



---

ISSN 1181-6465

Legislative Assembly  
of Ontario  
Second Session, 38<sup>th</sup> Parliament

Assemblée législative  
de l'Ontario  
Deuxième session, 38<sup>e</sup> législature

## **Official Report of Debates (Hansard)**

Tuesday 16 May 2006

## **Journal des débats (Hansard)**

Mardi 16 mai 2006

**Standing committee on  
estimates**

Ministry of Community  
and Social Services

**Comité permanent des  
budgets des dépenses**

Ministère des Services sociaux et  
communautaires

Chair: Cameron Jackson  
Clerk: Katch Koch

Président : Cameron Jackson  
Greffier : Katch Koch

---

### **Hansard on the Internet**

Hansard and other documents of the Legislative Assembly can be on your personal computer within hours after each sitting. The address is:

<http://www.ontla.on.ca/>

### **Index inquiries**

Reference to a cumulative index of previous issues may be obtained by calling the Hansard Reporting Service indexing staff at 416-325-7410 or 325-3708.

### **Copies of Hansard**

Copies of Hansard can be purchased from Publications Ontario: 880 Bay Street, Toronto, Ontario, M7A 1N8.  
e-mail: [webpubont@gov.on.ca](mailto:webpubont@gov.on.ca)

### **Le Journal des débats sur Internet**

L'adresse pour faire paraître sur votre ordinateur personnel le Journal et d'autres documents de l'Assemblée législative en quelques heures seulement après la séance est :

### **Renseignements sur l'index**

Adressez vos questions portant sur des numéros précédents du Journal des débats au personnel de l'index, qui vous fourniront des références aux pages dans l'index cumulatif, en composant le 416-325-7410 ou le 325-3708.

### **Exemplaires du Journal**

Des exemplaires du Journal sont en vente à Publications Ontario : 880, rue Bay Toronto (Ontario), M7A 1N8  
courriel : [webpubont@gov.on.ca](mailto:webpubont@gov.on.ca)

---

Hansard Reporting and Interpretation Services  
Room 500, West Wing, Legislative Building  
111 Wellesley Street West, Queen's Park  
Toronto ON M7A 1A2  
Telephone 416-325-7400; fax 416-325-7430  
Published by the Legislative Assembly of Ontario



Service du Journal des débats et d'interprétation  
Salle 500, aile ouest, Édifice du Parlement  
111, rue Wellesley ouest, Queen's Park  
Toronto ON M7A 1A2  
Téléphone, 416-325-7400; télécopieur, 416-325-7430  
Publié par l'Assemblée législative de l'Ontario

## LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

## ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

STANDING COMMITTEE ON  
ESTIMATESCOMITÉ PERMANENT DES  
BUDGETS DES DÉPENSES

Tuesday 16 May 2006

Mardi 16 mai 2006

*The committee met at 1556 in room 151.*MINISTRY OF COMMUNITY  
AND SOCIAL SERVICES

**The Chair (Mr. Cameron Jackson):** I'd like to call to order the standing committee on estimates. We'd like to welcome the Minister of Community and Social Services. Minister, we have approximately four hours till we are completed this round of estimates. I wonder, do you have any additional answers or responses? No? Thank you. These are the most current. These have been circulated by the clerk.

Then we're going to, by agreement, start the rotation again. I will begin with Mr. Martiniuk. Since it's the top of the hour, these will be 20-minute rotations. We're in your hands, Mr. Martiniuk.

**Mr. Gerry Martiniuk (Cambridge):** Thank you, Chair. Mr. Dunlop will lead off.

**Mr. Garfield Dunlop (Simcoe North):** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair, and to my colleague Mr. Martiniuk and to the minister.

Minister, all of my questions today will be on the closure of the three regional centres. I'd like to start out by saying I'm not sure if you've visited many of the regional centres, but I think it's important to note that when this closure date was announced, it was fairly devastating to a lot of the communities and a lot of the family members. I wanted to put that on the record because the family members of course must be writing you letters on a day-to-day basis, as they are me. They would still like to see some kind of a safety net put in place.

My first question, though, if I could—and please feel free to get back to me at a future date if you don't feel comfortable answering it now. The one in particular I'm thinking of, the Huronia Regional Centre in Orillia, is on a very large piece of property that at one time held substantially more clients than are there today. Today, agreements have been made with the Ontario Provincial Police and the Ministry of the Attorney General, and they actually occupy buildings that were previously occupied at one time by Ministry of Community and Social Services employees and the clients.

I know a lot of people in my community are very concerned. There's still about 20 acres of property that house residents of the Huronia Regional Centre. I'm

wondering when we can expect your ministry to declare the balance of the properties surplus because, if I can tell you, there's a great deal of interest from groups like the OPP and possibly other ministries, the city. We've even got a possible proposal for maybe a satellite campus at that site from Lakehead University. Can you give me a date when your ministry would declare the other buildings on the property surplus?

**Hon. Madeleine Meilleur (Minister of Community and Social Services, minister responsible for franco-phone affairs):** First of all, I have a question for you. When you talk about how people were devastated when they heard that the institution was closing down, was it in 1987 when it was first announced that all three facilities would be—

**Mr. Dunlop:** No, it was on September 9, 2004, when there was a final date put on it, because we felt that the services would be put in place and that the family members and the community would have an opportunity to give a review before a final announcement was made. What actually took place was that we had a deadline put in place and, with or without the services being put in place for the people that were in these three facilities and/or those that were not in facilities across the province and other areas, we were devastated to learn that a decision had been made.

When these facilities are closed, the safety net that they provide now is gone. You have to remember that the 1,000 people that remain in these facilities are the most high-needs people left of any of the closed facilities.

**Hon. Mrs. Meilleur:** I wanted to remind everyone that the closure of the facilities was announced in 1987 and was supported by following governments, including your government. I wanted to reassure you also that for the approximately 1,000 residents who are still in the three facilities, before they leave the institutions there is planning that is being done. The planning is being done with the best interests of the residents at heart. The family is involved.

I wanted to answer one of the questions that you had: how many facilities? In my five weeks, I've visited one facility. As you know, changing a ministry in the middle of the session—I concentrate my time and energy into learning about my new ministry. But I will visit the two others.

To answer your question about if and when I will announce what we will do with these three facilities, I

have to refer that to the Ontario Realty Corp. They are the ones dealing with the facilities and they are the ones negotiating with possible buyers. I will have to refer that to Ontario Realty. I cannot answer that question.

**Mr. Dunlop:** That's contrary to what the ORC are telling us. They're telling me that your ministry has to declare those properties and those buildings surplus in order to sell or lease, whatever it may be, to another ministry or to a municipality. If it is the ORC, I'm going to go back and tell them that that's what you said, because I've got people who are interested in some of those empty buildings.

**Hon. Mrs. Meilleur:** I'm sorry, I didn't understand your question, meaning, when would the last person be leaving the institution? I cannot say that today, because all these people leaving the facilities, we are working very closely with the families and we are looking in the communities where they want to go, working with the service providers in different communities to make sure that when they leave the facilities they have a very welcoming milieu to welcome them.

I cannot today, but we can get back to you on when approximately we plan to do that. I think in Huron there is somewhere around 300 hundred people or less than that who need to be placed in the community. It's not a process that we want to rush because we have the best interests of the residents at heart.

**Mr. Dunlop:** Minister, I clearly understand that. The schedule said March 2009. I've actually seen a plan that most of the residents would probably be moved out by that point, March 2009. What I was trying to ask you is, the vacant buildings that sit there today—I mean, we're talking about a 300-acre site in Orillia. There are a number of vacant buildings. I'm told by the Ontario Realty Corp., because you've already moved—let me put it this way: The office of the Attorney General is already using one of the buildings as a courthouse. The OPP cadet program is in another building. What I'm saying is that there are a number of vacant buildings that you may be able to capitalize funding for, receive money for, either from a municipality or from another ministry, but they tell me that you have to declare those buildings surplus. I'm going to guess there are over one million square feet of buildings available right today that could be declared surplus. I'm not asking you about the last client. You could declare those buildings surplus today, as opposed to when the last client leaves the facility, because you've already made the buildings surplus.

**Hon. Mrs. Meilleur:** I'm told by the deputy minister that by the fall we will have a pretty good idea when we will declare these buildings surplus. There are two ways to look at it: Do we want to sell the property separately, in separate pieces of land, or do we want to look at it as an entity? Those are the discussions that are going on right now with the Ontario Realty Corp. I can tell you that by this fall we will have a pretty good idea of what we're going to do and when we're going to declare these pieces of land and these buildings surplus.

**Mr. Dunlop:** That's the answer I was looking for. Thank you.

There are a couple of examples I had. I've been getting a number of letters, and maybe you can or cannot answer these questions.

**Hon. Mrs. Meilleur:** If I cannot, I have people around me who are very well informed about what is going on. We want to give you the best answer, the most accurate answer.

**Mr. Dunlop:** A gentleman from the Rideau Regional Centre was moved out in September last year. His name is Mark Rivet. It caused quite a disturbance in his life and he tried to escape approximately 11 times from the facility he was in, the group home that he was located in. He was eventually arrested and put in jail. I want to know if you can tell me where he is today.

**Hon. Mrs. Meilleur:** As you know, I cannot discuss particular cases publicly. So I am not prepared to answer that question.

**Mr. Dunlop:** Okay. In Chatham, on Taylor Avenue, there has been a new building built apparently. It's a group home. The parents' association is questioning the area that it's in. There has been a lot of violence in that area and a lot of crime. They're questioning what your criteria are for funding group homes in particular areas in communities. They're saying that this is a very poor place, on Taylor Avenue in Chatham, to have a new group home. Can you give me the criteria?

**Hon. Mrs. Meilleur:** I will ask the staff to answer that question, but let me assure you that when we negotiate with an organization to open a group home, we have the best interests and safety of our residents at heart. I would be very surprised that we have picked an area like this, but to talk about the criteria, I will turn it over to the deputy minister.

**The Chair:** Deputy, please introduce yourself.

**Mr. Kevin Costante:** Kevin Costante, Deputy Minister of Community and Social Services. In terms of criteria, the main criterion that is used is actually the local zoning bylaws of the communities. I can't talk about the specific case on Taylor Avenue; I'm not aware of it. In most communities, that requires that group homes be spaced apart. It also depends on the availability of land or a building that is large enough for the uses that we have. So there's a whole series of considerations that go into play.

I should also say that I think it has always been the practice of the ministry and the government of the day to make sure that facilities are spread throughout communities and that they're not highly concentrated in one area. Again, I can't speak to the specifics of Chatham, but I think it is normal in communities that group homes in other sectors, like young offenders etc., are spread throughout communities in all areas and not excluding areas or too heavily concentrated in a particular area.

1610

**Mr. Dunlop:** Thank you very much. Another question to the minister or to the deputy: The previous minister said that \$192 million had been committed in spending over four years to community supports and facilities for developmentally disabled Ontarians. This plan includes

the building of 390 new homes, including 90 homes for individuals with high needs. Can you tell me what the staging plan is for the spending allocations and how soon these facilities will be in place?

**Hon. Mrs. Meilleur:** First of all, in 2005-06 we created over 658 spaces and so far in 2006-07 we have 269, for a total of 927 permanent community spaces. In capital dollars, this represents \$25.2 million. We are planning and we will have others in construction. I'll ask the deputy to give us—it's the dollar amount that you wanted?

**Mr. Dunlop:** Yes, how much has been spent to date out of that 2004 announcement that Minister Papatello made at the time?

**Hon. Mrs. Meilleur:** In 2004-05, it's exactly what I gave you.

**Mr. Dunlop:** Okay. Are you saying, then, that the 900 spaces you just mentioned are for the 1,000 people who were remaining in the three regional centres, or is that for some of the thousands of other people who are looking for facilities at this time? It's my understanding there are over 6,000 people in the province who are without these facilities, without space for these facilities.

**Hon. Mrs. Meilleur:** Those are not only for those leaving the residences.

**Mr. Costante:** I may have to get back to you, because there have been several announcements about new spaces in the community, but I think prior to 2009, since the fall of 2004, the government has announced 2,180 spaces; 1,000 of those would be for individuals from the facilities and 1,180 for individuals who were living in the community. Some of them were young people who were in children's aid societies, who, once they turned 18 or 21, move into the adult system. Some of them were new group homes or supported independent living or family home situations for individuals who were home with aging parents who could no longer look after them. We could get you the year-by-year breakdown, but I'm sorry, I don't have that with me.

**Mr. Dunlop:** I would appreciate that, because that seems to be an area where there's a lot of misunderstanding or people aren't clear on the exact numbers, particularly the number of people. There are a number of people across the province who live with parents who are aging, and I'm told that that, along with other folks, amounts to over 6,000. We need spaces for those people before we start moving people out of the regional centres. That's one of the arguments that many of the parents' organizations have put forward.

**Mr. Costante:** I think historically—because I've personally been involved in the last round of depopulation from facilities—we try to do both at the same time. There is a demand coming from the community that needs to be met and we also try to do the facility depopulation at the same time. We have a total of approximately 14,000 residential spaces already out in the community. So yes, there were the 6,000 who left the community, but there are people who have never been in an institution and went straight into supportive independent living or group homes.

**Mr. Dunlop:** I understand that, and there's more to come, I believe. There are quite a few more to come.

**Hon. Mrs. Meilleur:** If I may add, of the 927 that I've talked about, only 118 were for those leaving the institutions.

**Mr. Dunlop:** Only 118?

**Hon. Mrs. Meilleur:** Yes, because those are the ones who have left the institutions since 2004.

**Mr. Dunlop:** Okay, I appreciate that. Thank you very much.

Mr. Chair, how much time do I have on this round?

**The Chair:** About three or four minutes.

**Mr. Dunlop:** I attended a lot of the parents' meetings. You've got to understand that in a community where you're losing 700 jobs and it's part of the culture of the community, it's a fairly important and a high-level issue to the citizens of the community, and particularly the family members who travel to that community to see their loved ones.

One of the things that I'd like to get your comments on: The existing services in a facility like the Huronia Regional Centre, where they had dental care and access to doctors, a therapeutic pool and a kinesiology room—people were pretty happy in that facility. They didn't have a lot of complaints about it. We were told that wherever they would go, wherever the clients were moved to, they would have equal or better services. Can you tell me what kind services people can expect in one of the facilities that would include one of the 118 beds that you just mentioned a moment ago? What kind of service could those people expect? Are they guaranteed a doctor? Can they get dental treatment, that type of thing? Because the people are telling me that they can't get it, it's not available.

**Hon. Mrs. Meilleur:** I will say to you, yes. Of course, it's not within the facilities like it was at Huronia or the Rideau Regional Centre, but we have created four—how do you call them?

**Interjection:** Specialized networks.

**Hon. Mrs. Meilleur:**—specialized networks that specialize in treatments for those with developmental disabilities. I will ask the assistant deputy minister to speak about that.

**Ms. Lynn MacDonald:** Lynn MacDonald, assistant deputy minister of policy.

In addition to the four specialized networks that the minister—perhaps I could expand a bit on the four specialized networks, to start with. Those networks were intended to build on practitioners who are already in the field, together with allied academics who are leading research in the field. We're bringing those resources together in four specialized networks across the province, with the intent that they would have an outreach capacity to other professionals in the community. They would be able to help train and expand the knowledge base of medical practitioners, nurses, dentists, occupational therapists etc., in the different areas.

What we've also done is we've invested in a series of pilot video services, if you will. What we've done is that

in the southeast and southwest—I think I've got the location correct—over the last 18 months we've built a capacity through video conferencing facilities, not to bring the client to the professional, but in effect to bring the professional to the client. In northern Ontario where, as you know, there is a dearth of professionals generally, we didn't want to have to bring our developmental services clients down to Kingston to receive services, so we've run some pilots that have been enormously successful in actually using video conferencing to do case analysis and to bring advice to local nurse practitioners in a community, looking at exchanging views with the client, the resident in northern or other isolated locations.

The third element that we've done that we're very pleased about it is that we created a new little program last year, just to see how it would work. I'm not going to remember the proper name for it—forgive me—but it was intended to expand the training and recruitment of professionals in the field of specialty services for developmentally challenged residents. I had an e-mail only last week from the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health here in Toronto, just as an example, to mention that they have had two students over the last year—one is a nurse practitioner, extended class, and one is an occupational therapist—expanding their knowledge base through practical, focused training on the job in working with developmental services clients, and essentially asking us, given the success of those students, could we provide them with more this year?

There's a range of things that we're providing, recognizing again that this is within a context where not everyone in the province, whether they face this particular challenge or not, can readily access specialized resources.

1620

**Hon. Mrs. Meilleur:** I wanted to add that we don't let individuals leave these institutions prior to having connected them with a doctor or a dentist etc.—the professionals. We don't think it's proper to do that. When the placement coordinator works with the family and the receiving organization, we make sure that this is in place before the individual will leave the institution.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Minister. I'd now like to recognize Mr. Prue.

**Mr. Michael Prue (Beaches—East York):** Thank you. I'm going to start on the same one so we don't get confused. On the last day I was also asking questions about the regional centres.

I've heard what you said about the doctors and dentists and the videoconferencing, and I'm going to leave that where it is. But I'm curious to know how many of these new centres, how many of these new places where people are going to be moved into will have a swimming pool. The one they're in now has a swimming pool. How many of them will have sensory units? And I've been in there and seen the sensory units. How many of them are going to have kinesiology? Because they've got a pretty good program. Obviously, if you've got five or six people in a house, that's not going to happen. How many of them are going to have the kind of facilities people have there now?

**Hon. Mrs. Meilleur:** I will ask the deputy to answer that.

**Mr. Costante:** I think what happens, Mr. Prue, is that for each person there's a plan. If the person likes to bowl, the local community agency makes arrangements to do that—or to use the local pool. Most communities have a lot of facilities, some of which weren't available within a facility. I think almost every group home in this province has a van or some sort of transportation. I think our Community Living agencies across the province have been hugely creative in connecting up the thousands of individuals who are out there now into everyday community activities like everyone else in this room uses. That is the philosophy and that's what we've been doing. I think they do a lot of that and there are a lot more opportunities. Yes, the swimming pool is not down the hallway. It does require a van ride. But I think what we've striven to do is to actually have people be active members of their community, as much as they possibly can, and to broaden the number of opportunities available to them, not to lessen them.

**Mr. Prue:** The families have told me of some of the wonderful things that happened at Huronia: the picnics by the lake, the parade that winds its way through the grounds of Huronia from Orillia a couple of times a year, those kinds of things. Can these residents expect these things?

**Mr. Costante:** I know that many of the Community Living associations have trips to ballgames at the SkyDome or Rogers Centre, whatever it's called these days. I think they're wonderfully creative in getting them involved. I suspect there are people with developmental services who attend the Easter parade in your riding.

**Mr. Prue:** Oh, for sure.

**Mr. Costante:** I think that's the spirit that this whole movement has been trying to take place over 50 years. I think they're very creative about it. So I think the people in the community settings enjoy equal, if not superior, opportunities to be involved in their community and meet a wide range of people in everyday life.

**Mr. Prue:** I would grant that that is the case for a great many people with developmental disabilities. There are people, though, in the facility—I went into a room with 20 men with pica. I had never seen that before in my life. It was, for me, a horrendous experience, these men walking around trying to pick things out of the wall to eat, and no skills in terms of verbal skills or anything—gloves on their hands to stop them, staring blankly. They have to be literally guarded 24 hours a day so that they don't eat things and do things. I see how the swimming pool can work for them and I can see how the sensory room can work. Quite bluntly, it's a hard question to ask, but I have to ask it: What kind of community support could there be for these 20 men? Where could they be taken? What could they do in the community?

**Mr. Costante:** The condition you talk about is called pica. We have many people who are in community settings now who have pica.

Again, we have to be very cautious with the people for their own health and for other people. The community agencies have higher staffing levels around individuals with higher needs, some of them maybe including pica. Many community living agencies have Snoezelen rooms, which are the rooms that you're talking about. They can enjoy these outings just like everyone else. Yes, it requires extra vigilance and care, but for the most part, very few people in the last 30 years have gone into facilities. The vast majority have been going out.

There are many, many people who've never been in the facilities who have pica, who are in communities and have been in communities and enjoy these same things. It does require care and attention; no question.

**Mr. Prue:** A question was asked of the minister yesterday in the Legislature about a group called Ongwanada, which is setting up group homes and facilities in Kingston. What they're saying is that no skills are required to run one of these group homes; no training is required; you need insurance, you need a fire certificate, but you don't really need to know anything. Is this the reality? Is the ministry setting up homes like this? Are you contracting out to homes like this?

**Hon. Mrs. Meilleur:** I will ask the deputy to answer that. But I want to tell you that we have reviewed what was in the paper, and it was stated very clearly that there is training provided. They may not have training when they come in, but I'm told that a lot of the facilities have individuals with special training. When they cannot find people with special training, they are trained on the job. I will turn it over to the deputy to answer the question.

**Mr. Constante:** First of all, if I can back up, the program is called the Familyhome program. It is a program that is designed for higher-functioning individuals. It does operate like a foster-care-type approach. To my knowledge, the agencies that offer this offer training. The particular ad that was quoted yesterday, a quote from the ad says, "We provide ongoing training and support from our professional staff and good remuneration." They provide professional backup to those. That's one aspect of the answer.

The other aspect: For every individual leaving a facility, we do have a planning coordinator, as the minister mentioned. There's a very detailed plan made of their needs and issues, challenges and the things that they like to do. We're very careful, I think, at trying to match those up. Added on to that—we practise this, and the court reinforced it: It requires the consent of the family.

I think we're very cautious not to put people in inappropriate situations. We try to make the best placement possible. Sometimes, those placements don't work out and we have to look at alternatives, and we're quick to do that. I've rented apartments that haven't worked out and I've had to look for alternatives as well, as many people in the room have.

Again, I think we try to take great care for the needs of the individuals, have them in an appropriate environment. Also, we take great care to understand the needs and desires of the family.

1630

**Mr. Prue:** Is it true that Ongwanada—I hope I'm pronouncing it right—pays between \$26 and \$38 a day per person who is taken in in these group homes?

**Mr. Costante:** Sorry, I'm not aware of the costs of this particular agency.

**Mr. Prue:** How much do you provide to them, and how much is that a savings over the regional centres?

**Mr. Costante:** I can give you gross numbers. Again, I can't speak to Ongwanada.

**Mr. Prue:** It's a tough one. I wish they had a better name.

**Mr. Costante:** Ongwanada. I'll have to practise that. I believe the average cost in our institutions is slightly over \$100,000 per annum in operating costs. In a group home it's in the \$70,000 to \$75,000 range, and I believe—Lynn can correct me if I'm wrong—it's in the low \$20,000 for a Familyhome. Again, I think you have to understand, in a Familyhome situation we are looking at people who have higher functionality, if you will.

**Ms. MacDonald:** Lynn MacDonald, assistant deputy minister. I will add—not to correct my deputy—it depends on the degree of skills and desires of the individual, of course. Familyhome will range from \$22,000 but will go up to almost \$60,000, depending on the particular needs and skills of the individual.

I did want to mention, however, because it's something that we're particularly proud of, that Ongwanada—it took me a year and a half to get around that—is affiliated with Queen's University. It is the core, together with Queen's, of one of our four new specialized networks. What they're able to bring to a Familyhome program or any group home setting is the additional resources associated with the specialized network, so the clinicians, the nurses, the dentists, which enable them to reach out. If a client, as we all do from time to time, moves into a bad frame of mind in their life and needs further stabilizing, Ongwanada, given the surrounding resources that they have, are able to provide additional resources beyond the resources of Familyhome or their individual group homes. That's a particular asset that, in fact, some other organizations don't have.

**Mr. Prue:** I just want to be clear. It costs about \$100,000, on average—some will cost more and some will cost less—in the existing facilities. These facilities will cost somewhere between \$22,000 and \$70,000.

**Ms. MacDonald:** The \$100,000 average would include overhead for the facilities. If you looked at a low-support-needs individual versus a high-support-needs individual, there's going to be as broad a range.

**Mr. Prue:** So this would be a considerable savings to the government to close it down.

**Ms. MacDonald:** Not to the government, sir, because we've committed to take all of the dollars that we spend on those facilities and roll them out into the community to support the individuals who are coming out of the facilities.

**Hon. Mrs. Meilleur:** I want to reiterate that this is not a savings exercise. I think I said at the beginning that

study after study has shown that it's not the way to care for these people. They would be better placed in a community setting. That's why this decision was taken. Like the assistant deputy minister said, all the money, if there are savings, will be reinvested for the care of these individuals or others.

**Mr. Prue:** Just so I'm clear and can follow this in the years to come—hopefully if I'm here—can you tell me the three figures I'd like to get: What are the total funding operating costs for the Rideau centre, the Huronia centre and the South West centre this year, if you have it? If you don't have it, you can perhaps—

**Hon. Mrs. Meilleur:** We have it.

**Mr. Prue:** Okay, that's pretty good.

**Hon. Mrs. Meilleur:** Just be patient for a minute.

**Mr. Costante:** I have it right here. I have the numbers for 2003-04, and we can get you the most current numbers. In 2003-04, Rideau Regional was \$40.8 million, southwestern region was \$27.7 million and Huronia region was \$38.7 million, for a total of \$107.2 million. We'll update the numbers for you and get back to the committee.

**Mr. Prue:** That would be most kind. I just want to make sure that when all this unfolds I can see \$107 million more, because then I won't think that it might be a cost-saving exercise.

Could you also get back to us too—I know you can't do that now—at the time that the three centres are to be sold, how much they're being sold for? Will the money they're being sold for go back into the system as well or will that go to the consolidated revenue fund? The Huronia centre on Lake Simcoe must be worth a bundle.

**Hon. Mrs. Meilleur:** I cannot answer that question. There has not been any discussion on, where the money will go after the sale of these three properties.

**The Chair:** If I may, having had some experience with this, the property would have to wave through all the other ministries to determine if there were other provincial uses. Then there's a hierarchy before it's put before the public.

I can just tell you, from my own agency in Burlington, we just opened a home for five residents. It was half a million dollars for the capital. That's \$100,000 just in the capital. The only reason I'm jumping in is that I've been a member for 35 years. I've helped build these homes, and I can tell you, it's extremely expensive to bring one into the community model. I fully support it, but it is really rather expensive. I'm sorry to interrupt, but that's how the property would be disposed of.

**Mr. Prue:** All I'm trying to make sure of is that when the property is disposed of, if it doesn't go to a government agency, if it is sold to a private person, that the money is used for this purpose. If it's not, I need to know that. I need to know if it goes to some other purpose. If you would be so kind, at some future point, to indicate that; if you don't, I will be asking in the House.

**Hon. Mrs. Meilleur:** If we forget to tell you, please remind us.

**Mr. Prue:** All right.

**Hon. Mrs. Meilleur:** I hope that you and I will be there in 2009.

**Mr. Prue:** We'll be watching. How much time do I have, Mr. Chair?

**The Chair:** You've got three minutes.

**Mr. Prue:** That's really not much time to start a new one, so I'm going to go back to the old one, which I started with—child poverty and the clawback—for three minutes. I'd just like to ask about ODSP payments, particularly around the food allowance. I asked a question yesterday, and we're starting to collect a great many people who are being cut back on their food allowance.

The gentleman yesterday, as I explained in the House, had ulcerated feet, he had diabetes, he was nearly blind, and his food allowance is being cut back. One of the things he requires is a special form of yogourt, which is very expensive, that he has to eat four times a day. He's gone from, I think, \$150 down to about \$30—about half. Maybe I should get the exact amounts, but about half. The first thing he has had to cut out is this special yogourt, which the doctor says he needs to take his medicine.

Is there a directive from the ministry that so many people are being cut back?

**Hon. Mrs. Meilleur:** The directive from the ministry is that the special diet allowance—this program was put together to assist those who have a medical condition and need special diets. Because of recent drastic increases in the demand, we have asked the Ontario Medical Association to help us put a list together of diagnoses, of medical conditions which require a special diet. We've prepared a new form. This form will have to be answered or filled out by a health professional. Those who were receiving a special diet allowance and whose medical condition does not appear on the list have been refused. But we are going to review the list again with the health professionals and readjust. But if there is someone who needs a special diet, they are provided with the special diet allowance.

I'll ask the assistant deputy to complete my answer. I may have forgotten something.

1640

**Ms. MacDonald:** As the minister says, the only change we've made to date on the form is to ensure that the health professional—and there are four different categories of health professionals, of course, who can complete the form, so it's not only doctors and nurses of the extended class but also dietitians, and in the case of First Nations or aboriginal communities, traditional midwives with respect to pregnancy nutrition allowances can complete the form.

They are now asked to indicate which medical condition it is that corresponds to the schedule which dictates what the medical diet should have. For example, if an individual previously had a medical condition, such as diabetes, which required a particular special diet, a diet supplement, if the medical practitioner now indicates on the form that they continue to have diabetes and that that



continues to require a special diet, then the individual would continue to receive the special diet.

**Mr. Prue:** Can you tell me how many people are being reduced? In my office alone there are dozens. I talked to my colleague from Timmins–James Bay, who says he has 16 people. This seems like an inordinately high number of people to be suddenly refused, people who have been on it for years cut down or cut off. How many are being cut down or cut off?

**Ms. MacDonald:** The individuals who are having a case-by-case review would be asked to have their health professional confirm that they still have the medical condition that requires the special diet. So if the medical professional indicated that I no longer had a medical condition that required a special diet, then the professional would not complete the form and I might well lose the special increment that I had previously, but if the medical professional confirms that I still have the condition requiring a special diet, that would continue, and we have not, as yet, changed the amounts allowed for in the minister's schedule. For example, if I have a medical condition, and my professional attests to it, that requires a special diet that previously paid me \$27 extra a month, we have not changed that \$27 figure.

We have committed to do two reviews. One review is with the medical profession to ensure that we have not neglected to have new and emerging medical conditions on the form. So the profession is advising the ministry if there are new conditions which should be added to the list that would require new special diets.

The second review we've undertaken is, again, together with the medical professions that practise in these fields. They'll tell us if a particular condition which requires a special diet—and let's take your example of a particular form of yogourt, for example—continues to require a payout of \$27 or whether that amount is out of date and we should be raising the amount of money.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much. I now would like to recognize Mr. Wilkinson.

**Mr. John Wilkinson (Perth–Middlesex):** Congratulations, Minister. In this 20-minute rotation, I'll be sharing my time with the member from Willowdale and the member from Ottawa–Orléans.

Just at the beginning before I ask my question, I am heartened to hear that you're planning, in your new busy schedule, to be able to get to all three of the regional centres. I know in my own riding, where we don't have a regional centre, I would commend the work of Cheshire Home in London, which supports many of my constituents in Middlesex and even some in Stratford, and particularly Community Living in Stratford-St. Marys and also in North Perth and the wonderful L'Arch communities that we have in Stratford. We have some five L'Arch communities in our small city of 30,000 people.

That model, which I know has been encouraged by the CMHC actually, is a wonderful, cost-efficient and caring way of looking after people in the community with developmental disabilities, living in the community with people who are able-bodied, as inspired by Jean Vanier.

That is a wonderful model that we can look at, and I would invite you publicly, Minister, if you happen to have an opportunity to come to Stratford and our riding, to see that.

I'd just like to change gears and look at the question of social assistance. My own feeling as an MPP, dealing with constituents and particularly with those people who are on Ontario Works and others on Ontario disability support payments, is that if they had their wish, it would be to work. They've told me, particularly before I got elected, that there were a number of barriers that prevented them from working, actually a disincentive not to have the dignity of work. I understand that the government has taken some initiatives to help people get beyond that. Since this isn't my file, I'm wondering if you could maybe list some of these initiatives for us so that we can share that with our constituents.

**Hon. Mrs. Meilleur:** Thank you for that question. I got the same comment when I was the chair of social services for the regional municipality of Ottawa-Carleton, that there were a lot of barriers that would prevent them from returning to work. What we have done since we formed the government is to try to remove these barriers. One thing we have done, for instance, is help them to find a job, but also to keep a job. That's something that we have provided to them through the JobsNow program. As you know, this pilot project is in place. We've noticed that some people need more assistance than others to keep their jobs, so they are providing services for a longer time to help them keep their jobs.

Another barrier that we'd like to raise is their drug card. They were losing their drug card when they returned to work. What we have done is allowed those on social assistance to keep their drug card for six months, or, if they have a drug plan with the employer, get rid of it earlier when the employer drug plan kicks in. These six months can be extended to 12 months under special circumstances.

Another incentive is, when they return to work, they can keep 50% of their income up to a certain maximum, for sure. Some cannot have a full-time job right away, so at least they can keep 50% of their earnings before we reduce their OW. Another point is the child care cost. We increased it from \$390 to \$600 per month, to help them get a child care option for working parents. We also give them up to \$500 as a start-up for job-related expenses. Some need special clothing or transportation.

Those are four or five examples of assistance that we give to encourage them to return to work.

**Mr. Wilkinson:** Thank you, Minister. Just is a follow-up before I yield my time, one of the concepts that was foreign to me, as a member who came from a business background—I've never really had the opportunity to deal with a lot of people who faced the challenges of being on Ontario Works and ODSP—is the whole concept of the welfare wall. We have a situation where there is, as you said, a disincentive. So what I'm particularly interested in hearing about is your own philosophy about

the need for us to keep that—you have to understand that so you don't end up having unintended consequences when you try to do the right thing and help to move people to the dignity of work.

I know your predecessor spoke quite passionately about this. I would be interested in your own opinions about the welfare wall and how you see that as part of your mandate as our new minister.

1650

**Hon. Mrs. Meilleur:** First of all, I think our approach is different. We take for granted that people want to work. If they cannot work, let's try to find the reason they cannot return to work. One option is to remove these barriers and the other one is to give them the support they need to return to work.

The welfare wall is, "I cannot afford to go back to work because it will cost me too much," especially for those who work part-time or at minimum wage. They are not encouraged by supporting them one day or the other. As you know, this group, MISWAA, issued a report yesterday. They gave us good recommendations to help the working poor as to how we can support them so they will continue to work and provide for their families.

I'll turn it over to the assistant deputy minister to complete my answer, if I've forgotten something.

**Ms. MacDonald:** Thank you, Minister. I believe the minister spoke earlier about the improvements to Ontario Works that would help address the welfare wall and get people back to work. The ministry, as recently as January 2006, introduced a series of reforms to the Ontario disability support program in order also to provide incentives to individuals to either increase their earnings or to be able to exit ODSP and work full-time.

We want to be very flexible. There is obviously hesitation about individuals in taking that risk, so we have, for example, not only moved in ODSP to that 50% earnings exemption—a much simpler, more generous approach than previously—we've introduced a \$100-a-month allowance which could relate to things like transportation in order to get to work; \$500, as the minister mentioned, for employment; a \$500 bonus if you're leaving the caseload altogether to assist you in new employment-related expenses, which might be work boots or whatever the case may be.

The one area that the modernization-of-income-support working group made further recommendations on—I'm pleased to say that when we line up the suggestions from the task force and the work that the ministry has actually done over the last couple of years, we've pretty much addressed most of the issues they've raised. The one additional area they've raised for consideration is whether we could do something further to improve the current treatment of assets for those who are on either Ontario Works or Ontario disability. The minister has directed us, as a result of the work of the task force and their recommendations specifically around assets, to do a further round of consultation, to do the policy research to see whether there are more changes we should make there.

**Hon. Mrs. Meilleur:** Yes, indeed. I felt that a lot of these people on social assistance were, for lack of a better term, stripped of their assets, so it was discouraging for them, because if they had some savings for their children to pursue their education, they were not able to keep it. So that's one thing that I have directed staff to look into, and also how much in assets they can keep before we start reducing their welfare income.

**Mr. Wilkinson:** I know the member from Willowdale has a question.

**Mr. David Zimmer (Willowdale):** A quick question on helping people with disincentives to move off of the welfare rolls: are we able to do anything to assist mothers with young children when they need daycare help in terms of finding spaces or helping them with daycare expenses and all that sort of thing to remove the daycare disincentive?

**Hon. Mrs. Meilleur:** Daycare is another problem for a mother who wants to go back to work, so we have created many spaces in daycare to help those in need. We were planning to create more spaces, however now, with the disengagement of the federal government in that area, this will hurt those working poor, and it's not with \$1,200 a year that they will be able to find a very secure and professional daycare. I'll turn it over to the deputy to complete the answer.

**Ms. MacDonald:** I think you just promoted me, ma'am. I'm assistant deputy minister for policy.

Yes, in addition to the increase which the minister referred to earlier for informal daycare, where the government has increased the rates of support for informal daycare from \$390 per child per month to \$600 per child per month, we also cover, for formal daycare, actual expenses.

In addition, to assist mothers with young children on either social assistance as Ontario Works or as the Ontario disability support program, we have a number of benefits. We have a back-to-school allowance for children. We have a winter clothing allowance for children. For those mothers or parents who have to establish a new residence, they are eligible for a community start-up benefit allowance. So if they had to move to a larger apartment, for example, because of more children, we provide for those children who are in the temporary care of an adult other than their normal primary caregiver. We will provide a special allowance there, topped up in the case of northern or isolated rural areas.

When a recipient is required to pay child care up front in support of their child's safe and secure setting, we do have an advance, up-front child care payment, not just once the receipt is presented for actuals.

The government has made changes to allow that children who have earnings—and many adolescent children of families who are on social assistance do have earnings. Previously, the earnings were deducted from their income and they were not allowed to keep them towards savings for future education or education-related expenses. The government has changed that. The government has also changed the rule which previously did not

permit an exemption for savings for registered education savings plan for children. That is now exempt for income. I don't want to go on at too much length here, but there is a long list.

**Mr. Zimmer:** I get the drift. Thank you very much for your answer.

**The Chair:** One minute, Mr. McNeely, if you feel so inclined.

1700

**Mr. Phil McNeely (Ottawa–Orléans):** Minister, the pilot projects that are operating in, I think, six areas, and one of them is in Ottawa—I know there are a lot of people in my riding who want to work except that it's that difficulty, that incentive that is being put in place under JobsNow.

Have there been improvements in aiding those on social assistance to find jobs through the JobsNow pilot project in Ottawa? What kind of numbers are coming out of that?

**Hon. Mrs. Meilleur:** JobsNow, as you said, is a pilot project that we initiated last year in April 2005. I was in Ottawa recently to announce that there were over 2,000 individuals who are fully employed because of this JobsNow program. Out of these 2,272, 908 individuals are from Ottawa.

I visited an employer who is very supportive of this program. At the announcement, the CEO of the chamber of commerce of Ottawa was present. They have many, many employers who are supporting this JobsNow program. This program is in existence in six of our communities across Ontario.

**Mr. McNeely:** Is that going to be extended? These are pilot projects. It's not available to everyone across the province right now.

**Hon. Mrs. Meilleur:** I will ask the assistant deputy minister to answer that. First of all, we have to do the evaluation of this pilot project to ensure that it's reaching the goal that we have established prior to moving forward with the program. I'll ask the ADM to complete the answer.

**The Chair:** Briefly.

**Ms. MacDonald:** The evaluation firm is SPR Associates, which has been engaged to do an independent review. They will be using a blind sample, using the same selection criteria as were used for the participants in the actual program. We expect the final evaluation report to be received in about September 2007.

Our instructions from the approval of the pilot project were to return to cabinet with the results of the evaluation before any decision was made to either extend this program or perhaps to change the criteria for our current municipal delivery agents within the regular program, based on the learning from the evaluation, sir.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much. Mr. Martiniuk.

**Mr. Martiniuk:** I have five short questions. Good afternoon, Madam Minister, once again.

**Hon. Mrs. Meilleur:** Good afternoon.

**Mr. Martiniuk:** Exactly how much responsibility does the ministry now have for the individuals residing in

regional centres? Will that responsibility change once they move out? We're talking about financial responsibility.

**Hon. Mrs. Meilleur:** The financial responsibility—would you clarify your question? Is the ministry responsible for these individuals who are moving out? We are responsible; we're not going to abdicate our responsibility. We are responsible for these individuals. We will make sure that, in a regular evaluation, they are placed in the right home with the right services.

**Mr. Martiniuk:** Yes. You're saying that there's no change in the financial responsibility of the ministry, whether they live in the regional centre or whether they move out.

**Hon. Mrs. Meilleur:** The money, instead of being transferred to the institution, will be transferred to the agencies who are taking care of these individuals.

**Mr. Martiniuk:** Okay. Let's go on to lifestyle decisions. Is there any change in responsibility by the ministry as to lifestyle decisions while they reside in the regional centre? Is it lessened by them moving into the community?

**Hon. Mrs. Meilleur:** In the communities these agencies are responsible to provide the lifestyle, the service. The choices of activities will be expanded, because they will have a whole community to pick the activities from. I have talked to these placement coordinators, and there are wonderful stories about these individuals moving into the communities and the change in their attitude, the change in their humour, the change in their lifestyle, because—

**Mr. Martiniuk:** Thank you, Madam Minister. I think you're going a little further than the question I asked, but I thank you for that.

Does the responsibility of the ministry change in providing medical and dental care whether they live in the present residence or move out into the community?

**Hon. Mrs. Meilleur:** As I explained a few minutes ago, before moving out of the institution there is a plan that is—

**The Chair:** Madam Minister, he asked you if you pay for it. That's all he asked you. You've explained it for the record and we were all in the room. Do you pay for it outside of—you said you would hook them up with a dentist. All he's asking is, will you pay for it?

**Hon. Mrs. Meilleur:** Yes.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Minister.

**Mr. Martiniuk:** Thank you, Madam Minister. The next question is, in developing the consultation document, Opportunities and Action, did either the current or previous minister meet with the Rideau Regional Centre Association or representatives of that association?

**Hon. Mrs. Meilleur:** I will not be able to answer that question, so I'll turn it over to the deputy.

**Mr. Costante:** Sorry, I'm not aware if there was or not. I'll have to check the previous minister's schedule.

**Mr. Martiniuk:** If you would do that for me, I would appreciate it. Thank you.

Former Minister Pupatello, when she first announced the accelerated closure of these centres in September 2004, promised to bring together all relevant ministries to help the communities deal with the economic impacts of these closures. When will the communities see some kind of plan to assist them?

**Hon. Mrs. Meilleur:** I'll ask the deputy to answer that question.

**Mr. Costante:** I think in each of the regional centres we did create an inter-ministerial committee to look at opportunities. We very much wanted the local municipalities to also be part of that. I would have to likely take notice of the question about when you will see a plan and get back to you on that. I'm not sure if there's an exact date envisioned or whether these are ongoing processes depending on what opportunities become available, because opportunities present themselves at differing times.

**Mr. Martiniuk:** Thank you very much.

**The Chair:** Mr. Dunlop.

**Mr. Dunlop:** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair, and if you could just let me know when you need the appropriate time for the couple of questions you had.

I want to go back again to the regional centres and a couple of areas. The one area is, when we remove the safety net of these regional centres—and that's what I call them, because I know there has been a number of people who have been sent back from community living and group home situations to the regional centres in the past. When they're gone, when a community living organization or a particular group home can't handle a high-needs client, will they end up in jails or mental institutions such as the Penetanguishene Mental Health Centre?

**Hon. Mrs. Meilleur:** I'll ask the deputy to answer that question.

**Mr. Costante:** I think the answer is that we're going to try as hard as possible for that not to happen. What we have announced and are in the process of putting in place is 90 spaces, I guess you would call it, for very high-needs individuals who may have extreme behavioural issues, so that when they get in crisis and perhaps can't be handled, supported in their normal group home setting, let's say, we have a place that can back that up, where there are more intensive behavioural supports available. So we very much see the need to have within our developmental services system a backup to their normal placement. Some of these spaces will be temporary, because some people just need them for a short period of time—they may go into crisis related to their drug therapies, for example—and some of them can be longer term if it's a longer-term issue. We have some of those spaces already in place, and we plan to complete the full 90.

1710

**Mr. Dunlop:** Could you tell me how many were in place? I'd be curious to know that.

**Mr. Costante:** I don't have the exact numbers that are in place. You want to know how many are in place now?

**Mr. Dunlop:** Yes.

**Mr. Costante:** Okay, we'll get that for you.

**Mr. Dunlop:** Thank you very much. The second area I'd like to ask a question on is, when I've visited the Huronia Regional Centre—and I'll be honest with you; I've only visited HRC. I've never been to Rideau or southwestern. I noticed that there's a huge percentage of very elderly people in this remaining facility. The question I get asked quite often in my riding—because I've got a very high percentage of senior citizens to begin with, and we have a lack of long-term-care beds—is, when these clients are moved out of the HRC, will they in fact end up taking up spaces in long-term-care facilities or hospital beds, or will the community living organizations or the group homes be able to accommodate their health needs as they get very elderly and near death?

**Hon. Mrs. Meilleur:** When they leave the institutions, they are placed in the community. I know there have been some—but I wouldn't be able to tell you the number—who have been placed in long-term care, but it's just a few.

**Mr. Costante:** We did have a situation a number of years ago where younger people with developmental disabilities were perhaps inappropriately placed in long-term-care homes, where there wasn't enough stimulation. Previous governments actually moved people with developmental disabilities who were in long-term-care facilities inappropriately out. I think we are saying now that long-term-care homes are open to the general population. People with a developmental disability would have to meet the criteria for long-term care. Of the 113 we've moved to date, one has moved into a long-term-care home, and that is in Ottawa. I actually visited this individual.

Where it's appropriate, where medical needs justify it—and again, where the family can do it. To me, long-term care is open to all citizens, and people with developmental disabilities are citizens of the province.

**Mr. Dunlop:** If I can just add this final comment. You can understand the concern, though, when we have clients in a perfectly good atmosphere in the city of Orillia today—they're elderly, they've got great care at the Huronia Regional Centre. You can understand the concern, when there's already a shortage of long-term-care beds, if those clients happen to be moved out into a long-term-care facility at the same time as closing down the Huronia Regional Centre. You can understand the outrage some people would have.

**Mr. Costante:** I can understand, but again if you take a citizenship principle that they are citizens of the province, they have just as much right as you or I to those services.

**Mr. Dunlop:** I completely understand that, but politically it doesn't sound very good from the perspective—

**Mr. Costante:** I think it's a rather unusual situation, as the numbers would speak for themselves: one out of 113.

**Mr. Dunlop:** We'll keep a close eye on those numbers because when we look at these three remaining facilities, there's a high percentage in them that may in fact require a long-term-care bed.

**Mr. Cameron Jackson (Burlington):** Everybody feels more comfortable if I ask questions from here instead of them being from the Chair.

Minister, I have a concern about a constituent of mine. I'll share with you the details, but not the identifying specifics. This individual is about 80% blind now, and the prognosis is that he'll be completely blind. We've been working very hard to try to get some income support for this individual. They were on ODSP with the previous government, which means nothing other than the fact that at the time he was single, unattached and disabled and received his benefits.

Subsequently, as a citizen of this province, he found a young lady who would like to live with him, and he made the mistake of telling the federal government that she was providing care and he was eligible for a minor little benefit. It was not a lot of money; I think it was about a \$2,200 caregiver allowance brought in by the previous federal government. This in fact made him ineligible, because he was now living with someone who had a job. We cannot get this individual back onto Ontario disability support benefits. I've written your predecessor a couple of times. We have been told that as long as the individual throws the woman out of his house, he could be eligible, or if he rented her a room in the house and set up a tenancy agreement and she became a caregiver. But the truth of the matter is that this is a couple, and she has a modest job. But as a result, he's ineligible. Yet I have other constituents who receive their Ontario disability support, get married and are not taken off of disability support.

These rules are rather rigid and inflexible. I wondered if this is a matter that's (a) of concern to you and (b) something that you'd be willing to investigate and look into. This individual will be completely blind within another year, according to his doctors, and we've tried everything. I must say, your regional staff in Halton were outstanding. We tried every possible imaginable approach. I've put hours into this case. We've applied federally, but there's eight months' wait to get federal support, and I can't even get supplementary support for the eight months. He will lose his home. We are doing whatever we can to sustain this individual. Is there any comment that you might offer?

**Hon. Mrs. Meilleur:** First of all, as you know, our income support program is based on the family income, and if they are considered a couple, they will take into consideration the income of his partner. It's not unique in Ontario. All other provinces are doing the same. However, in exceptional circumstances—and correct me if I'm wrong—the director has some authority to give some bridging assistance. But I'll turn it over to the deputy before I go too far and give this constituent money that he's not entitled to.

**Mr. Jackson:** You're on television, as well.

**Mr. Costante:** I don't know the particular specifics. There are large numbers of programs to assist the disabled. Perhaps I can undertake to talk with the Halton office and see if there's something we can do to help.

**Mr. Jackson:** We did the income calculation, and I think he was something like \$300 over. We've explored even having his domestic arrangement quit her job or try partial hours. But we're desperate to try to help him, so that would be appreciated.

Minister, I want to ask you some quick questions about deaf-blind services. As you know, the province of Ontario discriminates against blind children in terms of giving them additional services. If they had a second disability—deafness or any other disability to go along with their blindness—they're eligible for a substantive amount of support. But there's a growing concern about the support that's being transferred to blind children through the educational system. The government recently reduced the amount of support from about \$27,000 to \$17,000. As the minister responsible for persons with disabilities, are you concerned about this? Have you raised with the Minister of Education the fact that access to additional supports and services in our schools is being reduced for blind children who are attending our schools?

1720

**Hon. Mrs. Meilleur:** This is not under my ministry, it's under the Ministry of Children and Youth Services, so I think it would be more appropriate for Minister Chambers to answer that question.

**Mr. Jackson:** But you are the minister responsible for the Ontario disabilities act, is that not correct?

**Hon. Mrs. Meilleur:** I am responsible for the Ontarians with Disabilities Act, but this is a specific question about children's services. Am I correct in my answer, or—

**Mr. Jackson:** I was simply asking, as the advocate for persons with disabilities—I guess I should ask you, are you aware that the funding levels had been reduced through the Ministry of Education for blind children in our schools? Is that something through your blind and deaf-blind support programs that currently are operated through your ministry? That was my understanding, unless the deputy corrects me on some of the funding that comes through Comsoc.

**The Vice-Chair (Mr. Garfield Dunlop):** Give a brief answer, please, then we're on to the NDP.

**Mr. Costante:** The deaf-blind funding through this ministry is entirely dedicated on the adult side, so we're not involved in a programming sense with that issue for children.

**Mr. Jackson:** My final question is a request for information. If I could get the statistics for the last seven years with respect to deaf and deaf-blind services for adult programming through your ministry, not just the budgeted numbers but the actuals, that would be appreciated.

**Mr. Costante:** We can do that.

**The Vice-Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Jackson. Now on to Mr. Prue.

**Mr. Prue:** Let's go back to where I stopped. I don't believe I got an answer, so I'm going to ask it again. Can you give me the actual number of people who have been cut off or reduced in their diet supplement allowances?

**Hon. Mrs. Meilleur:** We will provide you with the information. I don't think we have the information right now. The review has not been completed yet.

**Mr. Prue:** Okay. A couple of other smaller, unrelated questions, and then I've got two big areas to explore. The first one has to do with seniors or those who are about to be seniors. The previous government did away with a program that allowed people between the ages of 60 and 64 who suddenly found themselves on welfare to apply for ODSP, because it was literally impossible for many of them to go out and find a job. It was just so hard. Then that was done away with. Is your government considering reinstating that program to allow people between the ages of 60 and 64 who have no prospect for work due to their age to get ODSP as opposed to welfare benefits? Three or four hundred dollars a month would be a huge amount to them.

**Hon. Mrs. Meilleur:** We know that it's an issue. You're right; for some people at age 60, it's pretty difficult to go back into the workplace. We are committed to treating people with fairness and dignity and we have raised the welfare rate.

I would say to you that I cannot answer that question now, because I have not discussed that issue with my colleagues, unless it was raised with the deputy by the previous minister. I would say that to move someone who is 60 onto ODSP rather than Ontario Works is not in our plan for now.

**Mr. Prue:** Perhaps if the deputy—I don't know, were you around in the previous government?

**Mr. Costante:** Yes, I was.

**Mr. Prue:** This was a program. I'm not mistaken, am I?

**Mr. Costante:** Yes. You're taking me back in history. I believe there was a special rate for 60- to 64-year-olds under the FBA, and that was done away with. I'm assuming the rationale was that the retirement age was 65 and anyone who wasn't at the retirement age was put into Ontario Works if they were able to work.

**Mr. Prue:** We're not talking about professionals. The people that I have seen worked in a factory or something of that nature. The factory shut down—no fault of their own; a very human experience. They're 63 or 64 years old. They were living hand to mouth, usually at a pretty meagre job, and there they are. How much would it cost to reinstate that program? Any idea?

**Mr. Costante:** We'd have to get back to you. I believe there is a number of thousands of people in that category in Ontario Works and, of course, that would also have an additional financial impact on municipalities because they cost-share that program.

**Mr. Prue:** They'd have to pay 20% of the \$300 or so per month.

**Mr. Costante:** We could do a rough calculation. It would have to be rough, because we couldn't assess each individual. If you assume the difference between a single employable on ODSP versus Ontario Works and then just calculate it with the number of people, we could do a rough calculation.

**Hon. Mrs. Meilleur:** I can add that if someone is in financial need, we look into it. For some cases, they have been provided the financial amount to help them, which is often equal to ODSP.

**Mr. Prue:** A separate, totally one-off question: What is the total outstanding liability of developmental service agencies for proxy pay equity?

**Ms. MacDonald:** We would need to get back to you, sir. I don't have that answer.

**Mr. Prue:** I thought you might have to on that one. I had to read the question twice myself to even understand it.

**Ms. MacDonald:** I think I'll need to read the transcript and then get back to you.

**Mr. Prue:** Okay. I understand that there is still the proxy pay equity question in all of these agencies and many of them are still out and, over many years, have not been resolved.

**Mr. Costante:** It actually may be impossible for us to tell that, because many agencies have a 1% maximum payment for proxy pay equity, if I understand the legislation right, going out into the future, and those payments can be readjusted. If their comparator changes, then the amount that they owe could possibly go up. We might be able to do a survey and do kind of a point-in-time piece for that.

**Mr. Prue:** If you could, because I saw today's newspaper, and the federal government and Bell Canada—it's now been 13 years outstanding for pay equity, and they've finally come to some kind of agreement.

I have two more large issues that I want to explore. They haven't been dealt with today by anybody. The first one has to do with WCG International. That's welfare privatization—finding jobs for people and monitoring them on welfare. How much is WCG International paid per client?

**Hon. Mrs. Meilleur:** We cannot give you a number, because it's a percentage and it's a complex and not-so-complex calculation, but we could give you an example. I'll turn it over to the ADM to give you an example of how much they are paid per client.

**1730**

**Ms. MacDonald:** The whole point of the pilot is to test a new methodology to retain people in employment for a long period of time. In the case of this pilot, as you may be aware, the people that the firm deals with must have been on social assistance for 12 months already, so they're a harder-to-serve clientele. The goal is to see if they can retain their employment status for up to 18 months and more. The firm is compensated depending on the length of time the person retains employment. We chunk it down—bad verb—into three sections so that there's an incentive rate percentage associated with a person retaining employment for six months, 12 months and 18 months. The firm would obviously optimize its earnings based on the individual retaining employment up to 18 months.

As I recall, sir, over the whole period of time, the average is in the order of about 67% of savings to gov-

ernment for the person increasing their employment or being off assistance altogether. It is a percentage based on the person retaining employment, optimizing their employment and coming off social assistance, or increasing their earnings, in the case of those who are employed part-time.

**Mr. Prue:** Are these the same or nearly the same terms of reference as for payments made in British Columbia?

**Ms. MacDonald:** No, sir. The contract we negotiated was considerably different. In the case of the British Columbia contract, my staff did go out and pay a visit to the BC government officials as well as to WCG International.

First, the original contract that the firm had with the BC government did not require that the participants had been on social assistance for over 12 months, and second, did not insist on retention of employment up to 18 months. The method of compensation—on which I am not an expert, but as I understand it—did not step up based on the length of time of the retention of employment. That was a key difference.

The second key difference is that in our case, we required that WCG negotiate a set of business processes with each of the municipalities involved in the six pilot projects. Some of those business processes ultimately led to WCG carrying the bulk of the work and just getting referrals from the municipality involved. In other cases, the municipality did basically all of the work involved with WCG, and in one case, as I recall, it was about a 50-50 split of whether the municipality did work or the firm itself did work. That was another key difference in the contract.

A third area of key difference is that we insisted on an independent, third-party evaluation, which included a blind sample—using the same criteria for the selection of participants to track along with the actual participants in the pilots. There may have been other key elements, but those would be the ones that I would best remember, sir.

**Mr. Prue:** When do the pilot projects finish?

**Ms. MacDonald:** March 2007, as I recall. The evaluation has commenced, but it will be completed after the completion of the pilot projects, because they want to look at the retention rates up to the last moment. We're expecting that the final evaluation would be tabled with the ministry in September 2007.

**Mr. Prue:** Now, you've started the evaluations. Is there any theme, is there any way you can look at what's happening? Is this saving the government money? Are there people staying out of work longer? Is this in any way superior to the ordinary system that has served Ontarians and Canadians for decades, apart from their making money, which they obviously do?

**Ms. MacDonald:** It would be too early for me to comment on the evaluation. It is an independent evaluation; we have not received a report. However, I can say that yes, as a result of these individuals being placed either part-time or full-time—the minister referred to visiting in the Kanata area outside Ottawa, where there

are actually two employees, one of whom participated in the ministry's announcement and is working full-time for the first time. She'd been on social assistance for over 12 months.

Obviously, in these cases the individuals are earning more. The government is making a savings and the firm is being compensated. As I say, if they optimize their earnings with a lengthy retention, on average they would be earning about 67% of those savings, and we have made payouts to the firm and we share the savings with municipalities.

**Mr. Prue:** One of the criticisms in British Columbia was that the firm cherry-picked. They picked people after looking and thought, "Well, this one here is a bit of a livewire and this one here will never get a job. We'll go with the livewire and we won't deal with this one." Government people have no such choice. Is it true that WCG can pick its clients?

**Ms. MacDonald:** No, sir. First, again, we insist that the individuals be over 12 months on assistance. BC did not do that, so they were picking up participants who had perhaps only been on assistance for a short time. Secondly, we generate, through our own computer system, a random sample of individuals who fit the criteria. We provide those names specifically to the municipalities. The municipalities, through their case managers, speak with the individuals and refer them to WCG. WCG does not have the power to select the individuals at all.

**Mr. Prue:** WCG spends a lot of money advertising with a firm called Artemis PR for JobsNow. How much of that money is taxpayers' money? Do they use any portion of the money you give them for this purpose?

**Ms. MacDonald:** I wouldn't know the answer to that, sir.

**The Vice-Chair:** You have about four minutes, Mr. Prue.

**Mr. Prue:** I just find it a little distasteful that this private firm is out there using monies which they derive from a government to hire a PR firm to tell everyone what a good job they're doing. Do you have any dealings with this Artemis firm? Do they provide any of the stats or background material or success stories for WCG International?

**Ms. MacDonald:** We have a very strict arrangement with the firm that they only deal with the ministry through our staff project manager. I do know that in the case of the minister's visit we asked the firm to identify an employer with whom we could talk about celebrating the 2,200 placements of an individual in employment. Whether there has been further contact with the firm with respect to success stories, I'm not the project manager, so I would not know. I do know that we did ask as a ministry for an example of a firm that was stepping up to the plate and being very corporately responsible, collaborating with the chamber of commerce in Ottawa.

**Mr. Prue:** Both the federal government and provincial government have civil servants who help people find jobs. I was employed 20 years in the Canada Employment and Immigration Commission before becoming a

politician. Although I worked on the immigration side, many of my colleagues worked on the employment side; they did this every day. How is this program different from what a civil servant would do? How is it better? Why did you decide to explore this?

**Ms. MacDonald:** A key difference is that the firm is working closely with the chambers of commerce. That's not to say that some municipal agents aren't doing the same. But the whole approach that WCG brought to the province of Ontario was that it had success in working with chambers of commerce.

As I recall my statistics, sir, at the time of the minister's announcement, now four weeks ago, in Ottawa we identified that the firm had been able to generate over 4,300 job offers through the chambers of commerce and had engaged more than 1,600 individual employers and had at that point over 2,200 individuals in either full-time or part-time employment. So the figures look pretty good. I couldn't, at the moment, answer whether it's better. That's the point of the evaluation, to tell us whether this particular business model works better.

1740

Some of our municipal pilots—Ottawa, for example. We were pleased to tell the minister that Ottawa has exceptionally strong results. In the various six pilots, Ottawa would certainly be said to be the leader. I believe it's Ottawa, although I may be corrected by my staff, that has a kind of 50-50 sharing of roles and responsibilities—yes, it's being confirmed—with WCG.

The intent is to learn from what works, to take the lessons learned of what doesn't work, to make a comparison. As I say, no decision has been made at the end whether—cabinet would look at the evaluation and direct us to incorporate this approach within our standard work with our municipal partner delivery agents or take some other mix of measures.

**The Vice-Chair:** Thank you very much, Mr. Prue and Assistant Deputy Minister MacDonald, for your time. We will now move over to the government caucus.

**Mr. Bob Delaney (Mississauga West):** Thank you very much. If there's one thing that's constant, especially in a ministry with challenges like yours, I'm sure it's change. Recently, one of the things you've announced is an additional \$84 million into the developmental services sector. Coming from a region like Peel, where we have traditionally been at a disadvantage in terms of our per capita funding, I know that this type of investment is going to go a long way to help people who live with a developmental disability. Could you go through some of the details of what the investment includes?

**Hon. Mrs. Meilleur:** First of all, I want to reiterate that it's the largest investment in history in that sector. This was done, of course, in consultation with the community.

The new funding includes something like \$11 million for the Passport program. The Passport program is support for disabled people who are leaving school and going into the community. It's to support them to participate in the community. It's kind of a mentoring program.

Also, for the special services at home program, \$12.5 million: This has been a request from the families for many years, so we will be able to provide approximately 3,150 more individuals and their families support that best meets their needs. The families will be deciding what is best for their loved ones. There's \$30.2 million to help more than 370 community-based agencies across the province address salary and other operating costs; \$10 million to create 200 new residential spaces in communities across Ontario, including group homes, independent and family support living arrangements; and \$20 million in permanent funding so agencies can provide long-term residential care for approximately 250 people.

All in all, that's the \$84 million.

**Mr. Delaney:** Can I drill down one level deep on the community-based agencies? Coming from the 905 belt, over the years we've been forced to be very efficient in the manner in which the support agencies are organized, and they've succeeded.

One of the things we need in our area, which is bearing the brunt of a great deal of the GTA's growth, is movement toward parity with some of the other regions in our per capita funding. Are we going to see any progress on this?

**Hon. Mrs. Meilleur:** Provided in the \$84 million there is money for salary increases, but you have to recognize that it's part of the negotiation from the agencies with their employees. As for parity with other agencies, this is part of the negotiation.

**Mr. Delaney:** Not so much parity with agencies as parity among different regions. In terms of per capita funding in the 905 belt, we have traditionally operated at quite a substantial disadvantage. Though the providers deliver what even the parents call remarkably good service, the conundrum is that we find more and more people gravitating to the area in part because they have family members, especially children, who are developmentally challenged, yet when they arrive there, they find that however good the agency is, it is stretched to the limits of its capacity, if not beyond. It has been a major cause célèbre in our area to try to achieve some sort of parity, not so much among agencies as among different regions in the province, so we could provide an equivalent level of support, especially to younger children with developmental disabilities.

**Hon. Mrs. Meilleur:** I'll ask the deputy to answer the question.

**Mr. Costante:** Our practice for the last number of years, recognizing that in high-growth areas they don't have a full per capita, as you were mentioning, what we have done when new money is available is that we introduce an equity formula into the calculation of how much we're going to provide per region. Normally 25% or 30% of the funding is then specifically directed to those areas that are underserved, if you will, and then the rest is distributed on a per capita basis. It's hard to keep up with very rapid population growth, so that has been our effort, to try to make sure that places like Peel—Fair Share for Peel Task Force has talked about this issue for many years. In York region, Durham, and



even in Ottawa we've had issues from time to time in terms of funding not quite keeping up with population growth.

**Mr. Delaney:** Thank you for that. I assure you that we're not making it up.

Just before some of my colleagues have questions, I have one that's fairly short. Could you be perhaps a bit more specific about the money allocated for special services at home and whether there have been any changes to the program?

**Hon. Mrs. Meilleur:** For special services at home, yes, there has been a change in the program. Last December, you will recall that there were two policy changes. The first was that eligibility for special services at home funding was expanded to include children with physical disabilities and/or a developmental disability or adults with a developmental disability. Secondly, primary caregivers can use the special services at home funding to compensate some of the family members who would take the responsibility to give respite to the primary caregiver. Especially in rural areas it's difficult to find respite services, so a family member can play that role.

Those are the two changes, very welcomed by the families. They were asking for that for quite some time and we introduced these changes last December.

**The Vice-Chair:** Minister, we will run the clock down to about three minutes before we have to go in and vote. We've got about another five minutes.

**Hon. Mrs. Meilleur:** Let me know.

**Mr. Delaney:** I think Mr. Arthurs has a few questions.

**Mr. Arthurs:** Minister, first I want to congratulate you again on this particular portfolio. I think it's one of the most substantive, demanding portfolios that a minister could handle. You can never meet all of the expectations, no matter what you do, and for those whom you serve, all of their needs can never be met because the needs are so broad and complex. All of us here are quite aware of the function, the hard work by caregivers, family members and professionals in the field in dealing with those in the developmental services sector. They work very hard, and I think all of us appreciate the work they do.

I'd like to know what the ministry is doing to help promote that sector when it comes to encouraging stu-

dents to move into that field as an area to work. Clearly, it's a difficult area, one where retention has always been difficult, and there's much work that needs to be done. So I'd be interested in hearing what your strategy is, what kind of work is being done to encourage students to come into, and stay, in that particular field.

**Hon. Mrs. Meilleur:** Yes, indeed. In my 14 years as a politician, I've visited quite a few of these agencies. They're a bunch of dedicated people, and they're so caring. I'm always so impressed with them.

Yes, as with other health professionals, we have a recruitment challenge. What we did was that last fall we announced the Ontario developmental services career connections grant. This is a \$4,500 grant to designated clinical disciplines. It's to help 20 college students to enter into that profession. It's also a grant that helps the student to connect with the profession. They go into these agencies and get some experience with the agencies. This clinical experience in the community is very valuable, and the profession is demystified.

As for retention, we have supported an increase in the compensation rate in that service. Last year, for instance, we had over \$66 million with respect to compensation rate. This included \$16 million of ongoing funding for agencies, using proxy pay equity; \$20 million for a 2% increase in that sector; and \$30 million as part of the 2006 budget to help community-based agencies across the province to address these salary gaps.

Those are actions we've taken to encourage young people to go into that profession and, for those who are there, to try to retain them.

**Mr. Arthurs:** Thank you, Minister. Chair, I don't think my second question at this point would give the minister an opportunity to respond very fully, so if there's—

**The Vice-Chair:** Okay. Does anybody else have a quick question for the minister right now from the government caucus? Seeing none, we'll thank everybody today for joining us. We'll meet tomorrow in room 228 right after routine proceedings. The meeting is adjourned until tomorrow afternoon. Thank you.

*The committee adjourned at 1754.*





## CONTENTS

Tuesday 16 May 2006

<b>Ministry of Community and Social Services</b> .....	E-249
Hon. Madeleine Meilleur, minister	
Mr. Kevin Costante, deputy minister	
Ms. Lynn MacDonald, assistant deputy minister, social policy development division	

### STANDING COMMITTEE ON ESTIMATES

#### Chair / Président

Mr. Cameron Jackson (Burlington PC)

#### Vice-Chair / Vice-Président

Mr. Garfield Dunlop (Simcoe North / Simcoe-Nord PC)

Mr. Wayne Arthurs (Pickering–Ajax–Uxbridge L)  
Mr. Bob Delaney (Mississauga West / Mississauga-Ouest L)  
Mr. Garfield Dunlop (Simcoe North / Simcoe-Nord PC)  
Ms. Andrea Horwath (Hamilton East / Hamilton-Est ND)  
Mr. Cameron Jackson (Burlington PC)  
Mr. Phil McNeely (Ottawa–Orléans L)  
Mr. John Wilkinson (Perth–Middlesex L)  
Mr. Jim Wilson (Simcoe–Grey PC)  
Mr. David Zimmer (Willowdale L)

#### Substitutions / Membres remplaçants

Mr. Gerry Martiniuk (Cambridge PC)  
Mr. Michael Prue (Beaches–East York / Beaches–York-Est ND)

#### Clerk / Greffier

Mr. Katch Koch

#### Staff / Personnel

Mr. David McIver, research officer  
Research and Information Services