiscal responsibilities under the Education Act. Some of them have suggested that international rating agencies like Moody's might be a little bit confused to learn that a major provincial borrower—I'm sorry, there's a mistake in my text here—was defaulting on its financial obligations. Some of our members have thought about fundraising for an ad in the Wall Street Journal to put international investors on notice about a provincial government that won't pay its bills.

As parents and taxpayers, we are desperately grateful that our trustees won't rest until our schools are properly funded, and you need to know that the community is behind them every step of the way. Our Shame the Deadbeat Province campaign includes a pre-election canvass

in Ottawa's four Conservative ridings to make sure the voters have the facts about the school budget crisis.

In the end, we want the money sooner rather than later so that our teachers and other professionals can begin mitigating the incredible, immense damage that has been caused by seven years of brutal provincial defunding. We know we're going to get it in one of two ways: either our local MPPs will have their political instincts triggered by constant calls from angry constituents, or they'll find themselves looking for day jobs after the next election. Either way, sooner or later we know we have no choice but to win this fight for our children.

In this statement I've suggested some specific areas that cry out for immediate provincial reinvestment. Some parts of Ottawa's school budget crisis have developed over a period of many years, and we wouldn't expect them be solved overnight. For this year's budget we have three recommendations:

First, pay your bills for the salary gap. By taking over sole authority for education funding but leaving school boards responsible for contract negotiations, the government essentially took it upon itself to cover the contracts that trustees negotiated in good faith. In Ottawa the salary gap is worth \$26.4 million for the coming school year.

Second, begin reinvesting in special education. In Formula Facts 2, our trustees identified a \$41.6-million gap in special-ed funding, not including the \$12 million we'll lose this year if the province continues to ignore the salary gap. An initial instalment against the \$41.6 million would bring some short-term respite and flexibility to an area of our board's operation that is in desperate need of both. We would consider \$20 million, or roughly 50%, a reasonable starting point for this year. We'll be back for the rest next year.

Finally, fund new schools in pockets of overcrowding. This is a perversity in the education funding formula that I've already explained at some length. It's worth noting that the four communities at the top of our board's new school construction list are in ridings currently held by Conservative MPPs. So, if I may be so bold, this is a great opportunity for the government to fund the pupil places in the next budget and take maximum political credit, knowing that the costs will have to be paid out over the next 25 years by a government of another political stripe.

Before the session, Mr Chair, you asked me the total per pupil cost of what we're proposing here. The total value is \$50.4 million. We didn't realize until you had me add it up—and thank you for that—that we're within not very much of the \$50 million our trustees are asking for. It equals \$630 per student, based on about 80,000 students in our board.

This concludes our formal presentation. You have Formula Facts 2 and also our own lifeline budget on your desks. I've also brought a bag of our buttons. They say, "Shame On Our Deadbeat Province." I'd like to tell you that they're available to government members in bulk for \$33.7 million. You can buy out our whole supply, Mr

Galt, if you like. But the actual cost is one dollar or whatever anyone would like to donate.

The Chair: We have one minute per caucus, and I'll start with Mr Christopherson.

Mr Christopherson: As you noted earlier, the conversation I told you wouldn't happen didn't.

Mr Beer: Duly noted.

Mr Christopherson: We'll see if you're any luckier on the second go around.

I want to focus on special ed, because it's come up as a top priority in virtually every community we've been in and in every school area. Whether we're talking elementary or secondary, Catholic or public, it's huge. I noted in the written text that you said 3,800 children are on waiting lists for assessment, and some aren't even being listed.

1510

Mr Beer: What's happening is that you don't get listed until you're two years behind on your school work. What's happening is that because the assessments are so far behind and people in our community have basically given up on getting the resources to do the assessments, teachers aren't putting kids on the list any more because there's no point giving them false hope. If their parents can't afford private assessments that run into the hundreds or maybe thousands of dollars, they're out of luck.

The Chair: Mr Galt.

Mr Galt: Thank you for your presentation. I'm rather disappointed that Mr Christopherson didn't listen last time. He keeps talking about the tax cuts costing money. I think you should have a look at the budget, Mr Christopherson, and see that the taxable revenue—

Interjection.

Mr Galt: I'm talking to you.

Mr Beer: Mr Chair, is this coming off my time?

Mr Galt: He's criticizing the government for not responding to you. If you happen to look at the budget, you'll find that the tax revenues have increased by 50% since we cut some taxes. There has not been any cost to the taxpayer. We did balance the budget. We're not laying on debt to our children into the future, as your government did for umpteenth years.

Mr Christopherson: I'll gladly debate you, but I think it's the presenter we came to hear.

Mr Galt: That's where it's at: an \$11-billion debt—

Mr Beer: Mr Chair, having travelled at my own expense—

The Chair: Just a minute. Mr Galt does have the floor. If he doesn't ask a question, then I'll have to go on.

Mr Galt: I did ask a question, and then you didn't want to respond, because I was questioning expensive trips to Toronto—

The Chair: Question?

Mr Galt: —versus a four-block walk from the local high school to this room. You kept going on about dollars the board doesn't have for expensive trips. I was querying about coming to a hearing such as this in a community such as here, and I have yet—

The Chair: Question, please.

Mr Galt: —when I've visited with probably 60 or 70 committees; in that neighbourhood—to see a single student brought by a teacher to a committee hearing. That was the question I was asking: to walk to it, not the expensive trip to Queen's Park. And you kept on going about the expensive trips to Queen's Park.

The Chair: Mr Galt, I have to bring an end to it. I have to go to the official opposition.

Mr Parsons: Yes. I'm looking at the list of presenters today—the autism society, the town of Cobourg says it's going to get rid of busing for disabled individuals in this community, the school council association, the coalition against poverty, special services at home, your presentation, the previous one—and it's quite apparent to me who has paid the price for the corporate tax cuts: they're being paid in our classrooms.

I'm sure you had something else to do today. You've driven here at your own expense, and I appreciate that. All over Ontario I'm hearing from people who aren't communicating with each other but are saying the same thing as you, that our schools are in crisis. The price isn't being paid by the school boards or by the teachers, it's being paid by the students, who have become guinea pigs in this grand experiment.

You've detailed the problems, as you've identified them. What happens to the young people of your community if these problems aren't addressed?

Mr Beer: The magic and the challenge of a public school system is that it is the one opportunity for everybody to get a shot. If a child has come to Ottawa or Hamilton or one of the other major ESL centres having spent all their life in a refugee camp, maybe with major post-traumatic stress, they have a chance at a future if they can get the public education they need and deserve. A special education student has behavioural problems that motivate him or her to throw furniture. A public education system can deal with that.

It doesn't mean that everybody is going to have the same outcome, but it means everybody is going to have the same opportunity. And that only works if that system is funded.

David Foote, the demographer, said you don't do more with less, you do less with less. And across Ontario we do communicate with each other. E-mail is a marvellous tool. We communicate together; we organize together; we work together right across the province. We know that this government has looted \$3 billion from our classrooms across the province through its defunding formula. You don't do more with less, you do less with less, and a whole generation of kids aren't going to get that shot.

Mr Galt and his government talk about prosperity. They talk about building the economy of the future. The weasel words are right out there. Of course, our group believes in building the economy of the future, but you don't do that if you aren't building what people call the human capital. I don't like thinking of my daughter as human capital, I like thinking of her as a wonderful

seven-year-old with whom I'd like to be able to spend more time at home instead of coming to hearings like this.

The Chair: With that, on behalf of the committee, thank you very much for your presentation.

NORTHUMBERLAND COMMUNITY LEGAL CENTRE

The Chair: Our next presentation is from the Northumberland Community Legal Centre. I would ask the presenter to please come forward; if you could state your name for the record, please. On behalf of the committee, welcome. You have 20 minutes for your presentation.

Mr Garth Dee: Thank you very much. I am here on behalf of Northumberland Community Legal Centre. The Northumberland Community Legal Centre is a legal clinic funded by Ontario legal aid. We provided services in areas generally known as poverty law. That means landlord and tenant work for tenants; we do work with Ontario Works claimants; Ontario disability claimants; workers' compensation claimants; we also, on the federal level, represent people with concerns with employment insurance and Canada pension plan—primarily Canada pension plan disability.

My name is Garth Dee. I'm a staff lawyer with the legal clinic. I have five topics that I've identified out of the experiences of our clinic that I wish to address to you today in your pre-budget consultations.

These are: first, gaps in the Ontario Works Act; second, inflation erosion of benefits under the Ontario Works Act, ODSP and workers' compensation legislation; the third is inconsistency in the government's policy with respect to what I'm referring to as "innocent overpayments"; the fourth is with respect to inefficiencies in the administration of justice through administrative tribunals in the province; fifth, I would like to address the importance of legal aid funding, which obviously affects us but also affects others in our community.

First of all, I'd like to talk about gaps in Ontario Works coverage. First let me say something about Ontario Works. There are a number of safety nets that have been built to protect the people in our society. The net that is built closest to the ground as the last protection against homelessness and as the last protection against not having enough food to eat is Ontario Works.

For policy reasons, there have been certain people who have been cut out of coverage by Ontario Works. I suspect that the people at our clinic, on our board and on our staff don't share the government's view with respect to a number of the gaps that have been created. I'm talking here about quit/fired penalties and lifetime bans for fraud, that type of thing. But that's not what I'm here to talk about today. I understand the political nature of those questions, and I'm not taking those on here today.

What I am asking you to take a serious look at are what I've identified as gaps in coverage under Ontario

Works. Particularly with respect to the government members, I'm asking you to take a serious look at these gaps and say, "Does it make sense to have these gaps in Ontario Works coverage?" In my submission, the types of people and situations that I will identify here who do not get coverage under Ontario Works are not justifiable on any policy grounds at all. These holes need to be fixed.

The first hole that I'd ask you to fix is a situation that involves applicants with insured loans. What we're dealing with here is a person who, while working, goes out and gets a loan. The loan may be used for any number of purposes, including buying a house, buying a car or for the purchase of consumer goods. When they obtain that loan, the person who loans them the money sells them disability insurance to cover the loan. A lot of these people are very cautious; they want to be able to pay their loans if in fact they do become disabled. And they accept the offer of disability insurance. They pay for it. Subsequently, they do become disabled in a number of cases, sometimes temporarily, sometimes permanently. They haven't gone on to ODSP benefits yet. The insurer, which is a separate company, usually, from the creditor, pays the creditor, as it should under the terms of the insurance plan. However, the person is without any money at all. They can't pay their rent; they can't buy food because they're not working.

So they apply to Ontario Works. What happens when they apply to Ontario Works is that they're denied assistance. They are either denied assistance or their assistance is reduced. You've heard a lot of people, I'm sure, talk about how difficult it is to live on Ontario Works. Once you start to take deductions off Ontario Works, it becomes almost impossible. And there will be a deduction from Ontario Works entitlement, dollar for dollar. Every dollar the insurance company pays the bank comes off the Ontario Works entitlement of the individual, and there is nothing that the individual can do to divert that income stream from the insurer away from the bank or financial institution toward themselves.

The rationale is that the loan payments are considered income to the person because they go to service the person's debt; however, the result of this is that you leave people without access to money for food or shelter. These people have exercised excessive caution in trying to avoid exactly that same circumstance, to the extent of taking out insurance against it, but the insurance in this case works against them.

If a person came to me for advice about whether they should insure a loan, my advice to them, based on the way Ontario Works acts, is if you have any question about your potential to need Ontario Works assistance, do not under any circumstances insure a loan. You will end up cutting your own throat with respect to your ability to put food on your table.

I'm asking you to recommend that there be excluded from the definition of "income" insurance payments made to creditors that cannot be accessed by Ontario Works recipients. Ask them to try to get that money from

the insurer, if they can. I have no problem with that. But if they cannot get that money and they cannot buy food, Ontario Works assistance should be there to help them.

1520

A second hole in the Ontario Works coverage comes with respect to people who use one loan to pay off another loan. A person might typically have a department store credit card with a couple of thousand dollars on it. The interest rates on department store credit cards are extremely high; they're 24%, 28%. It costs a fortune to keep a balance on a department store credit card. A person finds himself on Ontario Works, sees this amount of money accumulating each month and wants to do something about it. They find a source of a lower-income loan. It can be through a credit union, it can be through a friend of the family, it can be from any number of sources, but they're able to effectively reduce their interest rates from 24%, 28% down to a much more reasonable level. The problem is that in the month following the month you take out the new loan you don't get any Ontario Works assistance. Your benefits are cut off in the subsequent month. The rationale for that is that there is a provision in the Ontario Works regulations that says the proceeds of a loan are considered income.

I'm asking you to carve out an exception to that general rule, and the exception I'm asking you to carve out is to exclude from the definition of income the proceeds of a loan that are used to pay off another loan. So if somebody wants to act in a fiscally prudent manner in order to reduce the amount of interest they have to pay on a monthly basis—we're trying to get people to act in financially prudent ways. I understand that's the thrust of the government's policies. However, in this case when they do it, they're punished for it. I submit to you that's incorrect and it needs to be changed.

A third example is an example that wouldn't have existed just over a year ago. The regulations under the Ontario Works Act were changed about a year ago. This situation involves someone who owns a piece of property used for non-residential purposes. In the case of a homeowner, it might be a second piece of property; in the case of someone who rents accommodation, it may be a piece of property. We've seen this occur with people who own a share of a hunting camp or other people who have inherited property a few months previously. They're out of a job, they don't have any money. Again, they need to eat, and they apply to Ontario Works. Up to about a year ago, when you applied for Ontario Works the administrator would say, "We're insisting on your selling that piece of property. Make reasonable efforts to sell that property." However, that provision is no longer there. At the present time, if you apply for Ontario Works and you own a piece of non-residential property, even if it doesn't generate any income, you're considered to have assets in excess and you're denied Ontario Works assistance. So you have this piece of property, but you can't eat land. You need to eat, you need to pay your rent, and you can't do it. You list the property for sale, but it may not sell yet. We had one person come in with a

piece of property that was nominally worth some amount of money but it was pretty much a useless piece of property because you couldn't build on it. However, it was a second piece of property with a value in excess of their monthly entitlement for Ontario Works, and they were denied assistance.

We're asking you to restore the previous provisions. Allow a person with a second piece of property to obtain Ontario Works assistance. If the administrator needs to take a lien against the property to recover the value of any benefits paid, that's fine, there's no objection to that. What we do have an objection to is people who are without money and who cannot do anything about it. These are the most difficult people to counsel. In the first example, I counselled a gentleman like that. He was in desperate circumstances. I could not figure out how I could get him some money in order to eat, and I don't think he did anything wrong. In fact, I think he did everything that was expected of him.

I won't spend as much time on the second issue because I'm sure other people have talked to you about it, and this is inflation erosion of Ontario Works, ODSP and workers' compensation benefits.

Since 1995, when the rate cuts took effect, there has been no adjustment for inflation. In that time, cost-of-living increases on the CPI index have amounted to approximately 15%. What is happening is that inflation is being used in stealth to reduce the already low level of benefits that people are on. In the case of Ontario Works recipients, it's a level of income support that is almost impossible to survive on as it is. In the case of Ontario disability applicants, these are the disabled in our province, whom we indicate we want to support. We don't want to see these people living in poverty, but we're allowing inflation to erode the benefits that were in place as of 1995.

With respect to workers' compensation, there used to be CPI indexing. It got changed to Friedland indexing; it got changed to modified Friedland indexing. To make a long story short, in the same time that there have been CPI index changes of about 15% over the last seven years, most injured workers on permanent disability pensions have seen their benefits increase by only 2%. Again, inflation is being used in stealth to reduce benefits. In our submission, the government must stop.

The third topic is again another one I wish to talk about just briefly. Recently in the news there was information that the federal government may have accidentally, innocently overpaid the province of Ontario and some other provinces in their tax-sharing formula. The position of the province was very clear: these monies were received, they were received in good faith, they have been spent, and for us to have to repay that overpayment now would be a hardship on the citizens of Ontario.

We then turn to where the government of Ontario is not the receiver of an innocent overpayment but is the payor of an innocent overpayment, and this has to do with social assistance. With respect to the poorest people

in the province, if the government makes an innocent overpayment to them, the government's policy is that it must be repaid. It stays on the books and it will be pursued, and it will be pursued vigorously and aggressively. I'm asking the government to enunciate a policy on innocent overpayment recovery. Does the recipient of an innocent overpayment have to repay it or not? I'm asking the government to abide by that enunciated principle and live by that principle, whether you're a debtor or whether you are the recipient. It was astonishing, actually, to hear the government's position about overpayments payable to the federal government when it maintains the position it does with respect to welfare recipients. Pick a rule and live by it, I'm asking you.

The fourth topic is one I hope the government members don't get too upset at me about, and I hope they understand where I'm coming from on this. This has to do with the administration of tribunals in the province, and it has to do with patronage appointments to provincial administrative tribunals. I'm not here today to try to convince anyone that patronage should end. Patronage appears to be a fact of life. I've done some reading on it; Jeffrey Simpson wrote an excellent book on the role of patronage in Canadian politics. I'm not here today to talk about the overall system of patronage in the province, but I do want to talk to you about bad patronage appointments.

Most of the tribunals that we appear in front of on behalf of our clients are staffed by people who are there as a result of government patronage, whether it's on the provincial scene in the case of SBT, Workplace Safety and Insurance Appeals Tribunal or Ontario Rental Housing Tribunal. We also have patronage appointments in the federal tribunals we appear in front of for employment insurance and CPP. It costs the government no more money to put a good, qualified adjudicator on those panels than it does to put a bad adjudicator. Unfortunately, what we are seeing when we go to the tribunals—and I'm addressing here the provincial tribunals; I'm not trying to compare them to federal tribunals or to say the federal tribunals are necessarily any better. We are seeing in some instances appalling adjudication, and I've given some examples on page 4.

Someone who was running an SBT hearing told me that I couldn't ask leading questions of the government's witness on cross-examination because if the government couldn't ask leading questions of their own witness, then I couldn't. They fundamentally misunderstood the role of examination and cross-examination in the hearing process. I saw a WSIAT member who, without realizing there was anything wrong with it at all, indicated to me in the middle of the hearing that he had done his own independent research into the disability that we were there to deal with on the date of the hearing. Again, a fundamental betrayal of the rules of natural justice and fairness. I saw an ORHT member who accepted minutes of settlement, adjourned a hearing and then issued an order that was different than the minutes of settlement we had submitted. I wrote to the tribunal later saying, "This

must be a mistake.” I was informed no, it wasn’t a mistake. The ORHT member had decided that she didn’t agree with the minutes of settlement filed. You just can’t do that. If you want to hold a hearing, you hold a hearing. If you want to accept minutes of settlement, you accept minutes of settlement. But you can’t not have the hearing and then do something different than the minutes of settlement say.

1530

There are a couple of other examples. There is some bad adjudication, there are some bad appointments going on. They reflect poorly on the administration of justice. They’re inefficient because in many cases you have to do the hearings over again. You go through appeals. You get the incorrect result, so you get money spent where it shouldn’t be spent, you get money not spent where it should be spent. It’s a question of efficiency. It also reflects extremely poorly on the government when this kind of thing happens.

I don’t want to get into what it takes to fix all of it, but I have a fairly straightforward suggestion in terms of what the government might do to limit the effects of what I’m referring to as bad patronage appointments, and it has primarily to do with the role of the chair in these tribunals. I’m requesting that the chairs of these tribunals be of the highest possible quality, with established credentials in the fields that the tribunals govern. That’s not always the case now. It should be the case.

The chairs of these tribunals must also have the ability to veto the appointment of individuals who are selected for appointment through the political process. When the Premier’s appointments secretariat, or whatever it’s referred to, calls up the chair of a tribunal and says, “We have three new members for you,” the chair of that tribunal must be able to take a look at those members and say, “I’ll take two of them but that third one really doesn’t cut it. They just don’t have the basic skills that are necessary to do this job.” You must give that power to the tribunal as a check over the appointments secretariat of the government.

Finally, the chairs of those tribunals must have the ability to control the reappointment process. If the chair of a tribunal ends up with someone who’s on the tribunal and they’re just not doing the job they’re supposed to be doing—they don’t get their decisions out on time, they’re not aware of the procedural rules—that chair must be able to say to the individual, “I will not reappoint you. I will not put your name up for reappointment unless you can meet certain quality criteria.” The chair must be able to know that that recommendation is going to stand over whatever political pressure is going to be brought to bear from the appointments secretariat.

If the powers of the chair are enhanced, in my submission on behalf of the clinic, I would suggest that we would go a long way to improving the quality of the appointments that we do see to these administrative tribunals. As I said before, it costs you no more money. In fact, I would submit it costs less money to put high-

quality appointments on these panels as compared to people who don’t know what they’re doing.

With respect to the importance of legal aid funding, we would agree with some of the recommendations that have been made on legal aid certificates. In our experience, people are finding it very difficult to find lawyers, particularly on civil matters. That needs to be fixed. We on the legal clinic side also have our own concerns with funding. We are extremely busy. We add to the value of a lot of adjudications in front of review tribunals. We give MPPs a place to refer people when they come into their offices, and it’s a high-quality place to refer people to that they don’t get charged for. That’s an incredible value to the MPPs in this process.

I would ask you in your recommendations in this process to ensure that the funding of legal aid is at sufficient levels to allow the legal clinics to continue doing what they do and to fix some of the problems that continue to haunt the certificate side of the program.

Those are my comments.

The Chair: Thank you very much. You’re right on the time of 20 minutes, so there won’t be any time for questions. But on behalf of the committee, thank you very much for your presentation this afternoon.

NORTHUMBERLAND LABOUR COUNCIL

The Vice-Chair: The next delegation is the Northumberland Labour Council, if they would come forward at this time. Welcome. For the record, please state your name clearly as you begin.

Mr Tony Cunningham: My name is Tony Cunningham. Before I begin, I apologize for not being prepared. I would have loved to have maintained eye contact for the next 20 minutes because I feel very passionately about what I’m about to speak on, but if you’re not aware, OPSEU, the public service, is in the midst of possibly being in a strike position. I just came from a pretend strike line. I smell like smoke, I’m tired, but hopefully I’ll be prepared. Please excuse my head being down while I speak to you today.

Good afternoon. Thank you for giving me this opportunity. My name is Tony Cunningham. I am a correctional officer at Brookside Youth Centre and an active executive member affiliate of the Northumberland Labour Council. I will be speaking to the crisis in our public services and how to rebuild our services. As an active OPSEU member, I will be speaking on the crisis in our public service from that perspective.

I mean no disrespect to the thousands of other working women and men who service the public under a different banner, whether it be hospital, schools, CUPE, SEIU or the un-unionized. I’m sorry to admit that my knowledge does not intimately exceed the boundaries of my OPSEU experience, although I do believe that what I’m about to say, unfortunately, reflects every public service worker in our province, union or non-union, woman or man.

Building a budget is about setting priorities. It involves, first of all, deciding the things you must do, and

then deciding the things that would be good to do if you were able to do them. Second, it involves ensuring that your revenues are adequate to provide the services you have decided to provide. Jim Flaherty is making poor-quality assumptions about both the current economic climate and the options available for government revenue in our province.

Right now, Ontario's stressed-out probation and parole officers, for example, have the highest caseloads of any in Canada. Seven hundred people are supposed to keep tabs on over 70,000 convicted offenders serving sentences in our communities. On average, they only have time to meet for 30 minutes a month with sex offenders, and sex offenders get more attention. Our officers have 15 minutes a month for other offenders. Sometimes it's only two minutes. That's a shame. That is a grand disservice to our province. But is Jim Flaherty talking about this? Is he talking about increasing the number of P-and-P officers and support staff to keep our communities safe? No, he is not. To him, this is not a priority.

Or look at food safety. Ontario used to have 150 permanent provincial meat inspectors. Now there are eight. Ontario used to have 20 provincial fruit and vegetable inspectors. Now there are zero. In November, the Provincial Auditor said:

"Food safety deficiencies that are defined as critical by the ministry and could pose risks to human health were noted during annual licensing audits of abattoirs ... Such deficiencies include unsanitary food contact surfaces, rusty equipment, and the transportation of meat in non-refrigerated vehicles....

"Newer testing methods allow bacterial, chemical, and other hazards to be detected easily and quickly. However, the ministry did not have a process in place to randomly test meat from abattoirs for evidence of these hazards."

Shocking stuff. But is Jim Flaherty talking about food safety? No, he's not. To him, this is not a priority.

In the Ministry of Labour, the full complement of occupational health and safety inspectors is supposed to be 280. We're about 40 short, and we've been about 40 short for a long time. These people do important work. Their job is to stop people from getting killed on the job or having their arms ripped off or getting occupational diseases. Sounds pretty important. But because of this government, thousands of workplaces are being ignored. Is this costing lives? Yes, it is. But those lives are not a priority to Mr Flaherty, apparently.

In November, the Provincial Auditor called the Minister of Transportation on the carpet for mismanaging highway safety. Is Flaherty talking about this? No, he's not.

What is Jim talking about? Instead of talking about improving services, Flaherty is talking about wasting more money through the magic of privatization. It's right there on his campaign Web site. It says, "I am committed to privatization in order to provide a more efficient government." The only proper response to this would be, "Excuse me?"

Since 1995, privatization has been the most disastrous policy of any provincial government in Ontario history. In many cases, as the Provincial Auditor reported in November, private operators are charging the government two, three and more times what it would cost to have accountable public employees do the same work. In the Andersen Consulting fiasco, the Ministry of Community and Social Services paid the project manager \$575 an hour to manage a computer system that still doesn't work. The Provincial Auditor said public service employees could have done the \$200-million project for wages one sixth of what Andersen charged. Andersen employees billed the government an average of \$24,000 each for personal expenses, without receipts. Is this supposed to be efficient? I'd hate to see what inefficient looks like.

1540

The auditor said that highway maintenance cost more when performed by the private sector in three out of four cases he looked at. When the Ministry of Health privatized our air ambulance system, they paid out over \$2 million in severance to critical-care flight paramedics just to have the same people come back to do the work through the private operator. Our air-ambulance system now costs more than ever, with no improvement in service. I believe that's what Jim's idea of efficiency is. Nonetheless, it's a joke. It's not a funny joke, but it is a joke.

Why, then, is our government doing this? Why are they getting out of the business of providing provincially regulated services? A budget that's built around privatization is a budget that's built around waste. The only way that privatization is efficient is as a method of transferring taxpayers' dollars into the pockets of private business people. Meanwhile, Jim says he can't afford the services Ontarians need. Mr Flaherty is like the guy who spends all day in the bar buying drinks for his buddies but won't put food on the table for his kids.

This brings me to the next point: revenue. Government revenues this year will be over 20% higher in real terms than they were in 1995. Even without the \$12 billion in annual revenue that they've blown out the window on tax cuts, this government is richer than any other government in Ontario history. Yet Mr Flaherty is crying poor. In his speech in Toronto last week, Flaherty said that private sector economists were predicting an average rate of real GDP growth for the year 2002 of 1.3%.

I don't know who these forecasters are. Perhaps they're forecasters like the Canadian Imperial Bank of Commerce, which announced in November that the Canadian economy was in recession. As we now know, there was no recession, but even when CIBC was saying there was, they were still predicting growth of 1.7% for 2002. I can't afford the private sector economists anyway, so I'll stick with the public sector ones, thank you.

In the United States, Alan Greenspan, head of the Federal Reserve, has endorsed a prediction of 2.5% to 3% economic growth in 2002. As you know, the down-

turn in the US has been worse than it has been here. Here in Canada, David Dodge, governor of the Bank of Canada, has predicted a growth of 1% to 2% in the first half of 2002 and 3% to 4% in the last half of 2002. Even Dodge's predictions may be too low. Growth in the last quarter of 2001 was 0.5%, or an annual rate of 2%. Bear in mind that the budget you are making is not for 2002, but for fiscal 2002, which includes the first quarter of 2003. In 2003, as you know, Mr Flaherty is predicting a real GDP growth of 4.4%. Looking at these numbers, a strong case can be made for a forecast of over 3% growth for fiscal 2002-03. In 1996, then-Finance Minister Ernie Eves referred to numbers lower than that as "steady, solid growth."

Mr Flaherty's prediction of 1.3% is a deliberate lowballing designed to provide a rationale for his real agenda: cuts and privatization to transfer public dollars into private hands. Flaherty has bragged about balancing the budget in 2001-02.

We should all be asking the question, "If you could have balanced the budget in 2001-02, with 1% economic growth, how can we be short several billion dollars in 2002-03 when economic growth is going to be much higher?"

There is only one answer to this: there is a hole in the bucket, dear Liza. Somebody is still buying drinks at the bar when they should be thinking about buying the groceries. For example, Jim Flaherty's pet project, the tax credit for parents with children in private schools, will cost at least \$300 million and possibly as much as \$700 million once it's fully implemented.

By supporting the public services I mentioned earlier, Ontarians get a stronger public service. By supporting private schools, we get a weaker public school system. Who would vote for that if they had a choice?

Then there's the \$2.2-billion corporate tax cut. Why are we draining the public purse when Canada is the cheapest place to do business in all of the G7 nations, according to KPMG Consulting? It's simply pure right-wing ideology. It's not based on common sense, in my opinion.

Now, you may be surprised to hear me say this, but I agree with Mr Flaherty on something. We both agree that there is a crisis in Ontario. But I'm telling you now it's not a financial crisis; it's a crisis in public services, or lack thereof.

To keep it short and sweet, I'm talking today about the Ontario public service specifically. At last count, the OPSEU bargaining unit in the Ontario public service had been reduced by over 23,400 employees since 1995. That is a reduction of one third overall across the province. Workloads are up, stress is up, frustration is up, because the same amount of work needs to be done. The story of today's public service is the story of a system that has been broken; it no longer functions.

If we had 100 Provincial Auditors, or if an inquiry like the Walkerton inquiry were held in every ministry, it would be revealed that the same policies that undercut the Ministry of Environment are at work in every Ontario

government ministry. The process we call Walkertonization is a process of mismanagement. It involves selling off services; wiping out rules; axing jobs; reducing job security, job quality and wages for public employees, while increasing workloads, frustration and stress; creating confusion, not leadership; and destroying employee morale.

Walkertonization creates a mismanaged, fragmented patchwork of a public service. In its current state, the Ontario public service can no longer adequately protect public health and safety, let alone the public interest.

It's time we did something about it. After six and a half years of cuts, layoffs and privatization, it is now clear that we, as Ontarians, have no choice. We must rebuild the Ontario public service. That is what you should be thinking about in your budget deliberations.

The foundation of the public service is people. If you want public safety, value for money and a professional, accountable, open public service, you have to start by supporting the people on the front lines. After the September 11 attacks, air security experts asked, "Can we really expect safe airports with security guards paid \$6 and turnover rates of up to 200% a year?" Amazingly enough, they said no.

Here at home, Justice Dennis O'Connor reported on January 18 that a Ministry of the Environment human resources plan in 2000-01 reported that the MOE had difficulties attracting and retaining skilled personnel in a number of areas. There is a direct relationship between the quality of the public services Ontarians receive and the wages and working conditions of the public employee. I'm sure that's a given.

Lab technologists at our Resources Road lab in Etobicoke worked day and night during the Walkerton disaster. They were public service heroes. Yet their pay is 17% to 20% less than the pay for the same job at a community hospital. That's outrageous, and that's just one example. Our nurses, pharmacists, tradespeople and workers in close to 100 occupations all face the same problem. How can the government expect to hang on to skilled, experienced people? How can the government expect to recruit enthusiastic new ones? The answer is, it can't.

Take a look at the 25 junior environmental officers who have been hired to inspect water. All of them are temporary contract staff. Is the government saying that water quality is a temporary problem? It certainly appears to be the case. We now have 26% of our members on contract—please remember that when I say "we" I refer to 45,000 working women and men—with no benefits, no pension plan and no job security. Not surprisingly, for many of them, when they find out that a contract job is not a foot in the door but a slap in the face, it's not a career to these people, it's a job.

1550

When people have stable careers in the public service, they develop expertise and experience. They learn to live by a set of guiding principles on how to operate in the public interest. Senior workers pass their knowledge on

to the junior workers. More than that, they pass on the fact that they care about protecting the public interest. They pass on the fact that they are committed to protecting public safety, taking care of the public's money and ensuring democratic accountability.

That is the way the public service should work. But today, OPSEU members in the Ontario public service are overworked, stressed and demoralized, as I'm sure every other worker is that works for the public service. Their wages are low, they have little job security, staff turnover has never been higher and staff recruitment has never been harder.

With these kinds of decisions going on, we shouldn't be surprised that OPSEU members are wondering, "How is it that we can afford a 36.6% pay raise for MPPs but we can't afford to support the people on the front lines of public service delivery?"

To bring it home, and I only have a few seconds left, Mr Galt, interestingly enough I did ask your office a few weeks ago if you would sign a petition in support of rebuilding our public services. Not surprisingly you declined, because you ultimately serve the cabinet first and not the constituents of this county, in my opinion. I'm not provoking you, Mr Galt; I'm simply stating the facts. I know in the last round that you won by 2% of the vote and I know for a fact that in response to not signing this petition, there is at least 5% of this constituent base that will be upset. I think you need to start servicing the people of this county.

On that note, does anybody have any questions?

The Vice-Chair: We have about one, one and a half minutes left. I'll turn to the PC caucus for a response on this occasion.

Mr O'Toole: Thank you very much, Tony, for your presentation and the passion. Of course I understand you have every reason. Your life and your commitment are before us today.

Respectfully, we heard exactly the same speech. That's Leah Casselman's.

Mr Cunningham: Absolutely, just customized a bit.

Mr O'Toole: Of course. But I did hear the whole issue of—I don't like the "Walkertonization" term. It was a public service. There's some dispute even in Justice O'Connor's report on finding fault and the rest of it with process.

One thing you did say was that there is a relationship between revenue and expenditures. You know you can't go on forever in a deficit. The NDP social contract demonstrates that. They wanted to help. They just didn't have any money to help.

Our forecast in revenue: Mr Phillips is usually here and he makes the point, "Where are the revenue forecasts?" Everybody wants stable revenue for the long horizon line: three years. This year alone there's a lag in revenue when it comes to corporate tax, and if you looked at the revenue forecast you'd see the declining corporate revenues because companies, for many of the reasons you've stated, are declining. They're not going to have a profit. So I put it to you: do you think we should

balance the budget or should we have a deficit to solve these problems year after year?

Mr Cunningham: To answer your question, I think people should stop dying at the expense of balancing the budget. You've gone too far. You can't rape our health care system; you can't rape the educational system. You have to stop at some point. I say to you, sir, that it's gone too far. We have to reinvest in these people who run these institutions, for the benefit of all Ontarians.

What makes this intrinsically Ontarian—everything under the Tory government is for sale, and that to me is atrocious. There are some things more important than balancing the budget, or as important, and it's quality of life. I believe that your government needs to be reminded of that. We need it back.

The Vice-Chair: Thank you very much. On behalf of the committee, we appreciate your coming forward and making your presentation to us.

Mr Cunningham: Thank you, sir.

DURHAM CHILD POVERTY TASK FORCE

The Vice-Chair: Our next presentation is the Durham Child Poverty Task Force. On behalf of the committee, welcome. Twenty minutes have been set aside for you. What isn't used in your presentation we'll divide equally among the three caucuses for questions. As you begin, please state your name clearly for the record.

Mr Ron Dancy: I'm Ron Dancy. I'm with the Durham Child Poverty Task Force, and this is Glen Eagle, who's also with it.

We did distribute beforehand our annual report, which I believe you have. Here's our presentation. We won't read it word for word because you're running tight on time.

We are suggesting that there has to be an investment in people in any budget that you create for 2002, and basically we've got it down to two aspects: one is help for the working poor, and fairness for those on social assistance.

For help for the working poor, we're suggesting that there be an increase in the minimum wage. A previous speaker talked about there being no increase in social assistance rates. Well, there hasn't been an increase in the minimum wage either despite, I think he said, a 15% increase in the cost of living. So we're suggesting \$8 an hour is reasonable. It's not necessarily what will get people out of poverty, and we're not suggesting that the minimum wage is the sole method by which people can come out of poverty. You don't necessarily get paid based on the needs of your family. But we are suggesting that \$8 an hour is a significant step on the way to reducing poverty.

Another one, which can also be a family cost, is medical benefits. We think it's extremely important, and the Trillium plan in our opinion does not fill the gap that people have, particularly if you have a sick child. It can be, as we say here, a budget breaker if you have to choose between paying the rent, feeding your kids or

buying a prescription for a sick child. That shouldn't be the situation in Ontario today.

Affordable housing: this is probably the biggest factor that causes people to be poor. It's our understanding that the federal government has committed \$25,000 per unit for affordable housing into their \$750-million budget for this across the country. The province at this point is saying they're willing to do the provincial sales tax credit of \$2,000 to match the \$25,000 and it's up to other groups to do in kind or match the funds in other ways. We don't think that's an adequate response. We think the province is in desperate need of affordable housing out there and the province should be matching the federal budget of \$25,000.

Child care: you've all, I presume, been acquainted with the policy paper, that there is a suggested cut coming of 45%. Not only is that wrong, in our opinion, but it would be devastating to a lot of parents who are trying to get themselves stabilized in a working world. Cutting of licensed child care is very retrogressive and inappropriate.

Fairness for those on social assistance: as you know, there's a significant movement of people from social assistance to employment. The logic back in 1995, when a lot of the changes were made, was that once you have a lot of people off, you can then afford the changes. We don't seem to see that coming.

The first issue we would strongly suggest to you is that you lobby the federal government to increase coverage for employment insurance. Basically, what has happened is that so many people have been denied employment insurance through regulation that they end up on Ontario Works, which is inflating Ontario's costs. Since there is not an appropriate federal cost sharing of that, it becomes a provincial cost. Where before at least they were on the hook for only 30% of it, now they're on the hook for a good, significant portion of Ontario Works. So we think that is one way you can get the federal government to pay its fair share.

The clawback of the national child tax benefit for people on social assistance: we find that incongruous with the province's statement that they want to do what's best for children. You have the poorest children of the bunch and you take away money from them. It doesn't make any sense. This is money that is coming from another level of government. It's not necessary for the province to claw this back, because they then go and spend it anyway. So it's not a question of saving money; it's a question of where they want to spend it, and the poorest of the poor should be receiving the clawback money from the national child tax benefit.

Finally, there's the tax-back. I don't know if that's the appropriate term; it's when people move. One of the credos of this whole change to Ontario Works was to get people working, but there is a threshold or area in there where it costs you a fair amount of change economically in order to go to work. Not only are you taxed back at 75%—if you get part-time work, after a basic exemption, which after two years goes to zero, but I'm not even into

that—which is more than any person at \$100,000 would ever pay; you lose medical benefits and the Trillium drug plan does not compensate adequately. Plus, you lose the optical and any other benefits that are available. Thirdly, you quickly lose eligibility for other programs that are designed not for people on assistance necessarily, but for people who are working, including the national child tax benefit, which is now being clawed back. Its levels of eligibility are so low and it's recovered so quickly as your income rises that the tax-back, in our opinion, probably means that people who make around \$30,000 are the highest-taxed people in all of Canada. That, again, we don't think is fair. We think it should be examined so that there's at least a reasonable incentive, around 50%, for people to move from assistance to employment.

1600

Rev Glen Eagle: The purpose of my being here: I am on the Durham Child Poverty Task Force and I'm also a minister with the United Church. I end up being in the position of, for want of a better term, where the rubber hits the road. I have people coming to me daily looking for help. The help has increased over time. It's not unusual for somebody to come to the door of the church and say, "Can I get \$500, \$600, \$700, \$800 from you today? Otherwise my rent's gone, otherwise my housing is gone."

Just to put it into context, to take a case in point, a woman in my congregation was earning \$35,000 a year. She and her husband split. They had to sell the house etc; they got nothing out of it. Anyway, she was working for about 12 years. She, then, is now a woman with a single child. She used the money from the proceeds of the house to live for a few months, but because of the child, because of the daycare, she couldn't get employment that was adequate to pay all the bills. Consequently, she did a few minor jobs, \$8, \$10 an hour. Then, when the money from the house ran out, she applied for social assistance.

She's now getting \$500-and-some a month, because she gets \$250 from her husband. She is trying to get some kind of a job. I guess where I come into this is, when you put all the pieces together, it doesn't work. For her to pay the daycare in order to go to work, the daycare costs are up and the subsidies for that are down. The minimum wage, at \$7 or whatever it is, is a joke as far as that goes, because it doesn't pay. She loses the medical benefits, she loses the dental benefits and then with this clawback—we still haven't figured out her cheque last month because she went on social assistance in January some time. Apparently she got—I'm not sure what it is—a GST cheque or something back last fall. They deducted it, so her cheque for March is \$165. Her rent is \$740. What do you do in that case?

What I'm saying is, when you put these pieces together, it's great on paper, and any one of these might be something that would be functional or might help to alleviate. What ends up happening is—and the story I told you there is a daily occurrence for me—I have these people coming and saying, "OK, as of March 31 this

woman is out of her apartment.” Where does she go? To a shelter? To a friend’s house?

What I’m presenting here is that it’s not something we can look at and say, “Well, that’s too bad.” From their perspective, a woman with a small child, it’s more than too bad. Where does she go? I mean that. I’m saying this: you don’t have, as politicians, people coming to your door daily asking for money and expecting to get it. They may come to the office and say, “Isn’t there something you can do?” I understand that. But they don’t come to your building and say, “You’re the last resort, you’re the only thing we can do.” Because it’s my job, as a person I have to come up with some kind of solution for these people. Otherwise, they are literally on the street. When you put these pieces together, that’s where the scary part comes, and I guess I’m going back to what Ron was looking at at the beginning.

One of the things Ron didn’t mention that I would mention is about the increase in the minimum wage. From my perspective, I think \$12 should be the minimum wage. I realize there are a few repercussions that way with the employers. They would probably not be happy with you if you said \$12 an hour, but that’s a living wage as far as I’m concerned. It would get a lot of people off social assistance if you suddenly declared that. I know all the ramifications of that, and I’m not suggesting that.

One of the other things that would be helpful for you to look at, though, is somehow controlling part-time work. More and more companies are going into part-time work. My daughter just got a job at Loblaws. They won’t hire full-time; they only hire part-time. She gets \$6.40 an hour and no benefits. She’s 28 years old. How does she move out of that? It’s a joke. For her to even go to work is a joke. She has a small child. What she earns won’t pay for the daycare.

All I’m saying is that when you look at this kind of thing, look at the whole picture and try to place yourself in this position. These people do not have the resources. What I’m saying is, people in my position end up—going back to the child poverty thing, when I see this little kid, and lots of them, where their parents are trying to live off next to nothing, how can we expect those kids to do anything with their lives? When these kids don’t even have the clothes to wear, the food etc, we can’t expect them to excel. They’re just going to keep the cycle going.

My plea to you is to pay attention to the whole picture of what happens to these thousands and thousands of people who are literally bereft of any kind of support and where to move ahead is totally defeating.

The Chair: We have a minute and a half per caucus, and I’ll start with the official opposition.

Mr Parsons: What I’m hearing from you—in fact it’s been an accumulation since 10 o’clock this morning—is the tremendous cost of poverty to this province. There’s a huge cost. We’ve seen, in effect, provincial responsibility downloaded to food banks, to the United Church and to a whole bunch of people trying to do stop-gap measures to survive. Yet the province as a whole is paying a horrible price for it.

We’ve heard presentations from the education field. You can have the best curriculum in the world, but if the kid in the classroom is hungry, it doesn’t matter about the curriculum. Again, you can have the best curriculum in the world, but if the student can’t afford to go on the field trip or can’t afford the user fees for textbooks and so forth, it’s all for naught.

If we have what are described as working poor—they have no medical benefits and they can’t buy medicine for the child who needs it—then it’s all for nothing. I’m struck that we continue to have children in school when it’s very obvious that some children can’t even afford winter clothing. There used to be an expression when I was in school: “Sticks and stones may break my bones, but names will never hurt me.” I see these kids teased. And names hurt, names potentially destroy their self-pride and that for the rest of their lives.

The Chair: Question, please.

Mr Parsons: Yes, I’m struggling for the question. You mentioned the need for employers. What would be your number one priority for the government of Ontario to eradicate child poverty in this province?

Rev Eagle: It may not be Ron’s answer, but I’m going to say my answer is to raise the bases. From my point of view, raising the minimum wage would go a long way toward that, or making some kind of secure bottom line for people, whether it’s the minimum wage or even if you gave back the 22%. That would certainly help.

The Chair: Mr Christopherson.

Mr Christopherson: I think most people, at least until recently, thought more of major urban centres when they thought of homelessness and poverty. I wonder if you could give us a bit of a thumbnail sketch of what things look like in this area and even in the Durham region?

Mr Dancy: For this area, I wouldn’t know; we’re from Durham region.

Mr Christopherson: OK, Durham region then.

Mr Dancy: It’s a little more hidden. Obviously we don’t have a lot of people you step over like you do in Toronto. I used to work in social services, and we did a study a number of years ago. We found that every one of the people, families, on social assistance moved in that year—100%. Twenty-five per cent moved four times.

We also checked to see if they were really renting way above what they could afford, so we took the CMHC low end of market, if you know what I’m talking about. The rents were all below that. They were really good, economical rental finders, if you will, and they still couldn’t afford it. I believe the data would probably be for 1998, in case somebody wants a reference point.

So I consider 100% of everybody on welfare to be on the verge of homeless, or near homeless as I call it, because they are going to be on the street when they’re moving once a year. You and I don’t move that often—plus there are the people who live in the hostels. So there is a fair amount. It just doesn’t end up with a sleeping bag in a cubbyhole at a bank or wherever.

1610

Rev Eagle: If I could just add to that, for a tremendous number of basement apartments and backroom apartments, there are no contracts because they are technically illegal. So there's a lot of abuse that goes on: "Honey, if you want to live in my basement, you pay so much rent, but there's another benefit too." That does go on quite a bit. Just a week ago, the landlord of a fairly large apartment came to his tenant and said, "You didn't pay your rent last month." She said, "I did." He said, "We've lost the records." She had some records, but he said they wouldn't count. So he said, "Either you pay us again or you're out the door." I got involved in that, and he cooled down. But that type of "You're out the door tomorrow" thing on a day-to-day basis is incredibly stressful for people.

Mr Christopherson: To say the least, yes.

The Chair: Mr O'Toole.

Mr O'Toole: Thank you very much, Reverend Eagle and Ron. Just to reacquaint Dave and others, the short time I spent on Durham region you were indeed the director of health and social services. I know you come at this with some degree of passion. On an ongoing basis, I do get a fair amount of correspondence from you. I think it's important for me to always remain open and to listen, because you are at the front edge and finding that balance.

I think I fully agree with one of the things you mentioned here. I've talked to people about it, both my federal counterpart as well as provincially. You say those making \$30,000 are the highest-taxed people in Canada. What I'd sort of say is it's not worth the administrative nightmare. I'd take everybody under \$25,000 right off the tax rolls. It costs more to collect it. I've talked to Erik Peters, our auditor, on this. Administratively, to track it and the whole accountability thing, you have to pay to get it done in most cases, and on top of that they don't collect what it costs them to collect it. So I think that aspect has some benefit.

With Ontario Works, though, is it true—and I've followed the stats from Durham region—that the numbers of people on welfare are considerably down in Durham, to the tune of about \$8 million on the Durham budget?

Mr Dancy: I couldn't give you the dollar figure. They're less than half what they were when you came to power in 1995. What we're trying to say today is that they have moved into employment, but at a low level where they're still poor.

Mr O'Toole: Yes, the next group, the working poor.

Mr Dancy: Yes.

Mr O'Toole: And that's where that child tax credit is very important. It's the working poor that that money goes to, the low-income.

Mr Dancy: The people who are left have a lot greater difficulty getting a job for a lot of reasons. We don't think their children should be left alone.

Rev Eagle: Just very quickly, one of the things is that when you get a job you can also get a loan. Credit card companies send you these credit cards right away, as

soon as you get a job. For people who haven't had anything for a long time, the credit card goes up and then they're in even worse shape. I know everybody says, "You should be fiscally responsibility, and you shouldn't use a credit card." But I do know that when your child needs a prescription drug and it's a choice between using a credit card or watching your kid suffer, you use your credit card.

The Chair: With that, gentlemen, on behalf of the committee, I would like to thank you for your presentation this afternoon.

NORTHUMBERLAND COMMUNITY COALITION

The Chair: Our next presentation is from the Northumberland Community Coalition. I would ask the presenter to please come forward and state your name for the record. On behalf of the committee, welcome. You have 20 minutes for your presentation.

Mr Ben Burd: My name is Ben Burd. I'm speaking on behalf of Northumberland Community Coalition, which is a very, very small community coalition that represents quite a few different interests. Really what we've been doing over the past five or six years, probably as long as this government has been in power, has been monitoring its activities and checking the results of the programs that have been implemented.

I don't come here with a written brief; I have a few notes. But I'm going to pick up on what most other people have said. It's going to be very boring for you guys to listen to me just state the same kinds of things you've heard all day. And you didn't just hear them all day; I was watching TV last night and you heard them all day yesterday. It appears that every single person who seems to have been adversely affected or who has an opinion about the programs of your particular government wants to come along this time around and tell you about the results of what has happened to them.

It appears to me that somehow or other—and this is very interesting—these hearings that you're conducting at the moment seem to be totally absent of the usual types of people who would come to talk to you about budgets and finances. I don't see any representatives from the chambers of commerce, I don't see the usual board of trade people, I don't see the industrialists, I don't see any of those people saying, "Go to it, guys. You're doing a real good job for me." This makes me think that somewhere along the line they either got what they wanted a long time ago or they've written some of your programs off and said, "What's the point of coming to do this public hearing when we can talk to you behind the backdoor and get what we want anyway?"

What you're hearing, as a result of that, is a whole bunch of people who have been suffering for the past six or seven years as a result of the Common Sense Revolution. I don't want to get back into specifics, but I will say that I've only been here since 3 o'clock, and a trend has emerged since 3 o'clock. You've been hearing

from representatives of people or people who are actually working with people or who are actually on the lowest rung possible in this province's society. They've told you various things. They've taken your invitation very, very seriously to come and tell you how your programs of cutting 21% of the welfare rates, not raising the minimum wage for seven years, cutting back on health care costs, cutting back on education costs, have impacted them on a personal level.

I think it's to your credit that you've actually sat here so long and listened to all that. I know that if it had been I, it would be boring and numbing, wondering just what you could do about it, which brings me back to the first major point I want to say. As a government and a committee, if you've gone to the trouble of asking us, the people, to tell you what we think, then there is an obligation upon you folks to do something with that. We've been lectured for the last six or seven years about rights and responsibilities, and it goes both ways.

What I'm saying to you is that if you come and ask us to tell you what we think, then when we suggest various mechanisms and changes in your procedures, I think you have an obligation to definitely listen and at least acknowledge what you're being told. What we've been seeing over the past six or seven years is people coming continually to your government who disagree with you, and they don't get any remedy, or very little remedy. In fact, in the case of the working poor, the disadvantaged and the labour movement, they just keep getting slammed between the eyes. Further punitive measures get imposed on those folks.

What I'm saying to you is that there are obligations on this committee to listen, and that means you have to produce. To make sure we know you've listened, I would at least like to see some demonstration of your listening in the next budget. One of the first things that comes to mind is that because everybody who has come to speak to you in these hearings is asking for something, and every one of those remedies means you have to spend money, obviously it's incumbent upon you to try to prove to the province that you're either with those people or against those people. If you're with those people and with us at the bottom, you will be spending money and remedying some of the problems you have caused by removing \$20 billion in tax cuts from the economy that you're going to be doing by the year 2004.

Every single one of these remedies costs money. Mr O'Toole asked the labour council representative, "Would you want to see a deficit, or would you want to see a balanced budget?" I would say to you that if you hadn't had tax cuts to the level you've had, we would have balanced the budget three years ago. The point is that you have choices. I was watching a woman last night on television talk about choices. You've deliberately made choices to do certain things, which is OK, but there are consequences.

1620

The biggest consequence that's facing us in Cobourg at the moment, to those of us who are community-

mind, is the effect the funding formula is having on elementary schools. You've chosen to talk about efficiency. What you're doing is you're setting up efficiency against community. When you destroy communities in the name of efficiency, you don't have much left. Where you are destroying community schools—and People for Education has got a report out that you may agree or disagree with, but they back it up—44% of all the elementary schools in the province are in danger of closing due to the funding formula. If you're a bean-counter, that's perfectly OK, because you're moving kids into bigger schools, and by some convoluted form of logic, you can then say those kids will get a better education because they have access to more resources. While you're starving the smaller schools of resources, you can make that argument. But everybody should be aware of what's happening by starving the smaller schools and moving the kids into larger schools. It's a deliberate pogrom; that's what it is.

We have a school in Cobourg—you probably heard about it from a speaker this morning—which is 180 kids short on their school spaces, which is a misnomer because junior kindergarten only counts as 0.5 of a school person. So there may be more pupils than are actually being counted in that school. The point is that because that school is an older school, because that school is below capacity, they're starved of educational resources. Therefore, it's very easy to make the case that if we move them over to the other school, which is only 40 kids below capacity, that school now becomes above capacity and, bingo, they get the school librarian, they get the special-ed teacher. They get all the other resources they need. That's all very well, but what have you done by moving those kids over? You've destroyed a downtown community. That's what you've done.

The whole argument came to me when the school trustee called a meeting to discuss this. One of the parents stood up and said, "What's going to happen to me when my kids either go to the school in the east or the school in the west? I don't drive. I don't have a car. When the school rings me up and says to get my kid out of there because he's sick"—which happens very, very commonly in schools these days—"what am I supposed to do?" The school superintendent said to her, "That's not our problem." That's how much funding has impacted upon the community. I'm here to tell you that every single one of your funding cuts has a human element to it.

I walk my neighbour's dog every day. He went into hospital five months ago. He had a stroke. I won't go into medical details. The point is that his wife also has medical problems. She told the hospital and the access centre, "I'm sorry, I do not feel as though I can have him home because he weighs 200 pounds. I only weigh 120 pounds. I've got heart problems. I'm 75 years old. If he falls down, I can't do anything about it." So what happens? They get sent home. Home care comes in twice a week. I don't know about you folks, but I'm sure if my grandfather was only getting bed-bathed twice a week,

I'd want to do something about it. We don't expect the state to do everything, but we did have a standard of reasonable care before the cuts came in. This fellow has fallen five times since he's been home. I said, "What do you do, Harold?" He said, "I have to wait until my son comes home, because he's the only one who can help me." The guy works a midnight shift. If he worked on the day shift, sometimes that guy might have to wait—I don't know how long. I can't imagine how long that fellow might have to wait. That's only one story that I came across.

I come here, basically, to reinforce what everybody else has said: that your policies are having human impacts, and I think that you should be listening to those impacts. I don't ask you to change your minds, but at least have the honesty to tell us that we're not all whiners, we're not all out to lunch, we're not all bogeymen who tell you that you're all wrong for the hell of it. The point is there are genuine concerns.

If you are going to maintain this insane policy of cutting income taxes to the tune of \$20 billion over a period of 10 years, you have to understand that that money has to come from someplace, and the consequences of that are something you should be looking at. You may disagree with what I'm saying, you may think I'm all wet, but the point is, there are human consequences here that you folks, as administrators of the budget, have to look at. We've got \$8-billion worth of tax cuts to go, as I understand it. That \$8 billion can go a long way.

While I'm on that, it's always struck me from day one just how completely unfair the tax cuts have been. I'm not talking about the fact that 25% of the population gets 80% of the money or anything else. The very fact that you put an income tax cut in is insane. If you want people to spend money and boost the economy, you cut the sales tax. We've just been told this last week that the consumer has rescued the country from the recession we thought we were going into. Business didn't do it; the consumer did it by spending money. If you guys want to look good, give the consumer more money and cut the sales tax. It's simple. I don't want to go into inferences about why you didn't do that, but the very fact that you didn't do that shows me that not much thought went into this about the rhyme and reason of why the taxes were cut in the first place. That's all I've got to say.

The Chair: Thank you very much. We have two minutes per caucus.

Mr Christopherson: Thank you very much for your comments. I can't think of anything you've said that I would disagree with.

You may know or you may have heard that Harris yesterday, in a speech to the Toronto Board of Trade, said that he wishes he had done more faster. What would you say to that?

Mr Burd: I wish he had done more faster, because then we could vote him out faster. The effect of what he had been doing would have been apparent to a lot more people a lot faster.

Mr Christopherson: It's interesting you would say that because, regardless of what you answered there, my follow-up question was going to be, is it your sense that more and more people are beginning to see what is going on and understand that the few dollars they may have put in their pockets on the tax cut side are more than wiped out by the public services that have been lost in health, education, environmental protection and labour protection, as well as user fees? Is it your sense that people are beginning to see that there's a direct relationship between those two and that they didn't win?

Mr Burd: Yes. That's a very interesting discussion. For the first four or five years, we were continually told by impartial people who really didn't care much about politics that at least Mr Harris was the person who did what he said he was going to do. "I don't agree with the guy but at least he did what he said." That appeared to be a very prevailing comment and you can't argue with that. However, it would appear to me now that that comment, the admiration for his forthrightness and his gutsiness, has been tempered by the consequences.

I think a lot of people are saying, "If I've got to now pay \$150 a month for my prescription which was delisted last week, which has been on the formulary for goodness knows how long, then I've got a problem. If I've got to go to Peterborough instead of the local clinic, then there's an obvious cost to me." Yes, I think it's coming home.

Every time you turn around there's a financial consequence to almost everything you touch that has to do with government, which wasn't there seven years ago. Some of those might have come in whoever was in power, but the point is, yes, the tax cuts have been tied with the consequences and I think a lot of people have put two and two together.

Mr O'Toole: Thank you very much for your presentation. You're right; every delegation over the last week has asked for more money. I had a little running total going and it was something in the order of about \$10 billion. I guess it is difficult and it is about choices, no question.

As an ordinary citizen of this province and this country, I stick to basic principles, more practical, like your presentation really. I really feel it's the chicken and the egg: which came first? You have to have the economy, otherwise it's all pipedreams. You're an intelligent guy. I know from just listening to you explain that you understand the policy choice options and the background behind that, so I'd like you to respond to that. Maybe that's too simplistic, but if we scare all the investors away by raising taxes, they'll go to Alberta, they'll go to Mexico or wherever. It's global. Your mutual funds, wherever you're putting them, that kind of thing, are looking for a return on investment. They're not looking for some kind of—it isn't all numbers, it is about choices, and that's what these hearings are about—making choices.

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I believe if you look closely at the government documents, you will see there have been tremendous investments: \$1 billion a year in health care. It's the number one priority, no question about it. I hear "aging population," "more technology," blah, blah, blah. The argument, then, is a systemic argument. It's about the nurse practitioner versus the doctor. Do you understand? It's all systemic. It's these vertical little—one window can't work. If it's CCACs, the VON is against us.

Mr Burd: If the question was whether I think the choices you have made to boost the economy to the level that you claim has happened are based entirely on the premise that tax cuts have done that, I would fundamentally disagree. Investment has come into this province by means of the auto industry. The auto industry probably covers off 70% or 80% by the time the spinoffs are all added to the province's economy. The point is that the auto industry, coupled with the American boom, brought us to where we're at.

You may well say that you cut taxes at the same time as the boom occurred so therefore tax cuts created the jobs. I'd like to take your argument right now to BC for the next five years and see how many jobs are actually going to be produced as a result of BC's tax cuts. We've never had this economic theory proven properly because the economists couldn't agree on anything, to start with.

The second thing is, you've always mixed apples and oranges. If I was in your position, I would definitely be saying that tax cuts have produced jobs, because look at them, we've got 800,000 jobs. But how many of those would have happened without the tax cuts?

Mr O'Toole: They're all small business jobs, by the way.

The Chair: I have to go to the official opposition.

Mr Kwinter: Thank you, Mr Burd. I think your last comments are right on. I agree with you completely.

In the interest of fairness, I just wanted to make a couple of comments. When you started, you talked about the fact that you've been watching these hearings and that all the people who are coming are of a certain type and we're not getting the others. You should know that we've had the chambers of commerce, we've had the boards of trade, we've had the bankers, we had the group representing General Motors who were talking about the capital tax. When we structure these meetings—and I want to talk about how this meeting is structured—we try to have it balanced; we really do. You should know that this is the legislative committee on finance and economic affairs and it's an all-party committee. We've got the NDP, the Liberals and the Conservatives. So when you berate this committee, you have to understand that some of the people at this table agree with what you are saying. In the interest of fairness, I think that's important.

The other thing that I think is really critical is that this committee, when we have all of the hearings, when they're complete—tomorrow we're going to Kitchener-Waterloo, we're going to Barrie and then we're going to write a report—gives advice to the Treasurer. We can't

compel the Treasurer to do anything. This is advice from this committee as to what we want. Invariably, we will have minority reports, because the Conservatives have the majority on this committee. They will try to get the kind of report they want and both of the other caucuses will submit a minority report.

We have no control over what the Treasurer does. All we can do is suggest to him, "This is what we've heard, this is what we think you should look at," but then the Treasurer has to do what the Treasurer has to do. Not only that, he is holding parallel meetings. If you've been following the media, it's a combination between his leadership aspirations and using that as a vehicle to go out and have these meetings. There's a lot of input into the final decision that he and the government make, and once we do our job, we're in their hands. It isn't something that we have control over. I'm just trying to correct the impression I got that you're berating us because we keep listening to this but we don't do anything about it.

Mr Burd: I wanted to bring the point, very quickly, that quite frankly four or five of the groups that appeared this morning, today, were very surprised to be on the list, because they are not the kind of groups that normally get on the list for something like this. I think you deserve congratulations for actually doing that, if there was an element of choice. I won't be so bold as to suggest there weren't that many people who wanted to come and you wanted to fill the day out and make the list up with everybody who applied. Anyway, I'll leave that for you to keep it a trade secret. The point being, we were very surprised and we put a whole bunch of things together and we decided to get on and make a point. This is why I'm here, to add weight to the basic thrust, and the basic thrust is that the government's policies have been hurting the people we work with, the people we know, and we think it's gone far enough.

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.

ONTARIO LAND TRUST ALLIANCE

The Chair: Our next presentation will be from the Ontario Land Trust Alliance. I would ask the presenter to please come forward and state your name for the record. On behalf of the committee, welcome. You have 20 minutes for your presentation.

Mr Ian Attridge: Good afternoon and thank you for this opportunity. My name is Ian Attridge. I'm the chair of the government relations task group of the Ontario Land Trust Alliance and I'm based in Peterborough. I'm just pulling out my other set of notes. I apologize that I don't have enough copies of my submission for all of you, but I've asked Ms Sourial to make copies for me. You'll get that in due course, but my apologies for today.

What I'd like to do for a couple of minutes is just explain our organization, who we are, what kind of work we're doing on the landscape of Ontario, and then talk about a couple of aspects that relate to the budget that we

would like to see brought forward in various forms over the ensuing year in the forthcoming budget.

I'll start with the Ontario Land Trust Alliance. We are an organization that brings together land trusts from around the province. We started in 1997 with 14 founding members. We now comprise some 31 members ranging from regional groups in Thunder Bay and Sault Ste Marie, to the Muskokas, Georgian Bay, the Kawarthas, where I'm from, the Rideau, down around London, and a variety of other locations around the province. We also include the provincial Federation of Ontario Naturalists and the national Nature Conservancy of Canada.

Land trusts are non-profit corporations and charities. We work with landowners to look at conserving natural and cultural heritage around the province. It's the kind of work that allows us to get out in the field with landowners, to find ways to work together to secure a legal interest in land. That may occur through a donation of land to one of our members. It may involve entering into a conservation easement, which is an agreement between the landowner and our land trust that would preserve the land through some restrictions on the land title. It's an agreement that still allows the landowner to use the land, to work the land and to pass that land on to their kids or sell it if they wish. So it's a creative technique and increasingly we're seeing that it's being used by some of our members, as it has been across the country and in the United States.

One of the unique things about land trusts and one of the exciting aspects that I enjoy in my work with land trusts is that there's a real synergy of skills. We have land professionals at the board table, we have financial advisors, we have biologists, we have people with university backgrounds or with technical capabilities in GIS and data processing and that kind of thing. So we have a variety of skills at the board table.

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We've implemented a number of programs through our provincial group, the Ontario Land Trust Alliance, OLTA. We provide support for our local members and we have an insurance program. One of the aspects of our programs is the Ontario nature trust assistance program, which has allocated some \$116,000 for land securement over a two-and-a-half-year period. This has helped our members acquire nearly 3,000 acres of significant ecological lands valued at some \$3.7 million. With a small investment, we're able to help our members get out there, cover their acquisition costs and get a lot of donations in to protect that land. That's a leverage ratio of something like 31 to 1.

We're only part of the story. There are other funders out there. What we're able to do is help achieve some of the public objectives that the government and really the citizens of Ontario would like to see. That does come through a variety of initiatives: the Smart Growth initiative to reduce sprawl into the countryside and contain it to reduce the costs of servicing that will have to be extended on a broad basis. There is land securement on

the Oak Ridges moraine, a significant initiative that has had multiparty support, of course, and substantial citizen support. Land trusts can help deliver that. In fact, one land trust, the Oak Ridges moraine land trust, was formed specifically to use those kinds of techniques on the moraine. There are others who are working in partnership with them.

Establishing new protected areas in southern Ontario: much of southern Ontario, as you know, is private lands, so government can't go out and just designate a new provincial park or conservation reserve. But land trusts can work with landowners to identify significant areas, to acquire them in the public interest, and to do so in a way that perhaps is more acceptable in the local community. There are initiatives like the Great Lakes Heritage Coast, the Niagara Escarpment plan, trail acquisition, eco-tourism promotion, other kinds of tourism promotion and the kinds of amenities that support that. Increasingly we're seeing that land trusts are helping in that direction.

Where does that lead this committee? There are a couple of things that I know I will have a chance to discuss with Mr Beaubien further at another appointment, but there are a number of tax incentives that land trusts work with. One is a federal program called ecological gifts that involves a set of criteria, the most ecologically important land in the province, and that is a set of criteria agreed to by the provincial government as well as the federal government. That's the federal program.

We also have an important piece of the puzzle here at the provincial level. That's the conservation land tax incentive program, CLTIP. That has been an important program to help landowners of all kinds, including land trusts, to protect ecologically important lands in the province. There are a number of elements of that program that we feel need to be changed. There are some challenges in the way the Assessment Act is applied where the program is intended to reduce assessment on a parcel but in fact that just gets reduced on one part and shifted to another part of the property. The landowner still is not getting the benefit originally intended.

There is a portion of that program called community conservation lands that was specifically designed to help land trusts, but that has been under review in recent years. We're hoping, as this is moving through the process of approvals, that will come forward and in a way that matches that agreed provincial and federal criteria under the ecological gifts program.

Also I mentioned the technique of conservation easements. This kind of agreement between landowners and land trusts is something that is not specifically recognized in the Assessment Act. In fact, the federal government in their budget in 1997 did identify an appropriate way of valuing conservation easements for income tax purposes under that ecological gifts program. I would encourage the committee, and through the budget, to bring forward measures that will fully recognize conservation easements when they're being assessed by property assessors in the regular assessment system.

In terms of funding, it's an important issue to us. We feel that we can take a set of funds and really make a strategic leveraged investment. If land trusts are given the chance, we're able to work with those funds, limited as they may be, to then go forward and achieve conservation under a variety of initiatives.

We help deliver conservation, recreation and tourism initiatives. Many of our members have identified priority sites around the province using the latest technology and scientific methods, including geographic information system technology, GIS. We are run by volunteers and entrepreneurial boards who get out there with, as I mentioned, that synergy of skills that comes together, and we're able to operate at a fraction of government cost.

Finally, we leverage charitable donations with grants and tax incentives at all levels to protect lands worth many times the original investment made. Given this capacity and the opportunity to realize a substantial return on investing in conservation and land trusts, we would like to recommend to the committee that you bring forward and recommend that there be a land securement fund established in the budget. That might be in the range of \$10 million to \$20 million and it would have acre-land-value and leverage-ratio targets plus accountability mechanisms. Certainly the Ontario Land Trust Alliance would be willing to work in helping to deliver that kind of fund.

There are several ways that might be accomplished that would have limited impact on the fiscal situation of the province. One might be to allocate land transfer tax revenues into a larger land stewardship fund. I believe in the past year those revenues were approximately \$600 million. One could take 10% of that, say, \$60 million, and allocate it into a separate land stewardship fund run by a separate arm's-length board. This could be responsible for a variety of conservation initiatives in the province—land securement is certainly one that is near and dear to our hearts—but it could also involve activities and programs to implement some further recommendations from Mr Justice O'Connor's report on the Walkerton inquiry, the county-based Ontario stewardship program in the Ministry of Natural Resources, watershed planning by conservation authorities and the like.

Such a central fund for land stewardship and securement would also achieve administrative efficiencies, because you wouldn't have to be administering several different funds. Taking a proportion of the land transfer tax has been established in British Columbia. It's called the real estate stewardship fund there. It's also present in Texas, Utah and some 20 or more other states in the United States.

Another way of implementing this is to recognize that conservation of wetlands, watersheds, headwaters and important wildlife areas is part of the green infrastructure of the province. If this kind of land securement fund were established, that might be recognized as part of the SuperBuild fund and a portion of that fund could be allocated for land securement.

One of the examples that is used in the United States of how this is green infrastructure is that it's estimated that to buy the watershed lands to protect New York City's drinking water would cost \$1.5 billion, but if a filtration plant was built it would cost \$6 billion to \$8 billion. That's several times more to build something rather than protect and prevent some of the degradation that might occur.

The Ministry of Natural Resources is proposing a new ecological land acquisition program. Currently the predecessor of that program, the natural areas protection program, is focused on three areas: the Niagara Escarpment, the Rouge River and the Lynde Marsh. We would suggest it might be better to expand that program, both in terms of the resources available to it and the kinds of criteria, in order that the benefits can be achieved across the province.

A proposal of this magnitude may raise questions, but I think if we look at some of the economics in a broader context, we can see that this is a very valuable investment. If you look at the 1996 GTA report, it indicated that inefficient sprawl in the GTA, and on to the moraine, would cost taxpayers some \$1 billion per year. Land trusts can help avoid that and redirect inappropriate development.

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If one looks at the state of New Jersey, nearly \$100 million per year is spent to acquire natural watershed and agricultural lands. Maryland has a strong smart growth framework which includes the five-year, \$145-million GreenPrint program to protect remaining ecologically sensitive lands.

If we look at the tax base, municipalities will be concerned about the tax base, but there is evidence from a variety of locations in the United States where greenbelts and parks add to the assessed value. I think we've all seen that if we've looked at real estate ads. They're indicating, "We're near a park, we're near a trail." Land trusts, through their acquisition of key areas like that, can help build assessment. Some numbers from the US: \$41 million increased assessment in Oakland; \$5.4 million in Boulder, Colorado; a variety of other numbers. Back here at home certainly we know through studies that the Ontario Bruce Trail contributes some \$24 million in economic impact each year.

There are considerable benefits. There certainly has been demonstrated in the United States voter support for this kind of funding where these initiatives have been put on the ballot. There has been some substantial support for them. In my presentation, which you will receive, I indicate some of those numbers.

To summarize, the Ontario Land Trust Alliance recommends that the province make minor adjustments to the property tax assessment and incentive system, as I've described, and that it also establish a substantial land securement fund with application across the province, either as a distinct fund or as a component in a larger stewardship fund. We'd be willing to work with the prov-

ince as it's implementing that kind of a land securement fund.

That's the gist of my presentation.

The Chair: We have time for a quick question from each caucus. I'll start with the government side.

Mr O'Toole: Living in Durham region, of course with the Oak Ridges moraine, I think the formation of that trust there is extremely important public policy. You cast that against some of the demands in other areas of other ministries, certainly.

I think it does relate very well to the quality of life, that as the population grows, the world, the physical shape and size of the world, isn't growing; it's the number of people sharing it. So each of us are going to have to find ways of making more appropriate use of common sensitive spaces. I think this is an appropriate mechanism and I hope the attempt to resolve the land trust in the Oak Ridges moraine will affect the people of Durham, I think to the betterment, for many of the reasons you've made in your paper.

I can only say that this will be a tight year for getting money out of the land transfer tax fund, whether it's 10% or 1%. I think showing an initiative and recognition might be the right thing to do, and I think at the right time because of the debate around water quality, quality of life and the whole Oak Ridges moraine. It's timely, the presentation.

Mr Parsons: Are you involved with trail alliances also?

Mr Attridge: The which alliance?

Mr Parsons: Trail alliances, like the Eastern Ontario Trail Alliance.

Mr Attridge: Not specifically with the Eastern Ontario Trail Alliance, but I am a lawyer and I have advised the Ontario Trails Council. I'm in the process of doing a study on trail liability issues and the economic

benefits of trails and some other legal issues. I'm certainly familiar with trail issues, yes.

Mr Christopherson: The alliance holds the land in trust? I don't know exactly how this works.

Mr Attridge: The Ontario Land Trust Alliance is the umbrella organization. It itself does not hold the land. It's the individual members which are land trusts and they are non-profit charities that work specifically in their own local area to talk with landowners, identify priority sites and then to essentially identify the most appropriate mechanism. It might be one of those conservation agreements, it might be a donation of land, it might be a lease, it might be an option to buy the property. There certainly is an opportunity to, perhaps, buy at a reduced price.

Mr Christopherson: How much public money is involved?

Mr Attridge: It depends on the land trust. We've been able to work with some private foundations and a variety of sources in order to provide programs to the land trust. And they are out there raising their own funds. Government funds tend to be limited but I think one of the benefits of land trusts that I've tried to demonstrate is that there is an opportunity to really leverage many times the investment that might be made into land secured and the kinds of ecological services that have an immeasurable value from that protection.

The Chair: With that, I would like to thank you on behalf of the committee for your presentation this afternoon.

Mr Attridge: Thank you, sir.

The Chair: I guess one item before we adjourn is that for those who wish to take the bus tomorrow to Waterloo, we will be leaving at 7:45 am, in front of Queen's Park.

This committee is adjourned until 10 tomorrow morning in Waterloo.

The committee adjourned at 1655.

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