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Jeudi 14 septembre 2006

**Standing committee on
estimates**

Ministry of Children
and Youth Services

**Comité permanent des
budgets des dépenses**

Ministère des Services à l'enfance
et à la jeunesse

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STANDING COMMITTEE ON ESTIMATES

COMITÉ PERMANENT DES BUDGETS DES DÉPENSES

Thursday 14 September 2006

Jeudi 14 septembre 2006

The committee met at 0909 in room 228.

MINISTRY OF CHILDREN AND YOUTH SERVICES

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Garfield Dunlop): Good morning, everyone. Welcome to the estimates committee. Today we're very pleased to have the Minister of Children and Youth Services in attendance. We'll start out this morning with the minister having up to 30 minutes for her opening statement. Mr. Arnott from the official opposition, you'll have up to 30 minutes to follow, followed by the member of the third party, Ms. Horwath. After all three, the minister has another 30 minutes to respond to any of the comments made. Then we'll go into rotations of 20 minutes at that point.

Minister, please feel free to begin whenever you wish.

Hon. Mary Anne V. Chambers (Minister of Children and Youth Services): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Good morning, Chair, and members of the committee. Since its inception three years ago, the Ministry of Children and Youth Services has worked to help Ontario's children and youth have the best opportunity to succeed and reach their full potential. Our overriding objective is that the children we serve must be better off because we have been involved in their lives. In every instance, we must work toward the best possible outcome for every child.

We have accomplished much over the last year, with highlights that include:

- passage of Bill 210, our substantial child protection reform initiative;
- the launch of our highly successful youth opportunities strategy for underserved youth;
- working with our municipal partners to create almost 15,000 new child care spaces in just over a year;
- additional investments in services for children and youth with autism and their families; and
- additional investment in children's treatment centres, resulting in treatment for 4,800 more children with special needs.

I am pleased to be joined today by a very dedicated group of people: Deputy Minister of Children and Youth Services, Judith Wright, and other senior ministry officials. I have some of my staff here as well. Together, we are all working to improve and better integrate the

services and supports for the youngest members of our society.

I would now like to provide highlights of our efforts to advance our Best Start strategy based on our vision of early childhood development as an extension of our public education system. Last summer, one of my responsibilities as the new Minister of Children and Youth Services was to announce what Best Start would mean for families across Ontario who depend on quality, accessible child care. As you know, our government had signed a five-year, \$1.9-billion agreement with the federal government to deliver a comprehensive early learning and child care program to Ontario families. The Moving Forward on Early Learning and Child Care Funding Agreement was thoughtfully and constructively negotiated in good faith between the government of Ontario and the government of Canada. We were very disappointed with the current federal government's decision to cancel this agreement. Thousands of parents across Ontario were depending on the new child care spaces that would have resulted from the agreement.

In this year's budget, our government announced Ontario's commitment to sustain the tremendous progress made to date. By working with our municipalities every step of the way to ensure that local needs have been reflected in the development and implementation of Best Start, there will be almost 15,000 new child care spaces up and running across the province by the end of this month. We continue to urge the federal government to support accessible, quality child care. In my meetings with Diane Finley, Minister of Human Resources and Social Development, I have stated that if the federal government is to fulfill its commitment to build new child care spaces in Ontario, it must also provide ongoing funds to help sustain these spaces. I have also stated that the new spaces should be allocated across the provinces and territories on a per capita basis. My provincial and territorial counterparts also subscribe to the per capita approach. This would theoretically result in 10,000 new spaces for Ontario each year.

To increase families' access to licensed child care, our government will implement a new model for distributing child care fee subsidies based on a family's income, so that more families would be eligible for subsidies. We will have more details on this in the near future.

While quality child care has an enormous impact on the early lives of many Ontario children, our Best Start

program is in fact about more than child care. For example, the 18-Month Well Baby expert panel has submitted a report that provides the basis for a strategy to support a standardized developmental assessment for each child in Ontario at 18 months of age, and we have established a provincial advisory committee to help us move forward in bringing an enhanced 18-month well baby visit to families across the province.

As part of our commitment to the health and success of Ontario's children and youth, we have nearly doubled our investment in student nutrition programs to \$8.5 million annually. This means that more than 300,000 elementary and secondary students are in a better position to succeed in school.

The ultimate goal of Best Start is a network of early learning and care hubs centrally located in communities so that they are convenient for families. Our Best Start demonstration communities project has accelerated Best Start's implementation in three communities: the district of Timiskaming, rural areas of Lambton and Chatham-Kent and Hamilton's east end. I am pleased that starting this month, 24 hubs are opening in these demonstration communities, with a view to being fully operational in the 2006-07 school year. In addition, we are planning to introduce proposed legislation as a first step to creating a regulatory college for early childhood educators.

I would like to turn now to the substantial reforms we are making through the province's new child protection legislation.

I can think of no work more important than helping vulnerable children to grow up in caring, safe and stable environments where they can have the opportunity to achieve their full potential. The centrepiece of our reform to the child protection system is Bill 210, amending the Child and Family Services Act, which was passed by the Ontario Legislature on March 27 of this year. The act is designed to make it easier for children who need protection to find a permanent and loving home. When proclaimed this November, the legislation will create more legal options in support of adoption and permanency.

There are about 9,000 crown wards in Ontario who live in foster homes or in group homes. On average, these young people change homes every two years. Imagine what that instability must do to a child's development. Only 10%, or about 900, of those children are adopted into permanent homes each year. These children deserve better. Thanks to this bill, more children will be placed with a suitable member of their extended family or in their communities where appropriate.

The legislation that was passed was significantly amended since I appeared before this committee a year ago. In fact, there were 35 motions to amend the bill that were passed after second reading. This reflected our work with leaders within the aboriginal community to make the legislation more responsive to aboriginal children and youth. We recognize how important it is that aboriginal children in need of protection remain in their respective communities and cultures. An arrangement called "cus-

tomary care" allows children and youth to maintain important cultural and family ties in their communities.

We are working with aboriginal leaders, Chiefs of Ontario and the Association of Native Child and Family Services Agencies of Ontario to support the expanded use of customary care practices for aboriginal children. Early this summer I also had the pleasure of designating a new aboriginal children's aid society, Anishinaabe Abinoojii Family Services, in the riding of Kenora-Rainy River.

The amended act will also make CASs more accountable to the children and families they serve and to the broader community. To date, there is no province-wide standard as to how complaints against children's aid societies should be handled. With the proclamation of Bill 210, that will change significantly. An independent, neutral third party, the Child and Family Services Review Board, will have the power to make binding decisions in a timely manner when complaints are brought forward by families on matters that are not court-directed.

The safety and well-being of all children who come in contact with the child protection system are the driving forces behind all our efforts. We have also implemented a new kinship care regulation that requires mandatory, rigorous safety assessment before a children's aid society can support the placement of a child with kin. This includes a home visit and background checks of all adults who live in the home. This safeguard is critical.

A review of residential services for children and youth across all program areas, including child welfare, youth justice, developmental services and child and youth mental health, has been completed. My ministry is moving forward in this regard. This fall we will release to stakeholders an action plan for improvements to residential services for children and youth.

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We're also working hard to build and improve the continuum of services for Ontario children and youth with autism, from the time they are diagnosed right through their school years.

In July 2005, I directed regional autism service providers across the province to assess all children referred to the autism intervention program consistently across the province. I also gave direction that no child should be discharged based on age. The Ontario government continues to provide services and supports to children and youth with autism, regardless of age. The recent Ontario Court of Appeal ruling on provision of services for children and youth with autism does not change that.

A few months ago, I announced that the government is investing an additional \$13.1 million annually to increase the number of children receiving IBI, and to provide more supports for children and youth with ASD and their families. This will mean an estimated 120 more children with autism will receive IBI, increasing the number from 795 as of this past March to more than 900, an increase of approximately 70% since April 2004.

This new investment will also help youth with autism to make a successful transition to adolescence, through

additional behavioural supports, crisis intervention and skills-based training. It will help Ontario provide more supports to families of children and youth with ASD, including parent support networks, training, resource materials and access to consultation with ASD specialists. And in each of the next three years, it will help the Geneva Centre for Autism provide train-the-trainer training for up to 1,600 resource staff in the child care sector who work with children with ASD.

We are also funding Autism Ontario's online registry of applied behaviour analysis providers. This registry gives families an additional resource in helping them make informed choices for their children. The new funding brings our province's services investment to more than \$112 million annually.

I'm also pleased to be working alongside my colleague, the Minister of Education, to improve the level of support available to children with autism in schools. We have established an autism spectrum disorder reference group that will provide our government with recommendations on how best to respond to these needs. Both Minister Papatello and I are looking forward to receiving the recommendations of this reference group early in the new year.

I'd like to take a moment to address the issue of spending within the autism services portfolio.

Since 2003-04, we have more than doubled spending on services for children and youth with autism. Our government developed a plan to grow capacity in the system to better meet the growing demand for services. This included the creation of a college-level program to train more therapists for children and youth with autism. The program produced its first cohort of 92 full-time graduates this past spring, and we expect the program to grow to 180 graduates in 2008-09.

We are growing our capacity to meet the greater demand which has resulted from our policy on not discharging kids on the basis of age, and we are fully utilizing our resources. We in fact overspent on direct services for children this past year. We spent \$6.1 million more than we budgeted for the IBI program in 2005-06.

Underspending across the entire autism budget was reduced to \$1.7 million in 2005-06. This underspending was in the area of administration and also the school support program, where the expenditure for the program at maturity was lower than originally forecasted. We have adjusted the budget of the school support program in 2006-07 to more accurately reflect the required level of expenditure.

I know families of children and youth with autism face significant challenges, and while I am positive about the progress our government has made to date to provide increased supports and services, I know there is more to be done. I know that we must reduce wait times and the number of families waiting for services.

Strengthening ABA support in our schools will also give parents more confidence in the continuum of services we are building to address the needs of children as they grow and develop.

Last May I announced an annual increase of \$10 million to help Ontario's children's treatment centres provide services to approximately 4,800 more children and youth with complex special needs, including autism. This extra funding represents a 17% base funding increase over 2005-06 and is in addition to the more than \$130 million in new investments provided by this government since 2003-04 that are already making a difference for children and youth with special needs across this province.

We're also working on a sustainable long-term plan to fundamentally improve the current system. These improvements are aimed at providing services for children and youth with special needs—services that are more accessible, better coordinated and centred on the needs of children and their families.

Child and youth mental health is another area where we are striving to improve services and support.

In January 2005, we allocated an increase of \$25 million, growing to \$38 million in 2005-06, to strengthen mental health services for children and youth across the province. This additional funding brought the government's total investment in mental health services for children and youth to \$460 million in 2005-06, helping to create approximately 113 new programs and expand a further 96 existing programs, which are benefiting children and youth with social and behavioural problems, mental health and psychiatric disorders.

At the same time, we are developing a provincial policy framework for child and youth mental health. We expect to release the policy framework and an accompanying action plan this fall.

We are also funding programs that help aboriginal youth to make positive, healthy choices in life. Our government has directed more than \$2 million annually to the Ontario Federation of Indian Friendship Centres to operate a new community-based program—Akwe:go—in 27 urban communities to help aboriginal youth and children to succeed.

I would like to turn now to a new initiative that has been a great success: our government's Youth Opportunities strategy. It is a strategy that responds to what youth, particularly those in underserved communities, have said they need in order to help them overcome the significant challenges they face in their day-to-day lives.

We're investing \$28.5 million over the first three years of the Youth Opportunities strategy to improve outcomes for these youth. The strategy includes outreach workers, mentorship and youth leadership programs, job readiness, skills training and employment programs. It has supported the hiring of 39 youth outreach workers in the Toronto area—35 in the city of Toronto and another four in Durham region. Next year, we will expand this number to 62 across Ontario. These youth outreach workers are building relationships with youth, providing advice and connecting them to appropriate services.

As part of this strategy, we have established an annual program of summer jobs for youth for young people from underserved communities. This summer, the summer

jobs for youth program provided employment placements for 800 youth. Next year, the program will expand to other areas of the province to include 1,650 youth.

We have also partnered with Toronto Police Service in an exciting, first-ever Youth in Policing summer experience program for 100 youth from underserved communities. The Durham Regional Police Service also participated by placing five youth in jobs this summer. Next summer, the Youth in Policing program will be expanded to include more than 150 youth with the participation of other police services in other areas of the province.

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As part of the strategy, we are also piloting a school-based program in six Ontario high schools to support proactive peer mediation programs for early conflict prevention and increased student success.

Making communities safer means tackling the root causes of crime through both preventive and remedial programs. Research in the area of youth justice tells us that community-based programs that are meaningful to youth—and that hold them accountable for their actions—steer them away from crime. That's why we are investing in these programs and services to give youth in conflict with the law a better opportunity to succeed and become productive members of society.

Our government is helping youth in conflict with the law by establishing an additional 14 youth intervention centres, bringing the total to 29. These centres provide youth with structured and closely supervised programs to reintegrate them into their communities. The new centres are part of the government's \$22-million annual investment to provide community alternatives to custody programs for youth in conflict with the law.

In 2006-07, the Ontario government is providing \$10.7 million to support both the new and established centres across the province. This funding is up from \$7.5 million last year.

In conclusion, my first year in this portfolio has been one of progress in several areas: We have strengthened the child protection system, we are working to give children their very best possible start in life, we have made new investments for children with special needs, and we have created new opportunities for children and youth in underserved communities.

I feel humbled by the responsibility and the opportunities that my position as Minister of Children and Youth Services entails. I know there is more to be done to support children and youth who live with significant challenges. This is a very special portfolio. Thank you.

The Vice-Chair: Thank you very much, Minister, for your opening remarks. You didn't quite take your 30 minutes. Mr. Arnott, please feel free to use up the 30 minutes for your response.

Mr. Ted Arnott (Waterloo-Wellington): Thank you, Minister, for your statement this morning. I'm here as a last-minute replacement for our critic for children and youth services, Julia Munro, the member for York North, who unfortunately couldn't be here today. I'm not going

to be using the full time either, but I'm certainly interested in participating in this process today to ask questions on behalf of our caucus to do our job in opposition to hold you, as minister, accountable for the progress that has been made so far and some of the areas where we feel more work needs to be undertaken.

When I look at your conclusion this morning, where you indicate that in your first year in the portfolio you've worked to strengthen the child protection system, that you're working to give children their best possible start in life, that you have made progress, you feel, in making new investments for children with special needs and that you've worked to create new opportunities for children and youth in underserved communities, certainly those goals, broadly speaking, are ones that we share in the official opposition and would hope to see advancement on those key areas. I suppose where we differ is in the details as to how those goals can be accomplished.

I know that you would want to acknowledge the fact that it was under a Progressive Conservative government that the Honourable Margaret Marland was appointed to be the minister responsible for youth and children's services, I think the first minister with specific responsibilities for children's services in the history of Ontario. She was appointed during the 1999-2003 mandate of the Conservative government. I forget what year she was appointed. But certainly the work that she did, I would argue, laid the groundwork for some of the work that you're now in a position to proceed with.

We have a number of questions within our caucus about autism, at-risk youth, youth opportunity strategy, child protection, child care, mental health and youth justice. Those are issues that I know you'll want to respond to to the best of your ability.

I hope to contribute today in a meaningful way to receive the kinds of answers that we need to continue to do our work in opposition in the coming year. Thank you very much for being here.

Hon. Mrs. Chambers: Thank you. I look forward to your questions.

The Vice-Chair: Is this your opening?

Mr. Arnott: Yes.

The Vice-Chair: Then we'll go right over to the NDP for up to 30 minutes. Ms. Horwath.

Ms. Andrea Horwath (Hamilton East): Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'm going to follow along in the footsteps of my colleague. I think it's really important that we spend as much time as possible today getting into the details, so I'm not going to make any long opening speeches. I'd simply say that I'm looking forward to going over some of the issues you've raised, Minister, in a little more detail, as well as some of the things I'm a little bit interested in myself, both from the critic perspective and the community perspective in terms of what's happening in my own community with various services and experiences of children and families with those services. So, Mr. Chairman, I'm prepared to simply give over to the process of questions because I believe there's a lot that we need to cover today. I look forward

to it and I want to thank the minister and her staff for being here to respond to the queries that we are going to have throughout the day.

The Vice-Chair: Thank you, Ms. Horwath.

Minister, do you have any further comments and a reply? I thought we were going to use more time in the opening remarks, but if you do, feel free; if not, we will go right into questions and 20-minute rotations starting with the official opposition.

Hon. Mrs. Chambers: Chair, thank you for that opportunity. I think it's a good idea to focus on the questions during the course of the day. I would be happy to do that.

The Vice-Chair: Okay. With that, we will go back over to Mr. Arnott. You can begin to ask questions for the next 20 minutes.

Mr. Arnott: I want to start off by asking the minister some specific questions with respect to the presentation that she made this morning. I've got it in front of me and I appreciate the fact that it was given to us in writing.

Minister, you indicated that the passage of Bill 210 is a substantial child protection reform initiative. Could you explain how you feel that Bill 210 has made progress in that respect?

Hon. Mrs. Chambers: Certainly. Bill 210 has as its primary objective strengthening of the experience of children who find themselves in the care of our child protection system. Clearly, when you have children who are changing homes every two years, that is not—most adults would not be able to handle that successfully. That's not the way in which you provide the kind of foundation that children need in order to achieve their full potential.

One of the objectives of Bill 210 is to provide more caring, permanent, stable homes. We know, for example, that of the approximately 9,000 kids in the care of our children's aid societies, we would average approximately 900 adoptions per year. This bill removes something in the order of about 60% of the barriers, if you like, to adoption. It will enable us to improve our success in terms of adoptions through an open adoption type process. That's one area.

Another area is that of recognizing that families do go through some temporary challenges from time to time. So in looking even at our intake process and our assessment process, we feel that it's really important to provide opportunities to strengthen the family setting and to provide supports to families that may be going through temporary difficulties.

We want also to provide more constructive, less confrontational, less adversarial types of approaches. We refer to this as alternative dispute resolution. That, coupled with differential response type processes to ensure that families are given the opportunity to address their challenges while children are protected, is very, very important to the success of the children. Remember, our overwhelming and overriding objective is to ensure that children are better off because we have been involved in their lives. If they have involvement with the

child protection system, then they must be better off because we have been involved in their lives.

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We recognize that the system needed to be more accountable: accountable to the children and families it serves and, in fact, accountable to the public in general.

We recognize also that there were a number of inconsistencies in the way the children's aid societies function, and we are working to remove those inconsistencies. One area is the complaints process. Before I came to this ministry, I remember—and I'm sure every single colleague of mine, from all sides of the House, would have experience with parents who have come to talk about their concerns with their experience with the child protection system and their discomfort with having to complain to the same body that they are having difficulties with. We are addressing that through the Child and Family Services Review Board.

We have also created kin regs, kinship regs, for children who are in care and children who are out of care but have been assessed by the children's aid society, to make sure that even as we open up opportunities for extended family and community supports, we are ensuring that children are indeed better protected.

Mr. Arnott: Thank you, Minister, for that explanation.

You indicated in your presentation this morning that Bill 210 passed into law in March. If I'm not mistaken—and given the fact that this is such an important issue, there was extensive debate on Bill 210 in the Legislature; there were public hearings and committee work that was done. But I do recall, I think right before Christmas, that you were quite upset that the bill had not passed into law before Christmas. If my recollection is correct, you made a comment about the opposition holding it up, and it seemed to suggest and imply that this meant that children would be less safe. If that's the case, why is the bill not being proclaimed until November of this year?

Hon. Mrs. Chambers: The timing was not Christmas; the timing was indeed spring. The delay—and I'm surprised you're raising this, because I thought you were very bad. But anyway, the delay really brought the passage of the bill to the other side of the spring agenda. In other words, there was a break, so the passage of the bill could have occurred before we had our break in March; in fact, it ended up being passed at the end of March. The interesting thing, Mr. Arnott, is that your leader told me personally he had no issues with the bill.

Some of you may have heard that partisan politics is not one of my favourite aspects of this job. I don't like it, and when it seems to be brought to bear and in fact gets in the way of doing the good things that we should be doing, I do take exception to that. That was the issue there.

In terms of why it takes from the end of March to November to proclaim the bill, you should be aware that in the legislative process, passage of a bill is necessary before certain other steps can be taken, so very, very rigorous and comprehensive work is under way as we

speak and progressing very well on regulatory changes to support Bill 210. We're taking this very seriously because, as you have already said, it's the details that really count. We want to make sure that what we put in regulations will indeed serve the purposes that all parties discussed in the passage of Bill 210.

We have training activities to be done as well. This represents a significant transformation of the child protection sector, and the 53 children's aid societies also have to prepare for the new way of doing their work as a result of Bill 210. The Child and Family Services Review Board is being basically reconstituted with what we refer to as prerequisite experience and also the training that will be required there.

As in the case of all bills that I'm aware of, there is a period of time between passage and proclamation. My ministry and the children's aid society sector have been very, very busy over the past months, but until the bill is passed, there is work that is held up as a result of that. But I forgive you.

Mr. Arnott: Well, if I may, I appreciate that, and I would again remind the committee that we have a job to do in opposition. I certainly accept your explanation, but I would still question why it would take eight months from the passage of the bill to the stage of proclamation.

Hon. Mrs. Chambers: You know what? I'll be very happy and very willing to have my ministry provide you with the actual work plan for the initiatives, the activities that we have been undertaking and will complete.

Mr. Arnott: I'd appreciate getting that at some point in the future, I suppose, but this is a process whereby you've got numerous staff here who can assist you. Could I perhaps have a brief explanation from staff, if there's someone here who can help us with that, to explain why it's taking eight months between the passage of the bill through the Legislature and the proclamation of the law?

Hon. Mrs. Chambers: Okay. Perhaps Trinela or the deputy could talk about some of the main activities in more detail.

Ms. Judith Wright: I will ask Trinela Cane, as the assistant deputy minister responsible for the child welfare reform, to come up and speak in more detail.

Just to add a bit of context while Trinela gets seated, this is a significant reform of child welfare, as the minister said. There were substantial legislated changes in Bill 210, so we've had to work through a fairly significant effect; in my experience as a deputy, of one of the bigger regulatory improvements that would go with this. Because we are talking about protecting children, we have to be very careful that those regulations are accurate, and we've been working with the sector to ensure that they reflect their understanding of what the legislation was meant to do as well.

In order to implement this, we do, as the minister mentioned, have a series of training, development of tools for the CASs to use, and then some IT changes. So we need to sequence and to put a plan in place, which is the plan we're happy to share with you, of how we sequence the

regulations, the training and the support tools. But Trinela can give you more detail on this.

Ms. Trinela Cane: Thank you very much for the opportunity to respond to your question.

The Vice-Chair: Could you state your name?

Ms. Cane: My name is Trinela Cane. If I could just comment on the context for the reform package that we're moving ahead with, we were able to develop what I consider to be an extremely comprehensive set of reforms within about a six-month time frame. As approvals were obtained, we attempted to put as much of the groundwork in place as we could.

As the minister has clearly indicated, the passage of the bill itself is an absolutely essential component. We're not able to proceed with final drafting of regulations, and in fact I would say—and the minister alluded to the number of amendments that were made in the committee process, which I believe actually made the bill very much stronger and also necessitated a different type of approach and a different focus on the work that followed, because in fact there were a number of changes that were made, including the reference to the Child and Family Services Review Board, which represented a new piece of work and a new piece of policy work.

At the same time, what I will tell you about the package of reforms itself, and having been involved since the very beginning, as I looked across all of the jurisdictions, including the American, Australian and other provincial jurisdictions in this country, this package actually represents the most substantial set of reforms, the most complex, with the most significant number of pieces, and each of the pieces—the minister alluded to elements of the package.

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There are seven cornerstones of not just the bill itself but the work that follows. We have 53 children's aid societies and we have nine ministry regional offices. This transformation represents a very significant change in culture. We're moving to much more of a focus on strength-based and asset-based approaches, which means in this sector that we are trying to train staff to consider cases coming forward to ensure that the safety of children is paramount, but also to pursue the types of opportunities and alternatives that the minister mentioned. I might mention that in the 53 children's aid societies, we have over 7,000 staff who have to be trained. Many of them have to be trained on multiple aspects of the bill.

Since the beginning of our project, we've actually had very active engagement of the sector. We've had them involved in every one of our project teams. We've had them involved at the advisory level. I personally have attended every consultation session and we've had a number of symposia that have been brought together on topics like permanency planning, alternative dispute resolution—kinship care, for example—that really bring groups of people together in a bit of a training-type forum. So we haven't wasted time while we've been waiting and working on our policy work to support the bill.

We have done training in the area of some of our tools on permanency. That has been ongoing for the past year. In addition, we've taken advantage of the availability of these symposia to bring the field up to speed. But as the details of the bill are now known and the regulations themselves are crafted—as you commented earlier, the devil is in the details, and we're not able to complete our training curricula and roll them out until we know for sure exactly what the regulations will say.

I think that at least attempts to provide some overview of the types of activities that have been under way. I hope that's helpful.

Mr. Arnott: Thank you. When will the regulations, then, be completed and made public? What is the time frame for that?

Ms. Wright: We've got a commitment to have proclamation by end of November. So we will actually have those regulations approved, obviously, by proclamation.

Mr. Arnott: At the same time?

Ms. Wright: Prior to.

Mr. Arnott: Are you on track to achieve that objective?

Ms. Wright: We are.

Mr. Arnott: Minister, in the second part of your statement you expressed disappointment with the fact that the federal government has, in your words, “cancelled moving forward on the early learning and child care funding agreement that had previously been negotiated between the previous government of Canada and the government of Ontario.” Would you at least acknowledge that the current federal government was clear and explicit about the changes to child care assistance that they had been contemplating, that they had made that publicly known during the course of the election campaign and were elected, and would you allow that the government had a mandate to move forward with the plans that it had talked about during the election campaign and promised?

Hon. Mrs. Chambers: I'm certainly not saying or suggesting that the federal government is doing anything different from what they said they would do. They've also provided a one-year notice period for the cancellation of the five-year agreement. The cancellation of the agreement actually takes effect in March 2007.

The matter of whether or not they have been provided with a mandate to cancel this agreement is a subject of a less-than-scientific debate. For example, there is a recent survey that has been conducted by Ipsos Reid on behalf of the federal government that suggests that the \$1,200 per year so-called—incidentally, you said in my words “cancelled”—they cancelled it. It's easy. Those aren't my words; those are their words. They cancelled the agreement. But I would say the so-called universal child care benefit, research has shown, recent surveys are saying—and even the feds, according to what I read, are promoting a variety of ways in which people could spend the \$100 before tax that they get each month, because clearly that is not an alternative to a child care plan. With child care costs being, on average, \$45 per day in Ontario—

and this is not very different in other parts of the country—\$100 per month before taxes is not even going to give you two days of child care per month; so I gather that families are realizing that. Incidentally, I've never been publicly critical of the \$1,200, because as far as I'm concerned, any additional money for families to help them with their kids is a good thing; it's not a bad thing. But I cannot suggest, and I don't think anyone else can, that that's an alternative to a child care plan.

I do want to acknowledge that the universal child care benefit, which is what it's called, is not the only component of the federal plan. Discussions are under way, as we speak, between the federal government and a variety of entities around the country on how to move forward with their child care spaces initiative. Their child care spaces initiative, as I would imagine you know, is the 25,000 spaces that they're targeting to create per year—and there are some issues there. Your government, under Mike Harris, had in fact established a budget for creating child care spaces on the basis of incentives to child care providers, which was unsuccessful, and I have actually reflected on that with the federal minister. I have offered to work with the federal government to make their child care spaces initiative a success so that families in Ontario can indeed benefit from more child care in this province through that initiative. The federal minister acknowledged that whereas she talked about tax incentives for not-for-profit organizations in the throne speech, the reality is that not-for-profit organizations do not pay taxes, so tax incentive programs for not-for-profit organizations are not a happening matter. So she's looking at how she can make that work.

I have suggested a few things. First of all, there is no commitment on the part of the federal government to allocate the \$250 million per year on a per capita basis across the provinces and territories. All of my counterparts have joined with me in suggesting that a per capita allocation of those dollars would be the fairest way to approach this. I've also suggested that each province and territory has its plan. We planned extensively and comprehensively with our local municipalities, whom we partner with to deliver child care in this province. So we do have plans in place, and we would like to have the opportunity to pursue the continuation of the implementation of those plans.

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On more than one occasion, I've mentioned to the federal minister, “One of the reasons your government's incentive program was not successful in creating child care spaces was that it did not have a sustainability component to it. It did not have ongoing operating support associated with it.” So in reality, what a one-time grant would probably achieve is that entrepreneurial enterprises, for-profit enterprises who see this as a business opportunity, would respond favourably to a request for proposal to create spaces and receive a \$10,000 grant or \$10,000 tax incentive to create those spaces. What it would do is place the entire burden of ongoing operating costs on parents, which would mean that only wealthy

parents would be able to afford to put their children in these for-profit enterprises. You may want me to stop there.

The Vice-Chair: Okay. Well you're over his time anyhow. So thank you, Minister, for that.

Ms. Horwath: I guess I'll follow in the same kind of order and start with the child protection issues, if you don't mind. What I would like to first acknowledge, as you had mentioned, Minister, is the whole reform around Bill 210, what we used to call in the municipal sector a WIP, a work in progress, and we do acknowledge that.

But there are some specific questions that I wanted to ask, particularly around the Child And Family Services Review Board. Specifically, I was interested to note, when I was reviewing the results-based plan briefing book 2006-07, that on page 10 of that document, the list that describes the Child and Family Services Review Board is not reflective of any additional capacities that you purport will be under way to help parents deal with complaints about children's aid societies in your legislation. This is the government's response to the demands, or to the requests or to the initiatives, around trying to get independent oversight of CASs through ombudsmen, and your response was that the Child and Family Services Review Board was going to do the job. But in the document in front of us there's no indication, that I can see anyway, about the specifics around their new role of investigating or of responding to complaints against children's aid societies. So if it's such an important piece and if it's the answer to some of the horrifying stories that we hear, not the stories themselves in terms of the incidents, but people's frustration in terms of their ability to receive fair and just treatment in their complaints process, can you explain to me why it's not in here?

Hon. Mrs. Chambers: I'm going to ask the deputy to speak to the document that you are looking at, but certainly, it is very fair to say that the Child and Family Services Review Board, as it has existed to date, will be undergoing a significant overhaul, if you like, not only in terms of new membership, new chair, etc., but also in what I previously referred to as prerequisite experience, the kinds of qualifications that are necessary in order to carry out the very important work that they will have as a result of Bill 210.

I would like to just start, though, by providing a sense of the kinds of complaints that can go to the board. The kinds of complaints that can go to the board as a result of Bill 210, once we have proclamation in November, are as follows:

- the removal of a crown ward from a foster placement;
- the refusal to place a particular child for adoption or the decision to remove a child after he or she has been placed for adoption;
- alleged inaccuracies in a society's files or records;
- allegations that a society refused to proceed with a complaint;
- allegations that a society failed to respond within a reasonable time frame to the complaint;

- allegations that a society failed to comply with the complaint review procedure;

- allegations that a society has failed to ensure that children and their parents have an opportunity to be heard and represented when decisions affecting their interests are made or when they have concerns about the services they are receiving;

- allegations that a society failed to provide reasons for a decision that affects the complainant's interests; and

- allegations that a society failed to comply with its internal complaint review procedure.

When I came to this ministry, I think there were no more than about eight members in existence on this board, a board with a capacity, I think, for 35 members, including the chair. They weren't doing much in the area of child-protection-type work. Much of the child-protection-type work was actually being done, in my view, in a less than satisfactory way through a process that involved the appointment, if complainants asked for this, of a director who was a lawyer, who would look at the cases and provide recommendations to CAS boards but had no ability to make those recommendations binding on the CAS boards. The Child and Family Services Review Board will replace that process and more, and their decisions will be binding.

I'm going to ask the deputy, who would like to speak to the matter of resources.

Ms. Wright: Thank you for your question. You are correct; at the time of the tabling of the estimates, we had not had an opportunity to do a good, solid assessment of what the workload implications for the CFSRB would be of these changes and, in particular, further to what the minister had to say, what it would mean in terms of the number of members we needed. Also, at that point, we had not included any kind of increased resources for CFSRB. We're finalizing that process now and that costing, and we will be providing the resources that the CFSRB needs to do this function, obviously.

Ms. Horwath: Would I be able to receive a copy of the materials that you're talking about that you're developing in regard to that?

Ms. Wright: Yes. We will give you our best estimate at this point. As the minister indicated, the complaints process is new. When I was at education, we went through a similar process as CFSRB around the Safe Schools Act, and its—

The Vice-Chair: Deputy, could you try speaking a little clearer into that mike, please? I know you keep turning your head toward us.

Ms. Wright: That's good to know. Sorry, Ms. Horwath. We did a similar kind of cost estimate around education, and you do have to give a range. So we will give you the best estimate that we can, and I assure you the resources will be there.

Ms. Horwath: Okay. I'm looking again at the book, on page 10, the results-based plan briefing book. In your estimates, the increase, let's say, from 2004-05 actuals or even the accrual interim actuals to what you're putting in the estimates for the cost of this particular board doesn't

seem to be that significant if you're overhauling and giving all kinds of new responsibilities and bringing all kinds of new processes online that require a number of training initiatives and, theoretically, search initiatives for possible candidates, perhaps a larger board, perhaps a smaller board, a transformation basically of the board functions. Do these estimates reflect what you are coming up with already in your preliminary work that you're almost finished or—

Ms. Wright: No, they do not.

Ms. Horwath: So we will likely see an increase in that estimate—

Ms. Wright: There will be an in-year allocation of some sort once we get better information on what the bottom line should be.

Ms. Horwath: Okay. So in terms of the figures, do you think there will be like a doubling of that amount or 50% more?

Ms. Wright: I can't answer that question exactly at this time.

Ms. Horwath: What kinds of resources, other than the kind of start-up resources that we've already reflected upon, are you going to be expecting the board to need in order to enable it to do its work?

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Ms. Wright: We were likely looking at expanding the number of members at the board. We are also likely looking at having to invest in information systems in order to be able to manage the complaints process and likely looking at some additional staffing for the board to manage it, but that's our current thinking. Once we've finalized this, we'd be happy to share it with you.

As the minister also just pointed out, this will count for only three months, because with proclamation, 2006-07 is actually only three months of the complaints process, and the new role of the CFSRB, these estimates.

Ms. Horwath: I'm sorry, can you explain that to me? I'm not sure exactly what you're getting at.

Hon. Mrs. Chambers: Sure.

Ms. Horwath: Oh, I see. January, February, March.

Hon. Mrs. Chambers: December.

Ms. Horwath: Well, December. So four months. Okay, I see what you're saying. Because we haven't passed the bill—that's the whole discussion we had with Mr. Arnott a little bit earlier.

Hon. Mrs. Chambers: Proclamation.

Ms. Horwath: Yes, sorry, the proclamation of the bill. That's good, because the question I was coming to next was, as of proclamation, do you expect all of these pieces to be in place? So the board will be up and running? It will be expanded to its appropriate size?

The appointments to the board: Can you just remind me, are they order-in-council appointments?

Hon. Mrs. Chambers: Yes, they are. In terms of the process, we are in the midst of those new appointments right now. So you will probably be part of that.

Ms. Horwath: I'm not on that committee anymore.

Hon. Mrs. Chambers: No? The chair who was chair of that board for many years has come to the end of his

term. So a new chair is required, vice-chair, members, membership. So that's in progress right now.

Ms. Horwath: Okay. Great. So, then, proclamation will be at the end of November, all pieces in place, fully operational at the end of November. Or do you have a timeline for the board to be fully operational that's not the end of November?

Hon. Mrs. Chambers: No, no. Our expectation is that the board will be operational at proclamation.

Ms. Horwath: Okay. So, then, in the interim, what's happening with people who have complaints or concerns about children's aid societies at this point?

Hon. Mrs. Chambers: In the interim, the existing process whereby the ministry can appoint directors, which the ministry pays for, to review the complaints, but in addition to that—that's still on the way; in fact, I signed off an appointment, either this week or last week, of a director to investigate a complaint. But as I've said before, my issue with that process includes the fact that recommendations of that director have not been binding on boards.

Ms. Horwath: We've had a long discussion about that process in the past, Minister, and I agree with you.

Hon. Mrs. Chambers: So that process is still in place. In fact, my parliamentary assistant was given the task of reviewing the existing complaints process, visiting a number of children's aid societies across the province, and therein, we did confirm the inconsistencies in place. But I must say that the children's aid societies have seen more of the Minister of Children and Youth Services, according to what they tell me, than they had ever seen in the past. They recognize that we are in this together and there is no turning back here. So I must say that they are already starting to take this very seriously. As part of our transformation process, we will be ensuring that families understand what opportunities are available to them to challenge the actions of children's aid societies.

Ms. Horwath: I thank you for that, and it's extremely important, because I think we all recognize that children's aid societies do some very important work, but they also have a great deal of power to be accountable for, and have huge impacts on, the lives of children and families. So I appreciate your interest in sending them the clear message that it's an approach that we all have to be not only responsible for, but responsive to. I think that's important.

For your information—you might not have this information—we have, at my office actually, referred a couple of people, because we really didn't know what was happening. People were given one message about the new process. As you know, this has been a broken system for a while, so when the people who are engrossed in these situations hear that there's something new, they're anxious to try to figure out how they can access that new system. We've had people trying to access that new system, and of course, it's not up and running. They've been directed to your ministry when they call and try to get hold of the board or whomever they're trying to get hold of. When they get directed to your ministry, do you

then send them to a director for review? What's the process there?

Hon. Mrs. Chambers: I've said to you many times—and I hope you don't take this as patronizing; you do your homework—that a lot of what you talk about I've experienced myself as an MPP before I had this portfolio. I had people sit in my constituency office in tears, and the best I could do was to say to them, "Just keep calm. You don't want to now be assessed as unstable when you go to file your complaints." But certainly, to them it was a threat to their particular situation to complain to the same person. So when I came to the ministry, my correspondence staff learned very quickly that I was not prepared to send these people back to the same people they were uncomfortable with.

What we have been doing is referring them to the particular regional office, which informs them of the options that they have, including making them realize that there is a director review option, which a lot of people did not know about. If you ever come across any situation where that is not being done, my ministry staff should be alerted to it. I'd really appreciate hearing about that.

Ms. Horwath: I appreciate that.

This is, again, one of those problem-solving types of questions in terms of the reality of what we face with real people and real cases, as you said, in our constituency offices. Many times the problems are not new. They're ongoing cases that have been a frustration for people over a period of time. At this point, we're in the middle of September. Considering that many of these cases tend to be historic, usually at least a year or so—these cases are a little bit historic, anyway—do you think it would be more advisable at this point to give people all the information, but suggest that the new process will be online at the beginning of December, and they might get more satisfaction or more effective response if they wait for the board process?

Hon. Mrs. Chambers: In the letters that I have been writing to concerned families, I tell them about the CFSRB's imminence, if you like. I also refer them to the regional office so that they can choose whether or not to wait.

Ms. Horwath: That's great.

I wanted to just wrap up—

The Vice-Chair: You have about three minutes in this round.

Ms. Horwath: All right. Why don't I just wrap up with a couple of issues still on the child protection piece. I'm just going to throw them out there, because we don't have very much time left and I wanted to ask a few other types of questions next time around.

I'm not sure if you've been made aware of some of the discussion and the way that we addressed or dealt with or heard about some of the failings of our current system for families who have their children in some kind of supervised access system and, as a result, there's a death of a child. You may know that this is Bill 89, Mr. Jackson's bill, that I'm discussing. At that time, that very disturbing

and quite powerful day, it became very clear that there is a very significant concern by all of the women we heard from that they are being failed by the courts, that they are being failed by child protection, in terms of the ability of their voices to be heard. I know Trinela will recall that when she proactively brought a process chart of what's going to happen with the new child death reporting process, there were still some concerns around that, and I raised it at that time: the real sense that the voices of women are not being heard, not only now, but even in this very process that's in front of us that is the solution to the current concern about investigating the circumstances around child deaths.

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It's a twofold question. In trying to do the best for our children, how do we better ensure the voices of moms, of parents—they're not always moms, but certainly in the majority of the cases it's moms—who are in abusive relationships and are fearful of the violence and how that will affect their children if they get unsupervised access from the parent who has been identified with violent behaviour? There's not only the fact that that's happening, that that was the case in every single one of these circumstances—or at least, the vast majority of them—but also that there seems to be a lack of acknowledgement of that reality.

I heard Jenny Latimer saying on CBC Radio this morning that the Family Court system, which we know is rife with backlogs, extremely problematic at this point in time, works in such a way that the party who has the best lawyer—this is exactly what she said—gets the best deal, and the best deal doesn't necessarily mean the best deal for the children. That's exactly what happened in Ms. Latimer's case.

Is there anything that you're doing to address some of these concerns? Do you have any solutions that are in your plan over the next year for the ministry's work?

Hon. Mrs. Chambers: I used to hear some of this when I was on the board of the United Way of Greater Toronto. Quite often, it was women from ethnic communities where the language skills of the man, because he's out in the workplace, would be stronger than their language skills—very complicated. What I can tell you is that I am actually working with Minister Papatello, who has responsibility for women's issues, on the whole matter of violence against women. What I'm going to undertake to have done, specific to your question, Ms. Horwath, is to write to the minister specifically on this matter to see what we can do to provide more social-type, community service supports.

Ms. Horwath: Can you cc the AG as well?

Hon. Mrs. Chambers: Yes. Do you know what? You know it's not within my portfolio, but I agree with you that we have a vested interest in the protection of kids, and we know that kids are not isolated individuals. So yes, we will do that.

There is some interministerial work going on in terms of violence against women. This should provide us with

an opportunity to address that specifically. We will make sure that that's done.

Ms. Horwath: Thank you.

The Vice-Chair: At this point, then, we'd like to turn it over to Mr. Brownell in the Liberal caucus.

Mr. Jim Brownell (Stormont–Dundas–Charlottenburgh): Thank you, Minister, for being here this morning. I'm subbing on today and I couldn't be happier subbing on to an estimates that relates to children. Having grown up in a family of 12 kids—number two of 12—and having spent 32½ years in education, I was always around children in my life. What we're hearing today is something that I'm very understanding of and certainly have a close kin to.

I would like to reflect for a moment. Not too long ago, you had a meeting with a Heather Leger from my riding.

Hon. Mrs. Chambers: Yes.

Mr. Brownell: She came up to Queen's Park and had a great meeting. I attended part of it but had to rush into statement period. She met with you for about an hour and a half and went over many, many issues, especially those that related to children in the Best Start programs and other opportunities for youth.

I think in that meeting you understood that in my riding there are certainly concerns with the large rural flavour of the riding, the francophone flavour of the riding, where we have about 35% to 40% of the community francophone, and the aboriginal community of Akwesasne.

We heard, time and again, the Harper government stating that the former Liberal government signed those agreements with provinces like Ontario where those agreements favoured—and we've heard that—urban communities over the rural ones such as mine. Certainly in Stormont–Dundas–Charlottenburgh is a very, very large rural community spread out over great distances. I'd like you to reflect for a moment and tell us how the planning process for Best Start works in order to meet the diverse needs we have in the large rural areas, in the areas where you have large francophone communities and the aboriginal communities such as Akwesasne.

Hon. Mrs. Chambers: First of all, I have to tell you that the constituent you introduced to me is a perfect example of a belief I've always had, which is that it takes a lot more than elected officials to make a difference in their communities, and that civic engagement goes well beyond my elected colleagues and myself. You're very fortunate to have people like that keeping us accountable and keeping us aware of the realities.

In terms of the francophone and aboriginal communities in the planning process, the challenge has been that we work with local municipalities—we have, in fact, 47 service manager groupings across the province. Their responsibility is to work within their individual communities to identify local needs. In areas where there are larger aboriginal populations or larger francophone populations, we find that one of the challenges is, like you say, that they tend to be dispersed across the area, making it sometimes more challenging to address their

needs in terms of individual locations, as opposed to a spread-out type of situation.

We created two working groups: one for the francophone community and one for the aboriginal community. I would have to say that on the aboriginal side there's still a lot of work to be done, because the percentage of spaces that will have been created by the end of this month is still not where we want it to be, in terms of population stats in the aboriginal community. We are at about 1.3% out of something in the order of about 2.7% of the population that's aboriginal. In other words, we're halfway to where we need to be to effectively serve the aboriginal community's off-reserve child care needs.

We will continue to work on that, because the aboriginal community, as you would well know, are really keen on ensuring that their cultural values and traditions are respected. For a mainstream child care operation to say, "We would welcome your child here," is not everything the aboriginal community needs for their child. Yes, an aboriginal child will be welcome in a non-aboriginal setting, but there needs to be a lot more than that for the aboriginal community. We continue to work on that because we know in some of the areas where there are larger aboriginal populations, we have not yet met our targets for child care spaces. That's a WIP, as Ms. Horwath calls it—a work in progress.

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On the francophone side, we are actually doing a lot better. The aboriginal population is five-point-something per cent. We are at 10-point-something per cent of new child care spaces in francophone centres. Having said that, the francophone working group has brought us recommendations that will help us to serve them better. So again, we're still continuing; the work is not finished yet.

On the matter of rural, I have seen tremendous success and tremendous commitment to growing the number of child care spaces in rural communities. I mentioned our demonstration sites. Hamilton East is not rural; it's urban. It has its challenges and complexities, and they're working really, really well. But we look at places like Lambton, Chatham-Kent and in fact Temiskaming—and Temiskaming also gave us a little bit of the francophone opportunities. But their progress—well, I actually have some stats as of September 7. We are already at 92% of the new spaces targeted for creation by the end of September. I know, because I have spoken with the federal minister a number of times, and she represents Haldimand–Norfolk. She has spoken several times publicly about the child care plan being very much an urban plan. I say, "But your community is not urban; your community is a rural community, and they are already at 100% of their target for new spaces by the end of September this year." We are seeing that in more cases than not; we are seeing that throughout.

I think that you would be part of the eastern total. Is that where you would fall?

Mr. Brownell: Yes.

Hon. Mrs. Chambers: Yes. We're at 90% of that target. Interestingly enough, the municipal area that has

brought your eastern region down to 90% is Ottawa, which is at 85.3%. So that's urban, and all of the other areas are at 100% of their target already. It speaks to the demand in rural areas and the fact that this does address needs. There is a huge demand in rural areas for child care. I'm very pleased that the numbers demonstrate that we are making good progress in those areas.

The Vice-Chair: The next question is Dr. Qaadri.

Mr. Shafiq Qaadri (Etobicoke North): First of all, Minister, I'd like to also echo the sentiments of the committee and thank you, not only for your presence but also for your stewardship of this very important sector. I wanted to also report to you on behalf of the people of Etobicoke North, particularly one of the underserved areas that you referred to—Jamestown—who have been the beneficiary of a very important program, which has really, I would say, lit up the lives of a number of youth and their families who otherwise probably would not have tasted those opportunities.

I know that you and I both share a very specific affinity to some of the youth at risk, a kind of concern I think that predated our elected office here. I'd like to ask you a little bit more about what you have learned formally through your consultations with stakeholders on these youth opportunities, particularly the summer jobs. I'm very pleased to hear that it's, first of all, continuing and also expanding.

Hon. Mrs. Chambers: Thank you, Dr. Qaadri. Yes, Jamestown was one of the graduations I wasn't able to get to, and I'm really sorry about that. I hope you were able to go, because from the stories of these youth and parents I have met, if I wasn't already convinced that this was the right thing to do, I would really have to do a double take and say, "We've got to do this."

One of the things I learned out of this process, ironically, is that youth know exactly what they need. They don't have the opportunity that they deserve from time to time, but they know what they need. I remember last fall at a youth summit that I hosted, I think in October, some youth said, "We can help you to help us." What that told me is, be sure to listen to youth. Some of the programs—the youth in policing program and the summer jobs program—had skepticism amongst adults. We had a lot of skepticism amongst people with grey hair, like myself. I'm glad that we didn't allow that to deter us.

Some of the parents have told me that their kids have changed. One mother told me recently that her daughter has changed how she dresses. Her daughter wants to remove her tattoo now. Her daughter speaks to her more politely. And if that isn't good enough, her daughter then told her at the end of the summer, "I can buy my back-to-school supplies myself. You don't need to take me shopping." Another mother told me that her son had become totally dysfunctional, unreliable, irresponsible etc., and she cannot believe the turnaround in this young man.

I think what we have to understand is how important it is for us to recognize that for these kids, every time a

door closes in their face, their self-esteem decreases and it makes it a lot easier for them to fall prey to forces that mean them no good. So we do need to give them these kinds of opportunities. These kids are kids who just don't normally get these opportunities. It's ironic, because government—and it didn't start with our government; it started prior to our government—provides all sorts of summer job subsidies and opportunities for kids. In fact, approximately \$50 million per year goes into subsidies for summer jobs; 56,000 kids every year can access those kinds of opportunities. But kids from underserved areas (1) don't hear about these opportunities, and (2) when they apply, they're not necessarily successful. In fact, they're more likely to be unsuccessful than successful.

Youth outreach workers are an example of how we are addressing the fact that these kids don't know where to get information and what opportunities are available to them. These kids don't have parents who will network for them. These kids don't have parents who can pick up the phone and say, "Can you give my son or daughter a summer job?" or ask their employer to give their son or daughter a summer opportunity. Youth outreach workers told me that we have to go to the kids where they are because the kids don't know where to go to access opportunities.

We have also created a new website called youthconnect.ca. We want to provide not just government services and supports, but we want to provide through this website any services and supports that we think will be helpful to young people.

We will continue to expand these programs. Not everybody thought the youth in policing program was a good idea. It turned out to be an amazing idea. There were some divisions in the Toronto Police Service that said, "We won't be taking any of those kids," and came back and asked for kids. One division that sort of reluctantly said they would take one came back and asked for five more. There are police officers in Toronto who are walking around with notes from kids to their mentor, thanking these police officers for the experience they had over the summer.

Durham was not on our list for this year but the police chief in Durham said, "How can you leave me out? I have the same kinds of problems. Please give us a few kids." They got five kids. He is so thrilled with the success of the program that he has said, "Whatever you can give us next year we will find money to match." So we'll be able to double up on what we do there.

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We are also conscious of the fact that this program does not serve rural communities to the extent that we could, so we're looking at how we can expand these types of services. But certainly the website, youthconnect.ca, is available across the province. I'm really glad that Jamestown had a positive experience. This may sound crass, but I told the kids at the graduation, "Thanks for proving me right," because as a result of this being a success, we now have all the substance we need to continue the program.

Mr. Qaadri: That's great. Thank you, Minister.

The Vice-Chair: We've got about four minutes left in this round. Go ahead, Mr. McNeely.

Mr. Phil McNeely (Ottawa–Orléans): Minister, I'd just like to take that discussion a bit further, because I was just looking the numbers here. I was looking at your speech this morning where I think you said there would be another 22 youth program coordinators. I believe you're going to have 60 across the province. I just didn't think this would come up this quickly.

Hon. Mrs. Chambers: There will be 62 across the province, yes.

Mr. McNeely: But it's very important. Orléans has one of the highest family incomes of the province; it's mainly civil servants very close to the downtown Ottawa jobs, so we do have a lot of federal civil service jobs and a lot of jobs connected with CSIS and RCMP. It puts us up on that level, but there are a lot of communities within Orléans that need this service as well. I'm just wondering. When you look at the province, if you look at the numbers this morning, it's 800 new summer jobs, next year going up to 1,650; then, when you look at each riding, you come out with a figure of eight. But I think it's important that we get these programs going across the province, even in areas where the pockets of need may be smaller. I think the needs are often not related to family incomes. I'm just wondering, how does my riding tie in with this program? How do we get the support, and what are the plans when you expand it next year?

Hon. Mrs. Chambers: Just to give you a little bit of background as to how we did Toronto, we had the benefit of some work that had been done by the United Way of Greater Toronto and the city of Toronto, in identifying what they refer to as 13 at-risk neighbourhoods. They had a variety of factors used to assess neighbourhoods across the greater Toronto area: some economic but not all economic; some education-wise, job opportunity-wise etc., employment levels above certain ages and below certain ages, that kind of thing. So that gave us a base against which to move forward. We will be working to determine where we could have the greatest effect in other parts of the province. Ottawa is on our list.

Now, I should tell you that the areas for expansion so far—we started in Toronto—are slated to include Ottawa, Thunder Bay, Hamilton, London, Windsor—

Interjection.

Hon. Mrs. Chambers: That's it? Okay.

Those communities, those areas, were determined based on crime statistics. It may come as a surprise to some people that London gives Toronto a run for its money, as an example. We're not doing it by riding, per se, but certainly Ottawa is on the list. My ministry will be working with our regional offices across the province to determine how best to support kids as we move forward with the expansion. So that work is going on and will be informed by the experience that we have had this summer.

The Vice-Chair: Mr. McNeely, I think we've just gone over your time in this particular round. We'll get back to you in a few minutes.

Mr. McNeely: Okay, I'll get that in the next round.

The Vice-Chair: Thank you very much. Now we'll turn it back over to Mr. Arnott.

Mr. Arnott: Minister, in an answer to a question of mine in the previous round, you said that child care incentives which were initiated by the former government—I think you said my government—were unsuccessful in creating new spaces. You weren't really specific as to why they were unsuccessful. First of all, what incentives were you referring to specifically, and why do you feel that those incentives were unsuccessful?

Hon. Mrs. Chambers: There was a \$10-million budget available in the form of tax incentives for businesses to create child care operations or child care spaces; I think the drawdown on that was in the order of about \$200,000. This was in place between 1998 and 2004. The drawdown of the \$200,000, I gather, was used for things like equipment and renovations but didn't actually result in the creation of any new spaces. The review of what actually happened through that program and the reason that it wasn't successful comes down to the whole sustainability thing. This is why my advice to the federal minister includes a call for operating support in the form of funds that will help to sustain these spaces. Right now, on average, \$7,500 per space per year is what we allocate to support child care operations.

Mr. Arnott: In your opening statement this morning, you said, "To increase families' access to licensed child care, our government will implement a new model for distributing child care fee subsidies—based on a family's income—so that more families would be eligible for subsidies. We will have more details on this in the near future."

I do recall that when our party was in government, there was a tax credit to assist working families before a certain income threshold—and I forget what it was—with some of their out-of-pocket child care expenses.

What do you think is the appropriate income threshold for a family to access child care fee subsidies? At what level of income do you feel a family needs assistance with regard to child care costs with this kind of a program?

Hon. Mrs. Chambers: I think it would be fair to say that most families would say that they need help, because I think most families need help. But what we are working on, in terms of this new model, is income-based, so that parents who are at the very low end of the income scale would receive more support. As I said, they're working on the details, which will be available shortly, and I prefer not to pre-empt what we are finalizing as we speak. However, what I can tell you is that through the income-based model, families at the lowest end of the income scale will not have to pay anything for child care. What we have in place right now is a needs-based model that is a little bit more complicated than we think it needs to be. We think income-based helps us to remove judgments on things such as assets that families may have.

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I met a woman, who is actually a part-time student at the University of Toronto, who spoke to me of her shock when—being someone who believes in the importance of education—she had started a little RESP for her child. Well, it's changes that we made about a year and a half or two years ago that removed RESPs as, in fact, detracting from a family's determination of support needs. So what we're trying to do, Mr. Arnott, is increase the number of parents who are receiving support or child care.

I look forward to being able to provide you with the details of exactly what that model will look like. We're actually still in the process of checking impacts on people at a variety of income levels, but we're really close to being able to release those details. We'll make a note to provide you with the detail of what the model looks like.

Mr. Arnott: Is it your intention to expand the overall level of funding for this particular program at the same time as you rejig the eligibility criteria?

Hon. Mrs. Chambers: Yes.

Mr. Arnott: But I understood you to say that there will be some families who will receive child care free of charge; is that correct?

Hon. Mrs. Chambers: Yes.

Mr. Arnott: However, you're unprepared at this time to give us an income threshold at which you feel government should be assisting families with respect to child care costs in this way?

Hon. Mrs. Chambers: I would prefer if you would allow us to just complete the model and complete our work. You won't have to wait very long.

Mr. Arnott: Has the cabinet given policy approval for the program?

Hon. Mrs. Chambers: Yes.

Mr. Arnott: So it's coming soon.

Hon. Mrs. Chambers: One other thing I should mention to you is that in terms of families who are receiving subsidies right now, no family will receive less with the new model. No family will receive less than they're receiving right now. If the new income-based model results in a lower subsidy than the family was receiving under the needs-based formula—and the other thing that we're dealing with is the fact that across the province there were different applications of the needs-based model and how much families could get. We're trying to make that more consistent, but no family will receive less support than they're receiving now.

Mr. Arnott: In around 1997 or 1998, I brought forward a private member's resolution drawing attention to the Healthy Babies, Healthy Children program, asking that the Legislature show support for it and asking that the government expand the scope and the funding to that program. After the resolution passed through the House unanimously, as I recall, the government of the day in its budget announced a significant expansion of the program and the funding available to it.

Can you comment on how you feel the Healthy Babies, Healthy Children program is assisting families in

Ontario today, and will you give us some assurance that you support this program and that you're interested in improving it to the benefit of Ontario families?

Hon. Mrs. Chambers: Well, it's nice to know you had a hand in this, because it's wonderful and working very well. Yes, we are very supportive of this. This is in fact part of the Best Start program. As I said, Best Start is about more than just child care. Not only am I supportive, but we have increases to announce in the very near future.

Mr. Arnott: Can you enlighten us further as to what announcements—

Hon. Mrs. Chambers: Are you with the media, by any chance? What I can tell you is that, since 2003, \$10.85 million in new funding has been invested in Healthy Babies, Healthy Children.

Mr. Arnott: So the total annual expenditure on that program now is what?

Hon. Mrs. Chambers: It's \$80.9 million.

Mr. Arnott: For the other members of the committee perhaps who don't know the intricacies of the program, can you explain what the program is doing for Ontario's families?

Hon. Mrs. Chambers: We can go into as much detail as you like, but I should start by saying that—let me just actually run through the highlights. All right, Lynne, you come and do some work. Lynne Livingstone is going to provide details. Lynne Livingstone is the executive director of the Best Start program, and I should give her the opportunity to show off a bit about what she's doing here.

Mr. Arnott: I'm sorry, \$89 million or \$80.9 million?

Hon. Mrs. Chambers: It's \$80.9 million.

Mr. Arnott: Almost \$81 million. Thank you.

Ms. Lynne Livingstone: It's on page 61 of the estimates book for your reference, sir.

The services that the Healthy Babies, Healthy Children program provides are actually—it's a bit of a unique program in the province in that it provides both universal and targeted services. It provides prenatal screening to expectant mothers to help them with understanding how to have a healthy pregnancy leading to healthy, productive children.

We also provide screening postpartum to every consenting mother, and that screening is to help identify where a family may have issues, where they might need further assistance. That screening is done in hospital or, if you're having a home birth, it's done with your midwife. There's also a postpartum telephone call that is made through the Healthy Babies, Healthy Children program. The public health units run this program, and within 48 hours, they contact consenting new mothers to see how things are going. It's within a time frame where, if there are issues with feeding or other kinds of concerns, a public health nurse can assist that family with those kinds of concerns.

It's also another point to identify that if there is a family that they think might need further assistance, they then go to the next level of the program, which is more

targeted, and a more in-depth assessment is provided for that family. If they're identified to be what is called high-risk for concerns around the development of that child or issues within the family, then they're referred to the home visiting component of this program. The home visiting is done by a combination of public health nurses and lay home visitors. They interact with the family and provide a variety of supports. They also refer them to other community agencies that might be important to that family, like child care, special needs resourcing, those kinds of things. So those are the main components.

There is one other important part of the program, and that's what we call early identification, in that they interact with the primary care providers in the community to help as another point of identifying children early on who might need further assistance. So it's quite a comprehensive program, and it's one of two programs in the province that sees every child.

Hon. Mrs. Chambers: If you would like, I could give you some stats on 2005. Would you like to hear them?

Mr. Arnott: Yes, I would.

Hon. Mrs. Chambers: In 2005, 121,694 babies—that's 94% of all new births—were screened shortly after birth; 23,875 families were screened prenatally; 115,322 families with new babies—that's 95% of new babies—received a phone call from a public health nurse shortly after leaving the hospital; and 14,244 high-risk families received home-visiting support. So once again, I thank you for your contributions to this program.

Mr. Arnott: How is the effectiveness of the program monitored by the ministry?

Ms. Livingstone: There are a couple of levels of the way we monitor the program. One is through our regular budgeting service contract process, and we ask for regular reports from the health units in terms of where they're at in meeting their service targets. The minister just walked you through some of the key measures of the program, and we have quite an extensive information system called the integrated information system for children. It allows us to have fairly up-to-date information on where they're reaching those targets.

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In addition to that regular monitoring, the program—we've been quite fortunate—has actually been participating in an evaluation since 1999. So we've been able to understand from the beginning the impact of the implementation of the program and some of the early outcomes that we're starting to see with that program. Just to give you a flavour of that, some of the early indicators are that over 90% of the families that participated in the home visiting component of the program actually felt they were more confident as parents. A number of the children who participated in the program scored better on some of the key infant development measures than they might otherwise have. So we have our regular monitoring tools but we've also had this ongoing evaluation.

The Vice-Chair: You've got about four minutes, Mr. Arnott, in this round.

Mr. Arnott: Thank you. I want to turn to the subject of autism services and I would ask the minister for an explanation as to the difference between intensive behavioural intervention and applied behaviour analysis. Those are the commonly used terms: ABA and IBI. What is the difference?

Hon. Mrs. Chambers: IBI is more likely to be found as the therapy that is used in kids outside the school setting. So kids are actually with a dedicated therapist receiving focused, intensive reinforcement behavioural-type therapy for hours. ABA and IBI get used interchangeably, but ABA is actually the model that we think would be more effective in the school setting, because if you think of activities like reading recovery in the school system—you are probably familiar with that. You smile. Is that yes or—

Mr. Arnott: I have three children in the public school system.

Hon. Mrs. Chambers: Okay. So in the case of reading recovery, a teacher will be assigned to take that child away from the classroom to give a little extra support, and the child returns to the classroom having benefited from that additional support. It's more a matter of the environment in which it is delivered. They are behavioural enforcement techniques.

Mr. Arnott: Are you satisfied that the government is making appropriate progress toward the commitment that was made by the Premier in advance of the election, which he made in writing to a parent, that IBI services would be provided to children over the age of six? Are you satisfied that the government is making progress toward—

Hon. Mrs. Chambers: I have said I'm not satisfied with the wait times as they exist right now, but I am satisfied with the fact that we are not discharging kids who are six years of age or older anymore, which is something we inherited from your government.

What that has created, though, is a capacity challenge. The reality is that the IBI program—the intervention program was created for kids under the age of six, and in so doing was considered at its creation a preschool kind of program—is actually serving kids not just at the preschool ages but kids who are six years of age and older. So right now we have more kids—very shortly we'll be up to 70% more kids—receiving IBI than there were two years ago. However, I have to tell you that just over 60% of the kids in that program are six years of age or older. On the wait-list for IBI services, approximately 45% of the kids are age six or over. That tells us a few things. It tells us that kids age six or older are receiving IBI; they are not being discharged on the basis of age and they are not being prevented from being assessed for eligibility for IBI. But it also tells me that that so-called preschool program is not just a preschool program anymore. It tells me that we also have to do more to increase the confidence of parents that the supports they will get for their kids when they get into the school system will be adequate and sufficient, because I believe that parents who feel more confident about the experi-

ence their kids will have in the school system will not need to feel quite as dependent on what is intended to be a preschool type of service.

The Vice-Chair: Thank you, Minister, for the response to that question. We'll now go to the third party. Ms. Horwath.

Ms. Horwath: I just had a couple of questions to clean up on child protection, and then I wanted to get into Best Start. They're fairly straightforward, I think. I'm wondering particularly about tracking or the process of evaluating the transformation in child protection with Bill 210. We talked already about the troubles with family court backlogs and particularly when it's violence against women. I'm wondering if your ministry in fact has any role in the tracking specifically of Family Court backlogs and how they affect children's interests at this point.

Hon. Mrs. Chambers: I don't think we do that at this point, do we? Do we track Family Court backlogs?

Interjection.

Hon. Mrs. Chambers: Would you like to come to the table?

The Vice-Chair: Please come forward. It doesn't get on Hansard when you're back there.

Ms. Cane: Thank you for the question. Just to clarify, as the minister noted, we don't track the court backlogs ourselves as a ministry, but we do work in partnership through the child welfare secretariat with the Ministry of the Attorney General and a specific set of working groups that has been established by the judiciary and others. One of them relates to court backlogs. In fact, every one of our child protection reforms that relate to a reduction in court backlogs—the minister has referenced our permanency strategies as well as our alternative dispute resolution. We have been working with the court backlogs committee, so that is certainly something we're participating in on an ongoing basis. They've been very supportive of our reforms, which of course in turn reduce court backlogs, if that's helpful.

Ms. Horwath: That is helpful. I'm glad you raised the ADR, because that was my next question. Can you just explain the structure? There's a multidisciplinary or multi-ministry, multi-interest committee in place that's tracking or reviewing or monitoring the outcomes or the systemic changes that are resulting from ADR being implemented. Are there stats being gathered? Is there some kind of aggregate information?

Ms. Cane: Perhaps I can just comment and differentiate between the actual court backlogs process, which, as I mentioned, is an ongoing working group in which we participate fully. With respect to your question, more broadly, on two fronts, one is around the tracking of the progress we're making on transformation. Of course, with the proclamation of the bill at the end of November, we will have a number of mechanisms in place.

One major mechanism which has already been implemented and will continue to be enhanced is through what we're calling the multi-year results-based plan. Children's aid societies are being asked to report on any number of facets that relate to the child welfare transfor-

mation. We're tracking progress, we're monitoring expenditures and service impacts and service volumes related to each of those. That's one major mechanism that's already in place and being refined.

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The second area I should cover is that we do have, for the first time, a full-blown research capacity that will support Child Welfare Transformation and each of the main seven pillars of transformation, one of which is research itself. We actually have some calls for proposals that have been worked up, received and approved in all of the major areas. ADR will be one area that we will do some research in as well. We're covering it off that way.

Ms. Horwath: Can I just ask about the initial body that you talked about, the CAS? I'm sorry, what was the description you used for the program for the CASs that tracks—

Ms. Cane: Are you referring to the multi-year, results-based plan?

Ms. Horwath: Yes; the multi-year results-based plan. Is that similar to or the same as or does it have anything to do with the pilot that's indicated on page 12 of this Results-based Plan Briefing Book? It talks about: "In 2006-07 ... the Ontario Association of Children's Aid Societies, in partnership with the ministry, is proceeding with the development and pilot testing of a single information system designed to meet the recording and reporting requirements of all children's aid societies and the ministry."

Ms. Cane: That's actually a separate initiative. Would you like me to elaborate a little bit on that?

Ms. Horwath: Sure. Thank you.

Ms. Cane: I'd be pleased to. Perhaps I'll just take one step back and identify one of the key issues that we have been addressing as part of Child Welfare Transformation: the issue of information. I would say that over the past number of years, despite an earlier transformation in the year 2000-01, we had ourselves, as a ministry, begun to put more robust systems in place to track information corporately, but each children's aid society across Ontario uses its own information system. There were probably seven or eight information systems. Some of them are common to the children's aid societies, but each children's aid society has tailored the system, so it's not seven common sets of systems.

One of the issues identified in our earlier program evaluation that took place prior to the establishment of our secretariat was that, of the 37 recommendations, a significant portion related to the need for one common information system. The ministry was very fortunate to receive government support from the Ministry of Finance under the Strengthening Our Partnerships program, to be working with the Ontario Association of Children's Aid Societies. Twelve million dollars were provided to actually fund the development of a model and pilot for the single information system.

We're currently working with IBM. We've been through the RFP process. We've actually had a very active engagement of all agencies and the Ontario associ-

ation, which is spearheading this project on our behalf and on behalf of the government. We are planning on launching pilots of the full-blown new system, which is a case management system that we hope, ultimately, will be common across the province. It will be piloted beginning in January in three children's aid societies, if that's helpful.

Ms. Horwath: That's very helpful. I'm wondering if you can provide me with any details around the baseline information you're using there. What are you starting with in terms of what you want to get from the information system? You talked about case management. Are there flags in that system to try to deal with some of the issues that we've seen occur over time? What is it that this information system will help with in terms of dealing with some of the systemic problems within CAS delivery?

Ms. Cane: Once the system is fully implemented across the province—and I should just provide a caution that we're currently only going to be piloting in three. The intention of the system is to provide the right type of information and tracking at all levels, so ultimately the ministry will be able to view corporately the data from 53 children's aid societies and regional offices and, in fact, the societies themselves will be able to track information. It won't even be just the program data and statistics, but actually tracking progress on the key indicators around performance on differential response: How has that changed in terms of the numbers of referrals? How many referrals have been referred to ongoing service versus how many referrals have been referred back into community services? These types of indicators are now being developed and monitored.

I answered a question earlier to Mr. Arnott's point about why it takes so long to get ready for implementation—we needed to be ready with the various modules of the single information system. We need to know what our policy direction and approvals are by way of regulations for things like differential response, which will be piloted a bit earlier than provincial implementation through the pilots. The modules that are contained in the new single information system contain our new risk assessment model, which will be used at the front door of our system to determine who is eligible for service. It includes reporting modules on differential response and permanency arrangements and numbers of adoptions. So it includes a range of things, from tracking specific program indicators to actually tracking progress on the new policy directions.

Ms. Horwath: Trinela, will it allow children's aid societies to communicate with each other and track?

Ms. Cane: Yes.

Ms. Horwath: We know that that was a problem with the Latimer case, particularly.

Ms. Cane: Yes, you're absolutely right.

Ms. Horwath: The Hamilton CAS didn't realize that there was access, visitation, happening in Hamilton of the case that was from a different—okay, that's good information. I appreciate that.

Again, every time you raise the name of the other program, I forget to write it down.

Ms. Cane: The multi-year results-based plan.

Ms. Horwath: The multi-year results-based plan: Is there something I can have, something I can see that shows me what the goals are of that project?

Ms. Cane: Absolutely, and I should mention that we implemented it in the previous fiscal year. We're in our second year of implementation, and in each case we have refined the multi-year reporting requirements to reflect the transformation. We'd be pleased to provide you information on that.

Ms. Horwath: That would be great. I'm wondering, Mr. Chair, if we can make sure that all members of the committee receive that information.

The Vice-Chair: Thank you very much. We can do that.

Ms. Horwath: Thank you. That's excellent.

So the single-information pilot: You had mentioned that you are piloting, hopefully, if all goes well, in January in three locations. Any timeline as to when you think the entire 50-odd CASs might be online with that? You must have some kind of target: maybe the end of next year—

Ms. Cane: We need to allow the pilots to run for approximately six months. We've been asked by the centre of government to prepare a business case that identifies the cost-benefit of proceeding with a full-blown system across the province. It will require funding approval.

Ms. Horwath: Thank you. Then we wouldn't see it in these estimates. Only the pilot costs would be in these estimates. Okay, that's great. Thank you very much for that, Trinela. I really appreciate that.

I'm wondering now if I can ask some questions around the independent child and youth advocate. Again, this is one of those promises made that we still haven't seen. I know that last year during this process I asked about the independent child and youth advocate, acknowledging that the current advocate does great work already, but that there was a commitment made by the government to make that a truly independent office. I think on page 14, in fact, in the results-based plan briefing book there once again is a reference to the commitment to make the child and youth advocate an independent officer of the Legislature. So again I'm going to ask you, Minister, do you have a plan for the unveiling of that announcement?

Hon. Mrs. Chambers: We do remain committed to doing that. The last bit of legislation to create an independent officer of the Legislature was done in about 1994, so a while back. We wanted to make sure that we got this right, and in fact some of the factors we have had to take into consideration would probably not have entered my mind, anyway, as being relevant to establishing or putting forward legislation for the independence of the child advocate—factors such as staff in the office: where the staffing of the independent advocate would be aligned, whether to the Ontario public service or to the

advocate. Over the past year or so we actually have been doing very extensive consultations and we have now wrapped up those consultations, so now I think we are in good standing to get this on the agenda. We have to go to cabinet and then of course to the Legislature. But certainly it is one of those things that I am very eager to complete and feel that we are well positioned to take forward as soon as the schedule allows us to do so.

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Ms. Horwath: Through the kind of review you've been doing, in terms of how everything is going to play out structurally, are you seeing any indications that there's going to be a need for greater resources or reallocation of resources that currently exist?

Hon. Mrs. Chambers: We have not seen substantial increased resource requirements at all in this process.

Ms. Horwath: So at this point, in terms of a more specific time when that change may take effect, there's really no target date at this point?

Hon. Mrs. Chambers: I'd definitely like to get it done within this mandate.

Ms. Horwath: I wanted to ask you a few questions about child care next, particularly the child care piece of Best Start.

The Vice-Chair: Ms. Horwath, you have about five minutes in this session.

Ms. Horwath: Oh, I have five minutes left. Gee, maybe I shouldn't go into that then. No, I'm going to. I'm going to jump right in.

I thought some of the discussion that came about as a result of the comments made by Mr. Arnott was interesting, particularly your comments about not liking partisan politics when they get in the way of good things being done. It harkens in my memory to questions that I've raised in the Legislature about the government's commitment to 300 million provincial dollars for child care in Ontario, and your response was a very partisan one against me, saying how can I say that, considering that somehow it was my fault that the federal government, which is Conservative, cut the funding. I wanted to remind you of that. I think it's very interesting how we choose when to be partisan and when not. Nonetheless, I do think it's very important for me to understand whether this government now has—again, it's not in the estimates. So there's really only one small opportunity, which would be next year's budget, to make good on the \$300-million commitment that your government made for provincial funding for the provision of child care spaces in Ontario.

I just want to say that I know, having gone through this last year, that the largest pools of money are transferred from the federal government. I understand that, so I would prefer not to go through all of that again. I remember last year—in fact, I was looking at my notes earlier—with staff at the table, there was some discussion that perhaps \$14 million or so might have been flowed—maybe—of that \$300-million commitment. If I could just ask, is that commitment coming? I don't see it in these

estimates. If it's here, can you show me where it is and, if not, is it coming next year?

Hon. Mrs. Chambers: First, Ms. Horwath, on the subject of partisanship, I think what you would have recalled hearing from me is that I have asked, I have begged, I have beseeched you to put your strong voice alongside mine as we lobby the federal government to honour the agreements or, if not, to do the next-best thing, which is really where I am with them now in trying to make their child care spaces initiative work for families in Ontario. I have, however, heard you echoed in the Legislature about your party.

But that's not the position that I want to take with you. I want to take the position that we should be working together in recognition of the fact that federal and provincial money comes from families in Ontario. It comes from taxes paid by the people of Ontario. But what I should share with you is that in terms of the money that we are allocating towards child care, 75% of the funding is actually from the provincial treasury. As you know, we are sustaining almost 15,000 new spaces that will have been created by the end of September of this year.

My take on this, quite frankly, was that we wanted to bring new money to the table to create and sustain additional child care spaces for families in Ontario. The agreement that we struck with the federal government was going to do that to the tune of \$1.9 billion over five years.

Ms. Horwath: That was the Jack Layton budget. I remember it.

Hon. Mrs. Chambers: So there you go.

Ms. Horwath: So there you go.

Hon. Mrs. Chambers: It was \$1.9 billion over five years, which is actually more than \$300 million per year for child care. Right now, the provincial child care funding is \$506.7 million for 2006-07, and the federal funding is \$171.7 million for 2006-07. There is no question that the more money we can get to the table, the better, but as things stand right now I think we still have an opportunity, working on behalf of parents of kids in Ontario, to work together to get the most out of the federal government's child care spaces initiative and child care plan. I will continue to invite you to work with me in that regard.

Ms. Horwath: And I will continue to invite you to put in the \$300-million promise, because you know what? When that was promised, there were no strings attached. It was promised as a \$300-million influx into the provision of child care in Ontario. Yes, I agree with you wholeheartedly that that money, whether it's federal or provincial, comes from the pockets of families and is invested in programs.

If I can ask, then, as my last question in this very same vein, considering that analysis, which I agree with, the provincial coffers will be expanded by about \$60 million as a result of the tax revenue we will get from the \$1,200 child benefit that the federal government has decided to undertake, which we both agree is not a child care plan but rather a payment to families, which all families will

need and appreciate. Nonetheless, there's about \$60 million that will come to the provincial government as a result of that through taxation, and I'm wondering if you will commit that \$60 million at least to go directly to the creation of new child care spaces in Ontario.

Hon. Mrs. Chambers: I should tell you that I have my eyes on that revenue. I don't have the same figure you have. My calculations are different. I would be happy to see how you came up with yours, but whatever the actual amount works out to be, I have my eyes on that money as well. It's not my decision to make, but I have my eyes on that money.

Ms. Horwath: Can I ask you, Minister, what your figure is?

Hon. Mrs. Chambers: Forty-five.

Ms. Horwath: Thank you.

The Vice-Chair: I think at that point we'll move over to the government caucus and Mr. McNeely.

Mr. McNeely: Minister, I was just looking through your speech, page 8, and just to continue where we were on youth opportunities, "The strategy includes outreach workers, mentorship and youth leadership programs, job readiness, skills training and employment programs," which is the last part I'd focused on.

I would just ask that when you're looking at a city like Ottawa, you look at all the communities. Obviously Ottawa-Orléans wouldn't get a proportionate share just based on population, but there are certain communities that really need that assistance. I think the first four—outreach, mentorship, youth leadership and job readiness—are very important for youth and we're presently looking at getting set up in Ottawa-Orléans for that. So we would certainly appreciate that part of the program. I would just hope that one of my staff could meet with your officials and see what that program gives.

Earlier this summer, you and I visited an autism camp for francophone children. It was l'école L'Odysée, not far from my riding office. I think we were both impressed with what the community group was doing there. I think it was part of the summer program, as was explained to me by Dr. Leduc: to make sure that from June to September there wasn't a loss of ability on these young people, that they had the opportunity to continue advancing. Obviously, it's very important for the parents who have that assistance they get during the summer camps. The kids are learning, and it provided a lot of jobs for our youth in Orléans. So I'd just like you to comment on what you saw, what we saw that day, and what your opinion is of those summer camps.

1130

Hon. Mrs. Chambers: Mr. McNeely, I have to tell you that I was very grateful for your invitation to visit that camp. As you can imagine, I get a lot of invitations to visit all sorts of initiatives and programs and wish I could do more. The fact that that camp just runs in the summer sort of put a little bit of pressure on me in terms of giving priority to the timing of my visit, because obviously I wanted to get there while it was in operation.

I was very, very impressed by what I saw there. As you have indicated, one of the factors related to kids with autism is this ability to provide them with ongoing supports, ongoing reinforcements that are based on the professional knowledge of what works to help these kids. What I saw there was separate and apart from the tremendous volunteer commitment, which was very impressive. I actually saw techniques being applied. This was not just your average summer camp; this was a camp that was specifically focused on providing supports in a professional and effective manner for kids with autism. I remember asking some of the people who run that camp what parents have said about their kids' behaviours and demeanour when they're at home after a day at that camp.

One of the things that really touched me was that parents have been saying that the kids go home, saying, "I want to go back." We know that kids with autism benefit from the reliability of the settings that they're in. They're particularly sensitive to the settings they're in and the people they're working with. I saw happy kids there and I saw techniques. I also saw young staff from area colleges and universities who I feel very strongly are going to be working in that field even if that's not what they started in when they went to college or university. I think it takes very special, caring, committed people to do that kind of work and I could see that. I'm just very happy that you introduced me to this program and that we will be contributing to the funding of this program on an ongoing basis. So thank you for giving me that opportunity.

I also see it as a model that we could employ elsewhere in this province. If it works in one place, as it clearly does for those 40 kids—that wide age range as well; I think it's from three to 18 or something like that—then it's certainly the kind of program that I think would benefit.

It also speaks to the kinds of supports that families want. They're not just talking about programming for their kids; they're talking about opportunities to create stable and supportive environments for their kids year-round. Thank you for giving me that opportunity.

Mr. McNeely: I thank you, Minister, for coming down and for the support you gave the families. They're very appreciative of your visit and of the sustainable funding that is going to help them continue that camp.

I think Mr. Wilkinson has some questions he wants to ask.

Mr. John Wilkinson (Perth-Middlesex): Thank you for coming in today, Minister. I have a couple of quick comments. One is that I just want to report to you, and particularly to your deputy, that your predecessor was able to be very helpful and provide an increase in funding to the Rotary respite house in Stratford, in my own riding of Perth-Middlesex, which provides a wonderful opportunity for children with multiple disabilities to spend some time in a loving, warm, safe, enjoyable, home-like setting and allow their parents and siblings to have some time together as a family, as a respite. I happened to be

able to visit just last month with my father, who's the president-elect of Rotary International, and so they rolled out the red carpet for us. I was able to see and talk to families who have benefited from the decision of your ministry to provide more funding. The need is definitely there.

Following up on your question about the Best Start program, I've been invited by those in child care, early child care educators, who are part of a campaign to try to convince our federal government that this great country can afford both in the province of Ontario, that they can meet their own campaign commitment, but as you said, we can also make sure that these spaces are created.

The third thing I just want to mention is that I have a present for you. I want you to know that you're always welcome to come to the riding. Unfortunately, you were unable to come to the opening of the new Huron-Perth Children's Aid Society headquarters in Stratford. My colleague Carol Mitchell, the member from Huron-Bruce, and I attended in your stead. The children there created a beautiful picture for you, and I have it. I offered to deliver it to you, so I'll be presenting that to you shortly. I'm sure you'll love it.

We've discussed Best Start in regard to child care. Obviously, our government has a tremendous focus—in your ministry and also in the Ministry of Education—about getting kids off to a best start and making sure that in the early years they're in classrooms where they can get the attention they need. I understand that early identification of disorders and subsequent treatment is a major component of Best Start. Of course, I think of some announcements we're making about the fact that we've added three more childhood vaccinations so that they're free for Ontario families. Along that line, could you just give us some idea of the impact you are seeing of this work in regard to early identification, particularly in the demonstration communities, and do you see that as something that we can spread across the entire early childhood sector?

Hon. Mrs. Chambers: Certainly the work that we're doing includes, as I've said, a lot more than child care. I won't go back into Healthy Babies, Healthy Children, but I'm going to touch on a couple of other programs that we provide. We're also increasing investments in the preschool speech and language program. We had 1,700 kids on the wait-list for assessment and kids waiting for intervention, and we are addressing that.

The infant hearing program is an excellent example of the value of early interventions, and I'm really thrilled with the work that's being done in this area. The average age now for diagnosing hearing impairment is down to four months from two and a half years. When we think about how much kids learn in the early years, if a child was two and a half years of age and had not yet been diagnosed as having a hearing impairment, what opportunities they would have missed out on in that time as a result of that. So there's been a lot of progress.

We're about to make an announcement on blind/low vision early intervention programs.

1140

We also shouldn't forget about the student nutrition program, where we almost doubled our investment from \$4.5 million to \$8.5 million a year. We have panels working on a variety of issues. We have expert panels on quality and human resources on the Early Learning framework. We're expecting reports in the fall of this year from panels. We also have, further to Healthy Babies, Healthy Children, that 18-month Healthy Baby checkup, Healthy Baby visit. So these are all indications of the importance of early interventions.

I must tell you, in terms of providing supports for families with complex special needs, one of the most touching experiences I had—and some of you probably have one in your riding—was when we announced the additional \$10 million to the base budget of children's treatment centres—an increase, on average, of 17%—which will take 4,800 kids off their wait-lists, provide services for 4,800 more kids. That's one of the announcements I made where parents and staff and volunteers cried, because they had waited so long for this kind of new investment to help the kids who need these kinds of supports.

So I think we're making progress. Like I say, there's a lot more to be done, but I know we're going in the right direction.

Mr. Wilkinson: Minister, I can echo that. I know that there was a local announcement made in the Kitchener-Waterloo area. I know our colleague Mr. Milloy made the announcement, but our friends Mr. Arnott and Mrs. Witmer were there as well, and I was able to join them. It really was a very emotional moment for a lot of those parents and the staff that we were able to do that. I think that is the types of things that definitely have all-party support. You're right, children and their welfare should not be a partisan issue.

I did want to ask you just one other question. How much time do we have, Mr. Vice-Chair Pro Tem?

The Acting Chair (Mr. Ted Arnott): I believe approximately nine minutes for your caucus. I'm sorry, about six minutes.

Mr. Wilkinson: Great.

What I want to talk about is, I know that we're working on creating a College of Early Childhood Educators. Our kids all went to Avon Co-Op Nursery School. So we participated as parents. There was a time where it was decided that Dad—in our family, me—would actually spend time doing some of the volunteer work. It was an eye-opening experience for this, at the time, young man to do that. It's a wonderful school. There are so many of them. It did give me a chance to understand just the unique role that early childhood educators have and the value they provide to our society.

It all goes to that question that I think we learned early as a government, when you are responsible for spending these vast quantities of money. I know you and I, from our business experience, would agree that it isn't the amount of money; it's how well you spend it, which means, strategically—money has to be placed. So

always, if you look at it from a cost-benefit analysis, all the money that we can pour in in those early years—early intervention, identification and dealing with that—saves us as a society and frees up resources for all the other pressing issues that we have.

It's just such a shame to see that for the lack of a nail the kingdom was lost. If we had only spent some money in years previous to help children, some of the tremendous social costs that we pay for as a society through government could have been avoided and that money could have been used for other worthy work that government has. So I'd be interested in what your opinion is about such a body as a College of Early Childhood Educators and what value you think they could bring to our system throughout the province.

Hon. Mrs. Chambers: The College of Early Childhood Educators is actually one of the outcomes of some of the human resource and standards for early learning work that we have been doing in my ministry. We have received cabinet's approval to move forward with proposed legislation, so we in fact are working on drafting the legislation for the establishment of a regulatory College of Early Childhood Educators.

What we are basically saying here is that child care workers and early childhood educators have very, very important roles to play in the lives of our children. We are long past the point where this is just a matter of babysitting young kids. We have come to recognize that early child development, as you say, is very critical to the future success of our people. So what the College of Early Childhood Educators will help us to do is to establish quality standards, expectations of what to expect from early childhood educators and what our families can hope to benefit from from their children's time with early childhood educators.

First of all, I should tell you that the community is thrilled; people working in that sector are absolutely thrilled. The overwhelming majority of child care workers and early childhood educators in this province do not have formal education specific to that work. This will take us in that direction and provide them with the supports they need to become more qualified to work with our kids.

I should make reference to the autism file, where, as I've said previously, we are working on providing what we refer to as a continuum of services. Wherever the child may be, we want to be able to have people working with that child in a manner that benefits that child as much as possible, so we've also announced funding to train resource people in the early childhood education sector. We'll have 1,600 trained individuals working in the child care sector, training in ABA-type principles to help kids with autism be successful. We're also training teaching assistants in a school setting. We have a two-year plan to train 5,000 teaching assistants in the publicly funded school system on ABA principles.

So there is no question that the College of Early Childhood Educators is going to raise the bar and help us to achieve our objectives through the whole Best Start

program for kids who are receiving child-care-type services.

Mr. Wilkinson: Thank you.

The Vice-Chair: Do you have any further questions? We've got a couple more minutes there.

Mr. Wilkinson: Oh, we do? Well, thanks. We might actually bridge our way close to lunch.

I'd say to the minister too about the children's treatment centres—I was able to go to, in our colleague Ms. Wynne's riding, the Bloorview, the new hospital that has been built there, which is just fantastic. If every parent in Ontario had a chance to go to that hospital, which is the central resource for all of the children's treatment centres across Ontario or it's becoming that, the work that's being done there—children are so malleable, so adaptable, if we can just be there for them when they need us most.

I have a question for you. My sense of it is that autism spectrum disorder—there's a debate as to whether or not we're just doing a better job of identifying children or whether or not there is a tremendous increase in incidence. I know that that is not the responsibility of your ministry, but my understanding is that there is work being done to look into why we seem to have such an increase in the rates of autism, because the strain itself also on the health care system is something—and my work at the Ministry of the Environment goes to all of those fundamental questions: When you see something in the general population, is there a connection back, is there some missing link that science is missing? In your position, do you have to prepare that there will be an increasing incidence going into the future?

1150

Hon. Mrs. Chambers: I actually personally don't think so, but right now the incidence is high enough for us to be concerned: approximately one in 165 kids. We—the big “we,” not just government; it's well beyond us; it's well beyond Canada—don't have enough information on autism. When I was in my previous ministry, I worked with the Ministry of Children and Youth Services to establish a new chair in autism research at the University of Western Ontario. It is held by Dr. Rob Nicolson, I think is his name. We need to know more about autism. There was research done in the US some years ago, and I think that was what led to greater awareness of autism amongst the public.

In terms of the numbers that we see receiving services through the IBI program or waiting for services through the IBI program, I mentioned earlier that there are a lot of kids who are age six or over in the program now and are waiting for services in the program. Even though I do not have a breakdown of the circumstances of the kids who are waiting, we know that 45% of the kids who are waiting for IBI are age six or over, and I believe that some of those are kids who were previously discharged from that intervention program have realized that they can come back for more services. This is why I think it's so important to ensure that this continuum of services exists for kids of all ages. Our target is up to age 18.

Interestingly enough, I've been doing some research on the Alberta situation because there have been stories about some Ontario families moving to Alberta. Alberta does not actually have an autism-focused program. They don't differentiate autism-related services from other services for children with complex disabilities, special needs. Ontario has tracked and has been measuring a lot more than, say, Alberta has. I'm unable to obtain numbers from Alberta that parallel the kinds of stats we collect here.

In other words, some jurisdictions deal with kids on the basis of the type of therapy that could be helpful to them. This goes right back to this whole matter of the kids being served by children's treatment centres who have a range of special-needs-type challenges. Some of them are kids with autism. Some of them are receiving speech and language therapy etc. I think that speaks to the multi-disciplinary nature of the types of services and the need to provide supports, whether they be through summer camp experiences, effective in-school supports, supports in child care settings—wherever they may be.

Training for parents: Alberta doesn't provide training for parents. We provide training for parents to, again, help provide the continuity and the home setting for those kids, so that those parents have a sense of how best to help their kids at home.

Mr. Wilkinson: Thank you.

The Vice-Chair: We're just about at 12 o'clock. I think what we'll do right now is adjourn until 12:30 and this afternoon we'll get cleaned up. Thank you very much, everyone. Recessed until 12:30.

The committee recessed from 1155 to 1235.

The Vice-Chair: Ladies and gentlemen, we'll reconvene the meeting. We're at the stage now where the next 20 minutes will be questions by the official opposition, so Mr. Arnott, whenever you're ready, we can proceed.

Mr. Arnott: I wish to return to the issue of services for children with autism in Ontario. I have before me what I understand to be a message that was sent by the Premier during the election campaign in 2003 to a Bradford-area parent. In this message, I understand the Premier said: "I ... believe that the lack of government-funded IBI treatment for autistic children over six is unfair and discriminatory. The Ontario Liberals support extending autism treatment beyond the age of six.... In government, my team and I will work with clinical directors, parents, teachers and school boards to devise a feasible way in which autistic children in our province can get the support and treatment they need. That includes children over the age of six."

He couldn't have been more clear in his position, and I think a lot of parents believed him. It was shortly after the election that many of the parents became concerned that that promise was broken. I know you were not the Minister of Children and Youth Services at the outset when the government was formed, but you have been now for approximately a year, as you said in your statement. In your statement this morning you said, "In July 2005, I directed regional autism service providers across

the province to assess all children referred to the autism intervention program consistently across the province. I also gave direction that no child should be discharged based on age." How was that direction communicated to regional autism service providers? Did you send them a letter?

Hon. Mrs. Chambers: Yes, we did send a letter to the nine regional service providers. Is there more to your question, or can I expand on that?

Mr. Arnott: Go ahead.

Hon. Mrs. Chambers: Yes, we did communicate that in writing to the regional service providers. As you would know, it's the regional service providers who work with the parents of kids who receive these services. One of the areas of opportunity, if you like, is this matter of communication, being able to communicate directly with parents, because I think it's really important for parents to know what is available to them, what changes are being made in the system etc.

We have been listening to parents. You read the Premier's letter. I have been meeting with parents, not just at rallies but actually in my ministry office. We actually established a parents' advisory committee. We have recently established, in partnership with the Minister of Education, a reference group which also has parent representation, so the school board, the professionals—all that the Premier has referred to there has actually been delivered. We have spoken to the media, because the media is also a good way of communicating with parents.

But the fact is that there are still some challenges in getting the word out to parents, so we have in fact started a newsletter, and these newsletters will be distributed through the regional service providers as well. People who write to me will get a copy of the newsletter as well. The newsletter provides the opportunity for people to tell us if they would like to receive future publications of the newsletter, because we think it's really important for parents to get a very clear message.

As I said earlier today, the evidence is there. In our autism program right now, the intervention program that was originally intended to have been a preschool program, 60% of the kids are age six or over. We know that a lot of parents do know and are happy with the fact that we are not discharging kids on the basis of age. On the wait-list for IBI, 45% of the children are age six or above. So those parents do know. Maybe not all parents, and maybe some parents are skeptical—maybe when they hear some of the things that you or your leaders say, they wonder who to believe—but the fact is, we have not been discharging kids on the basis of age.

1240

Mr. Arnott: Given the fact that the government was under some considerable degree of fire politically and otherwise to respond to this issue, you indicated in your response that there was a letter that went to the service providers, and given the fact that you now say you have challenges in getting the word out to parents, why was there not a public announcement of the change in gov-

ernment policy when that was communicated to the service providers last July?

Hon. Mrs. Chambers: We've actually talked to the media all along, and like I say, parents know. The service providers are responsible for keeping in touch with parents.

In addition to the parents, we also work with a variety of organizations I've met with from time to time. We work with the Autism Society of Ontario. We work with the Ontario Autism Coalition. We have gone public with this from when it was announced. Like I say, when they hear opposition members and the opposition leader suggesting that this is not happening, it's actually unfair to these parents. If I should be really honest with you, it's unfair to these parents. Quite frankly, that's a perfect example of where I say partisan politics has no place in children's services.

Mr. Arnott: You again say there was an announcement in July 2005, and to most of us here that means, I think, a public announcement: a press release, a press event of some sort. Perhaps I'm mistaken or the information I have before me is not accurate, but it's my understanding that there were no speeches, no fact sheets, no backgrounders, no press releases. None is evident on your website from that period of time. Again, I'm puzzled as to why a more public announcement was not made at that time, in July 2005. You say it was an announcement. It appears not to have been a public announcement.

Hon. Mrs. Chambers: You know, Mr. Arnott, I'm going to get really angry very soon—not yet, but very soon.

This is an issue that we inherited from your government. I am sorry you weren't quite as passionate about this as you should have been or you claim to be now when you were in government, because in fact this is something we inherited from you that we are now fixing. Can we communicate better? I can suggest to you that you can help us. You can stop sending confusing messages to parents and help them to understand how to secure services for their kids.

Mr. Arnott: It's not my intention to make you angry. Certainly, I do have additional questions to deal with this. In your last response you said this shouldn't be a partisan issue, and then you responded in a partisan way.

Hon. Mrs. Chambers: No, I'm just acknowledging the fact that this is something we inherited from you. It brings me to this whole question of how sincere this line of questioning is. The fact is that parents know. Do all parents understand for sure how this works? I don't know, and that's why we continue to find ways of communicating. And if you have not received a copy of that first newsletter, I'd really like to provide you with a copy.

Mr. Arnott: I look forward to getting it. Thank you very much.

I should inform you as well that over the course of the summer months an organization called No More Excuses—a parents' group—organized rallies in a number

of communities across the province. Along with the MPP for Nickel Belt, Shelley Martel, I attended one of the rallies in Kitchener on July 31. I met a number of the parents who told me that as far as they're concerned, the promise was broken, and it's still the case; it's still broken. They're not reassured by the commitments or the statements of the government. They tell me that kids over six are not receiving treatment and that the promise has been broken. Many of them have spent a great deal of their time over the summer months to organize this effort to raise public awareness of the issue. I was hearing from parents who told me this. I'm not sure if you were able to attend any of the rallies. I think there was going to be one at the Premier's constituency office. I'm not sure if you had an opportunity to meet with this parents' group or not, but certainly it is their contention that kids over six are still being denied treatment.

Hon. Mrs. Chambers: I actually hosted one of the rallies at my constituency office. The organization is actually called the Ontario Autism Coalition. The topic of the rally was "No More Excuses," but the organization is actually called Ontario Autism Coalition. I also have word that your party has become very attached to this group and has been seen rallying parents at some of these rallies.

Also, prior to that particular rally, I have attended other rallies and have met with the organizers and some of the lead parents in that group on more than one occasion. In fact, I have another meeting scheduled with them very shortly. I also am aware that they know what's going on. I guess there is no more clear and quantitative evidence for—in fact, one of the lead parents from that organization has been a member of that parents' advisory group that I mentioned to you.

Like I say, if you really want to help these kids, then please let them know the facts. Please let them know what we are doing.

Mr. Arnott: Well, I'm certainly trying to do my job in opposition, listening to what I hear from parents. I attended that rally because I was invited to participate. To suggest—I'm not sure what you're suggesting—that they were very close to our party, well, I was invited, as was Shelley Martel. We were glad to be there to hear what was happening and I felt obligated to raise that question with you.

In your presentation this morning you talked about training IBI teachers. It's my understanding that in an interview with Rosemary Thompson of CTV on August 25, you made reference to this as well. I believe you said, "We are also about to launch a program which will train thousands of teaching assistants in the schools." I understand that you also said, "We are also going to be training early education workers and child care providers, and we think these types of supports are exactly what parents are asking for their kids in the schools." I guess my question is, how many teachers have been trained so far, what is the cost of this training, when did the training occur and where did this training occur?

Hon. Mrs. Chambers: There have been several programs. In terms of training for teachers, the school

support program—I can ask my deputy to quickly find the spending on that program. In fact, that's the one that provided training to teachers in the publicly funded school system over the past two years. We are actually reviewing the outcomes of that program right now. So that was teachers in the school support program. Alex can come to the table for this. It's a \$25-million initiative.

The more recent announcement was with regard to training teaching assistants in the schools, which will train 5,000 teaching assistants. As at the 2004-05 records, there are about 7,000 kids with autism in the publicly funded school system. Over the next two years, we are training 5,000 education assistants in ABA principles to assist these kids. That's \$5 million?

1250

Ms. Wright: Yes.

Hon. Mrs. Chambers: We also previously announced the training of 1,600 practitioners in early childhood education/child care sector. That's a three-year initiative that starts this fall. The budget for that is \$2 million.

In my opening remarks, I also referred to a new college-graduate-level program where we have graduated the first cohort. This is a full-year program being delivered in six college locations by nine colleges. The first cohort of graduates was 92 in number. That was a graduating class this spring. That's behaviour analysis and behaviour intervention. So these people will actually be able to work as what we call instructor therapists in the intensive IBI program. That was the first year. We're growing that program to the point where, by 2008-09, we should have 180 individuals graduating.

I also know of some parents from the Ontario Autism Coalition who have taken that course. The course is available on a full-time basis, a part-time basis, online; it's been very well received.

Mr. Arnott: Another concern that I heard at the rally I attended in Kitchener was that the government claims that significant resources are being allocated towards this service, but much of the money has not been on treatment for autistic kids, that it's being reallocated to other ministries. It's not being spent on what the ministry says it intends to spend the money on. Is that in fact the case?

Hon. Mrs. Chambers: Actually in the first year that we were in government, in 2003-04, we actually inherited a budget from your government where there was a shortfall in spending of about \$36 million.

Mr. Arnott: But we're not being partisan here.

Hon. Mrs. Chambers: I'm giving you the facts, just the facts. You asked me a question and I'm giving you an answer.

In 2004-05, there was also a shortfall in spending as the school support program was being ramped up. It could be twenty-something million dollars—\$26 million. Again facts; our government.

In the 2005-06 year, we overspent the autism IBI budget by a little over \$6 million. We had a \$1.7-million-or-so shortfall in that year's budget because the school support program has basically matured. We had over-

estimated the expenditures for that program, so we re-allocated some of that money to IBI. We also had some new technology that we were looking at implementing, on which we have in fact gone in a different direction. So that's how we ended up with a shortfall in the administration category of \$1.7 million in 2005-06.

This year, our spending on autism is actually going to be double what we were spending two years ago.

The Vice-Chair: That concludes that 20 minutes. Now, Ms. Horwath, could you start.

Ms. Horwath: If I can, I wanted to just ask a couple of brief questions about the tail end of the Best Start piece that I was looking at, and it's very brief. The first is, we were talking earlier about the income-based model for determining subsidy or support for parents for their child care needs. I'm wondering, is it like a sliding scale income model?

Interjection.

Ms. Horwath: Okay. You're saying you're putting the finishing touches on that to make sure there are no inadvertent negative impacts, depending on family size, makeup and all of that. When do you think that will be complete and when do you think you'll be implementing it?

Hon. Mrs. Chambers: We are targeting implementation for January 2007, but we'll make the announcement before that.

Ms. Horwath: The other thing that I wanted to follow up on around Best Start: I don't know if you recall, but last year, as Hamilton East was and is a demonstration site for the full-blown Best Start plan, one of the things that came to my attention was a concern about the extent to which there were real and accountable measures or efforts made to ensure that all aspects of the plan that got presented and approved were in fact inclusive in terms of community diversity.

I know that timelines got a little bit tight, considering changes in funding. We're not going to go down that road again, and I share your outrage on that, Minister, you can be sure, and I've said it many times. Nonetheless, it did happen, it was an occurrence, and we are dealing with the fallout. But one of the specific concerns that came up from my community was the extent to which the diverse communities—and I mean culturally diverse and income-diverse—particularly in the preparation of the plan, had a voice at the table, an effective voice that was really taken to heart, and that the efforts were made to bring those people to the table. Because I received some of the documentation—who was on various panels and who was on various committees to feed into the process—and it was, unfortunately, not as diverse as I understood the commitment to be that it should be.

Can I just ask, has there been any feedback, any accountability as to how that happened and how we can fix that if we're going to ever get to a point where Best Start perhaps in the future will have a federal government that will help the provincial government to actually get the plan going across the whole province? Part of the

demonstration project is to learn these things and to address them, hopefully, so I'm just wondering if you have any comments on that. I know that the commitment was there: It's there in the literature and it's there in the requirements. What I am asking for, because we're at this committee, is the accountability of that.

Hon. Mrs. Chambers: I'm going to ask Lynne to help me with some of the details—I'll tell you what I'm going to ask you to respond to.

I'm going to ask Lynne to respond to how the partnerships were established and set up for that Hamilton demonstration. I remember that in Hamilton we were dealing with something like 50 different community organizations representing different aspects of early childhood development and care, which goes well beyond, to be honest with you, the federal stuff, well beyond the child care. So I'll ask Lynne to address that, to give you an update, give all of us an update on how it's progressing. One thing that I can tell you is that if you are also alluding to pressure to get things in on time, that was me.

Ms. Horwath: We went through that last year, and that's not really it. It's really, "Now we're there. What have we learned?" I still have concerns that there were problems with that piece of getting the voice of the actual single mom or the south Asian immigrant mom who needed child care and who was one of the clients, more or less, how their voice was put in.

Hon. Mrs. Chambers: I'm going to turn it over to Lynne to talk about how they were brought together.

Ms. Livingstone: Thank you very much, Minister. My understanding, and you probably know it much better than I do, Ms. Horwath, is that the Best Start network in Hamilton has over 50 different representatives, but it goes beyond that. It does include parents, it does include aboriginal communities, it does include the francophone communities. I know also that they're using the committee in Hamilton to form the basis of their committee to address poverty, and that they're taking an actual agenda forward in Hamilton to look at the issue of poverty beyond what Best Start can do about that. But certainly they see that as the genesis of being able to address that, because of the depth of involvement they have from the community.

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In addition to that actual network, they're also establishing—and this may go more directly to your point—neighbourhood advisory committees for each of their hubs. They are to have parent and community leadership, not organizational leadership, on those. That is one of their steps to try and get at that input from those community members.

I also know that they're engaging in some outreach activities because, as you know, new immigrants or single moms aren't always necessarily going to come out to things. So, how can they outreach to those folks to participate more? I think it's a growing and evolving process, as part of their network.

I visited their community in June with the deputy and the minister's chief of staff, and I think we got a flavour of the level of commitment and participation in that community.

Ms. Horwath: There's no doubt in terms of the commitment of the community. Certainly, absolutely, I agree. In fact, we have a poverty round table that's been put together in the city. They're engaged in that, and that's great. But I'm still concerned.

I'm appreciative of your acknowledgement of First Nations or aboriginal communities, because we have a large urban native population in Hamilton. We also have a noteworthy francophone community in Hamilton, and of course we've also talked about the income issue.

I have to say I'm a little bit concerned that theoretically, when we put these programs together, we talk about diverse communities, we talk about outreach to immigrants, we talk about immigrants and refugees, we talk about communities like Hamilton—maybe not to the extent of Toronto, but certainly Hamilton has a significant immigrant population: Have you built into your budgets the resources for translation, for cultural interpretation? Are the dollars there to back up the verbal commitment to making sure this outreach takes place to get those voices at the table? You identified that it's not easy; it's exacerbated even more by language and cultural barriers.

I think until we start from a policy perspective, adding that budget line, we're going to have a problem, because already there is extreme stress on agencies and service providers who try to fill that gap. They don't have core funding. They get project funding, they scramble as much as they can to put in place whatever they can to help ministry or government—not just this ministry but government programs—to succeed, because we all know they're important. So they do their darndest, but rarely do the service delivery agencies from whatever ministry have built into their budget lines cultural interpretation, translation—something that acknowledges that this is important, not just in policy and in words but in the actual budget. Do you have that? Is that in your budget lines?

Ms. Livingstone: There's not a specific line that says "cultural interpretation" or "translation." However, there is a line that talks about integration and coordination in the communities, and within our instructions we've said, "You use this in terms of how you think you can bring your community together." If that means things like translation, transportation to bring people together, those are legitimate costs.

We also provided dollars to our regional offices to help support the community planning process, including the demonstration communities, and I can tell you that in last year's expenditures, a significant amount of that funding went to translation costs. So those efforts are under way.

The deputy has reminded me of an additional accountability mechanism that we have around understanding outreach and participation at the community level, and

that's the evaluation we're undertaking with the demonstration communities. That evaluation is under way. We're looking at not just what will be the impact on children, which is ultimately what we're concerned about, but we're looking at, "How is this happening? Who's engaged? How did that engagement happen? Was everyone included?" That piece is under way right now. So, as you said, we can learn from this experience.

Ms. Horwath: Is there any kind of measurement or is this issue in top of mind or anywhere in mind when you're doing the evaluation? Is there a criterion as part of the evaluation system that looks for indicators that say you have or haven't achieved this particular goal in terms of engaging immigrant and refugee communities and making sure there are diverse voices at the table?

Ms. Livingstone: There are specific indicators around engagement. It isn't just to that; it's also around parent engagement. So there are those indicators within the evaluation.

Ms. Horwath: You said that there are many; it's not specific to this. So this isn't there as a specific identifier?

Ms. Livingstone: I'm sorry. I'm trying to say: They're looking at that in addition to other engagement issues, because there are parents as a whole and then there are specific communities as well.

Ms. Horwath: Thanks, Lynne. The last thing on that: You talked about the fact that there is a budget line or there are resources allocated to and described for translation and transportation as part of a budget line. When you're servicing a community that has extreme poverty issues as well as extreme immigration issues, one is going to win over the other in terms of who gets the resources, whether the decision is to spend those resources on transportation to get people who will more easily engage because they can now be transported, but perhaps there are people who need transportation and language assistance or cultural interpretation. Do you see what I'm saying?

When you set up something that has a defined pot of dollars to it—I'm just putting this in because, again, I actually believe that we can start solving some of these problems if we put them on the table and on our agenda. So if you identify a budget line, a pot of money or a goal that includes a number of things, I get worried. I know that a lot of communities—maybe not so much anymore, but I know we have data on the kinds of communities that have various levels of immigration and receive refugees. Those data are very available. I would just hope that we start pulling that out and identifying it and saying that we do value the participation of these communities. We talk about it a lot—politicians talk about it all the time—but we have to start putting it into our program mandates and we have to show them, through what we're doing, that we're hearing their voices. I just fear that we don't do enough of that.

I'm just bringing that to the table, having mentioned it last time around—actually in my office, when you were going through the program with me when I was first here, I think. I just want to make sure that's still out there. So I appreciate that and thank you for that.

Hon. Mrs. Chambers: Can I just add something there? I think it's really important to us, given that Hamilton was chosen as a diverse urban community for the demonstration site—the other two demonstration sites have their own characteristics. But Hamilton was quite different, and the characteristics that we were trying to address in Hamilton were quite different from the other two. I would like to invite you to give us whatever help you feel comfortable giving us on this. If, for example, there are organizations that have not been engaged that you feel we should know about, I would like to encourage you to get in touch with Lynne and let her know, because I agree with everything you have said and I'm certainly familiar enough with the Hamilton area to know that we have an opportunity to do things well to serve that community. We really want to do things well there, and we don't want to pass over people who would benefit significantly from this kind of initiative. So please help us to understand how we can do more in that area. If there are organizations that we should be consulting or should ensure that the service managers consult, we would very much like to have that information.

Ms. Horwath: I appreciate that, and I certainly can provide that.

Just as a kind of closing to that: If we build that piece into the planning process, then we're much more likely to get an outcome of a model or a system that has that already in it. So, hopefully, at the end of the day, we won't even be asking those questions anymore because those pieces will be built in because we've now figured out how to do that from the beginning with the community. So I appreciate that.

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I'm just wanting to ask one last question. I was looking through the Results-based Plan Briefing Book, on page 17, in the first Best Start strategy around the priority for "Success for students." The result is "Improved readiness to learn," and then there's a list of measurements. The first one talks about "More kids arriving at school ready to learn." It goes back a little bit to the discussion we were having before—and I'm not sure if it was with Mr. Arnott or one of the government members. I think it was Mr. Wilkinson maybe, now that I'm recalling, who was talking about Healthy Babies, Healthy Children and the efforts to determine where children are at an earlier stage and thereby hopefully provide the sources needed to get that child off to a good start.

We have, "Results of EDI for spring 2005 indicate that Ontario children are doing better at entry to grade 1 compared to Canada-wide norms. Full baseline to be completed summer by 2006." Do we have the full baseline yet?

Ms. Livingstone: The baseline's this fall. We're just getting the information this month from the Offord Centre. The baseline is this fall.

Ms. Horwath: So that's just off by a couple of months in terms of the timeline?

Ms. Livingstone: Yes.

Ms. Horwath: Can I get a copy of that when it comes?

Ms. Livingstone: Yes.

Ms. Horwath: Mr. Chair, can we make sure that comes around? Okay. That's great. Thanks very much. Is it late because there has been trouble getting the stats in?

Ms. Livingstone: I believe it's an error in the report. We were always targeting the fall for that data to come in from the very beginning of the three-year cycle. I was a bit surprised to see the summer. It was always intended for the fall.

Ms. Horwath: All right. Thanks very much. How much time do I have left?

The Vice-Chair: You've got about three minutes left in this round, Ms. Horwath.

Ms. Horwath: Okay. Well, I'm going to start right into the children's treatment centres questions. There was a \$10-million commitment of additional funding to children's treatment centres—I think it was in May of this year. Is that \$10 million included in the regular yearly increase or is it in addition to any funds that might be listed here?

Ms. Wright: It's an increase in the base funding to CTCs.

Ms. Horwath: Is it annualized or is it just a one-time—

Ms. Wright: It's annualized.

Hon. Mrs. Chambers: It's annualized and it was new money approved at the time of this year's budget.

Ms. Horwath: Okay. So they can expect that to be now—

Hon. Mrs. Chambers: It's annualized, yes.

Ms. Horwath: Okay. I'm still trying to learn how all of these things interconnect. I'm sure you are too, Minister, with your new ministry, relatively speaking, right? But how do the children's treatment centres and their funding relate or compare to special education funding from the Ministry of Education? Is there any relationship at all?

Hon. Mrs. Chambers: No, there isn't, actually. So the children's treatment centres—right?

Ms. Wright: Right.

Hon. Mrs. Chambers: Okay. I wasn't sure if that was a look.

One link to another ministry is actually with the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care, where the funding for—someone had mentioned Bloorview-McMillan. Because Bloorview-McMillan is an in-patient facility, even though it's a children's treatment centre, it's funded by the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care, but the other 20 are entirely under my ministry's portfolio. Those children's treatment centres provide a variety of services to kids with a variety of complex special needs. So it might be speech and language therapy; it might be technology, wheelchairs or language devices. It might be behavioural therapy. It might be equipment that helps them to communicate. There are a wide variety of services, and this is why I say that some of the kids they

serve are kids who have autism—not all of the kids. There are some kids with spina bifida.

There's a fantastic story of a young man whom I met out at one of the children's treatment centres who is actually at York University now. He has—is it spina bifida?

Interjection.

Hon. Mrs. Chambers: Yes. Let's put it this way: If we can help someone with that kind of complexity, as we have—he's actually living in residence now at York University, with some supports. He chuckled as he told us that his parents call every day to find out if he really, really, really is okay. But he has been served for many years through one of the children's treatment centres.

The Vice-Chair: I think we should now go over to the government members. You get 20 minutes.

Mr. Brownell: I just want to say, sitting here and listening to my colleague from Waterloo-Wellington make the comment that children over six are not receiving treatment made me a little annoyed because I know that children over the age of six are getting treatment and are not being pulled out of programs as they move beyond that age-six time period in their lives. I would really like you to restate for the record that close to 60% of the children currently receiving IBI are over six. I believe that was something that you had said.

Hon. Mrs. Chambers: That is correct.

Mr. Brownell: For the record, I'd really like you to indicate that, and that leads me into a question that—and I want to tell you that for the past three weeks I've been on autism on this file back in my riding. I don't know if your staff heard that about three weeks ago I had a constituency picnic and I was approached by a constituent whose son has Asperger syndrome.

I thought I knew everything about autism and Asperger's. I received my specialist in special education through the University of Ottawa in my teaching career. Last Saturday, I met with this constituent. I met with her daughter. Her daughter had just finished high school. She's working for a year to raise some money to go to college because she wants to study autism and become one of those young people who are helping out in the community. It was wonderful to hear that.

I know that the spending in the budget—the numbers have improved over the past couple of years, leading to overspending in direct services to children in 2005-06. What I'd really like to know is, what progress have we made in the autism intervention program that would lead to this overspending, and what would you credit for the significant improvement in spending over the last year?

Hon. Mrs. Chambers: First of all, references have been made to the Premier's commitment. The Premier's commitment was very clear to me and it made a lot of sense to me. Quite frankly, we have driven this very hard. We have driven this really hard, and we're not there yet. We're not where we want to be yet. As long as kids are still waiting for any prolonged period of time to get into the program, I will not be satisfied. But certainly our determination in ensuring that we put as many kids into the program and that we provide supports for these kids

as they go through their various stages of development has been a huge priority for my ministry.

I arrived in that ministry at the end of June last year, and we looked at how the different regional service providers were assessing. We knew that assessment times had been reduced significantly. Assessments are now being done anywhere between six and eight weeks. There isn't a long wait for assessment. The good thing about that is that as soon as a child is assessed as being eligible for services—in other words, is deemed to have autism—the parents start to get supports, training etc. There are a variety of services other than IBI services that these kids can get, even while they're waiting for IBI.

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I personally had difficulty with the fact that there was money unspent. I had difficulty with that. The more I spoke with parents and service providers—or I should say listened to them—I certainly empathized with the challenges that these families face. I think it's very, very important for us to understand that wherever we can help as a government, we are obliged to help.

Yes, for the record, 60%—exactly 61%—of kids who are currently receiving IBI in the province of Ontario are age six or over, and 45% of the kids on the wait-list for IBI—in other words, they have been assessed and have been told that as soon as there is more capacity in the system, they're lined up—are age six or over. Families want their kids to be in the school system, in integrated learning settings etc. As I said before, I think it's really important for us to continue to strengthen the school system so that parents can feel confident that their kids will be able to receive that continuity of care in an integrated school setting.

Mr. Brownell: Thank you very much for that. If I could just follow up with regard to Autism Ontario, at that meeting last Saturday I had the chair of the Upper Canada chapter, Debbie Keillar, at the meeting. I'm just wondering about the association between the ministry and that organization. Could you expand on that a bit?

Hon. Mrs. Chambers: The Autism Society Ontario—there are a couple of different organizations. I think Mr. Arnott was referring to the Ontario Autism Coalition. The Autism Society Ontario is the organization that we have actually funded to provide a number of services, including a new web-based registry of service providers. That's one of the things that parents, including some of the representatives from the Ontario Autism Coalition who do the rallies, have told us, that parents needed more support in ensuring that the qualifications of the service providers out there were indeed what was appropriate to support their kids. One of the initiatives that we have funded with the Autism Society Ontario is a web-based registry. I think the website is ABACUS. It has two components to it.

Incidentally, that got off the ground towards the end of July. We have already had more than 10,000 hits against that site, and very positive feedback. We have more than 70 service providers who have registered. What that means is that they have their qualifications, where they

provide their services in the province, what kinds of services they provide. So we're building this registry of service providers that parents can access. We also have on that registry questions that parents can ask to determine how comfortable they would be with the qualifications of the particular service providers, even before they actually make contact with them.

Parents want to feel more empowered to care for their kids, particularly parents who are being funded through the direct funding option for services, where they go and find the service providers themselves. They have told us that they really appreciate the service.

Mr. Brownell: Thank you.

The Vice-Chair: Mr. McNeely, I understand you're next.

Mr. McNeely: Minister, you said this morning in your introduction, "The centrepiece of our reform to the child protection system is Bill 210, amending the Child and Family Services Act, which was passed by the Ontario Legislature on March 27 of this year." Early on after my election, Susan Galarneau, a family law lawyer in Orléans, came to my office and spoke to me about a lot of the difficulties of not having more people in permanent adoptions. Her experience was that the young single mothers she was meeting could not make that decision to give up their children forever and would try to keep their children, often would not do a good job of raising the child or have too many difficulties, and in the end would give their children up for adoption, but adoptive parents could not be found. She felt it was much easier when the child was younger for the adoption to occur.

You say that there are presently 9,000 crown wards in Ontario who live in foster homes and that they live there on an average of two years per foster home, so it's not a very stable situation. I've got two questions, then. First, what are the changes coming forward that will make sure that more children are adopted? Secondly, when this new legislation comes into effect, do you see the 9,000 crown wards, that number, decreasing, or at least stabilizing?

Hon. Mrs. Chambers: Thank you for the question, Mr. McNeely. There are a number of steps that will be available through Bill 210 that I feel confident will increase the opportunities for stable home environments for kids.

One of those opportunities is the openness in the adoption process and mechanisms. It has been very, very difficult for individuals to adopt kids in Ontario because of legal barriers that had to do, for the most part, with birth parents' rights to keep in touch with the kids. Now those barriers will come down. That's one of the ways in which adoption of kids in Ontario will be simpler to do. In fact, when I look at some of the international adoption numbers, they're a lot higher than the domestic adoption numbers, because it's easier to do if you have the money, right? That's one way in which I see greater opportunities for permanence while permitting the kids to keep in touch, to remain in touch with their birth parents, if that is the desired arrangement.

We also will have the opportunity to provide legal custody type arrangements. Grandparents might want to

be involved with that. Incidentally, there were also changes made in terms of who were considered to be places of safety. One of the letters that I received shortly after I was appointed to this ministry actually was a very emotional one for me because it came from some grandparents who wrote to ask, how could it be, in the province of Ontario, that their grandchildren could be adopted without them even knowing that they were up for adoption? You see, grandparents were not considered places of safety. I wondered how I would deal with that if that happened to me and my grandchildren.

Grandparents, with all of the appropriate risk assessment processes in place, new processes that we have announced, will have the opportunity; extended family—in aboriginal communities, the customary care type of arrangements where their communities own their kids. They don't see their kids as limited to the responsibility of one particular parent. They pitch in and take care of their kids. Those are other opportunities for more permanent placements of kids.

Differential response—in other words, where we start: Right now, about one in five situations in which children's aid societies are called in end up with kids being placed in care. We believe that there are families who, with some professional support and sometimes financial support through what we call our differential response process, which is part of Bill 210, we will be able to avoid taking kids into care as a result of providing parents with the kinds of supports they need. Grandparents have said to us—because there are so many grandparents who are taking care of grandchildren now, legally or informally—“This is very hard on us financially,” so my ministry is actually working on improving financial supports available for grandparents. This policy is very close to completion, whereby grandparents could apply for support, based on their financial circumstances, of up to \$900 per month for their grandchild.

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I think the person you referred to would also tell you that alternative dispute resolution and the mediation processes will also provide a more positive environment for some of those mothers who just can't make it through the court system. So these cases would not even have to go to the courts. Family mediation has been found to be very successful. So I fully anticipate that we will not see those numbers grow and in fact be reduced. That would actually be a great measure of success.

The Vice-Chair: You folks have about four minutes left for another question. No further questions at this stage? Okay. Mr. Arnott?

Mr. Arnott: Minister, I wish to resume the discussion we were having in the previous round about the unspent money that was allocated by the budgetary process for autism services but not spent on autism services. It was reported in the Peterborough Examiner on August 16, and I believe as well more recently on August 30 in the Sudbury Star, that since 2003, the year that your party took power, approximately \$67.2 million dedicated at budget time for autism programming went elsewhere. In

the fiscal year 2005-06, which is the fiscal year that ended at the end of March of this year, your budgetary plan was to spend \$99.3 million for autism programming, but \$1.7 million, which I'm told represents enough money to take 35 children off the waiting list, was not spent on autism services. Is this in fact the case?

Hon. Mrs. Chambers: Actually, the 60-something number is not accurate. I'm going to give you the number by year. The variance in 2003-04, the underspending in 2003-04, was actually \$36.3 million—call it \$36.4 million—in 2004-05 it was \$21.5 million and in 2005-06 it was \$1.7 million. Not all of that money goes into IBI therapy. Some of the money in the autism budget is for the school support programs, some is for direct operating expenses, and in fact it is in those areas that we have seen the bulk of the underspending by our government.

I'm going to give you a few other numbers. In 2003-04, in the IBI program, the autism intervention program—that was the year in which our government came into office—the variance was \$14.7 million. In 2004-05, our government's first full year, the variance was \$3 million, and in 2005-06, the second full year of our government, we actually overspent on the IBI program by \$6.1 million.

Mr. Arnott: Well, the figures you gave me—I've quickly added them up here. You said that \$67.2 million dedicated, but dedicated for autism programming, was unspent. In actual fact, over three years it was \$59.6 million, so rounded off, almost \$60 million over a three-year period that was budgeted for autism services but not spent on—

Hon. Mrs. Chambers: Not just autism services; administration, everything.

Ms. Wright: Not just IBI.

Hon. Mrs. Chambers: Not just IBI, no. I can give you the IBI numbers—I gave you the numbers.

Mr. Arnott: This is clearly what the parents whom I met on July 31 were pointing to, the concern that it appears that money is being allocated but it is not being spent on services that directly impact on improving the lives and the opportunity for quality of life of these children. You really haven't denied that that's the case.

Hon. Mrs. Chambers: I would have to tell you that where you say, “is not being spent,” I would say, “was not being spent,” because in 2005-06 we actually overspent the autism intervention program dollars by \$6.1 million.

Mr. Arnott: If you look at the totality of your term of office, clearly you've got a long way to go to get that back down to—

Hon. Mrs. Chambers: Especially since we started out by inheriting that huge underspending from the previous government in the first part of our mandate.

Mr. Arnott: When I came to Queen's Park today, there was a letter on my desk that is addressed to you. It's dated September 13—yesterday—so in all likelihood you haven't seen it, but it is addressed to you. I'm certainly happy to give you this copy that I have in front of me.

Perhaps you have seen it, I'm not sure. It reads as follows:

"Attn. Mrs. Chambers:

"We received a newsletter recently from your ministry which outlines the services families with children who have autism can expect from the Liberal government.

"Your recent claims that this government doesn't discharge children with autism from services when they turn six years old are astounding to us. We begged your government not to discontinue our son's treatment two years ago. Since his discharge, he has not learned the items listed below ...", and there are five pages of background where this family has concerns.

"The newsletter claims children are receiving appropriate services in school. Well, enclosed I have documented my son's very diverse and complex needs. As you can see, the list is quite lengthy. We are still awaiting assessments that are required by your ministry to admit him into the IBI program. Surely all of these needs cannot be addressed during the six hours our son attends school. Obviously his need for intensive treatment should be quite apparent given the skills he has not yet attained.

"I'm sure that given your very public commitment to ensure children with autism are receiving the supports and services they require, you'll be very supportive in ensuring that services are in place to meet our son's needs.

"Thank you for your time. We look forward to hearing from you."

I certainly will share this letter with you.

In response to an earlier question I had, you referred me to this newsletter. This family has received the newsletter and clearly is not in any way satisfied with the claims that are in the newsletter. Do you have any word of response to this family and these two parents who have written this letter?

Hon. Mrs. Chambers: First, I must say you're right: I have not seen that letter as yet. If it's dated September 13, I don't think it's unreasonable that I have not yet seen it. I'm sure I will, and I will look forward to responding. I will look forward also to ensuring that my ministry connects those parents with the regional service provider appropriate to the area in which they live.

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In terms of school supports, this is one of those work-in-progress type of situations where we are adding to the capacity of the school system to provide appropriate supports to kids with autism by training educational assistants, teaching assistants. Over the next two years, 5,000 education assistants will be trained by the Geneva Centre in ABA-type principles so that they will be there to provide support and services to kids with autism in our publicly funded schools.

We spoke about the school support program as one area of underspending in the budget, which was because we had in fact overestimated the costs of that program. That's the program where teachers in the publicly funded system have been provided with training, and there have been consultants who have paid thousands of visits to

school settings to support teachers, to help them to understand how to work with kids with autism.

I believe there is more that can and must be done to provide supports to kids in the school system. That's the reason why Minister Papatello and I have actually very recently launched the autism reference group: specifically to provide us with recommendations, which we expect to receive in January or February of 2007, on how best to support kids in the integrated school setting. We're looking forward to receiving those recommendations.

Mr. Arnott: This morning you chastised me and our party's leader for raising these concerns, and you seemed to suggest that parents weren't being given the accurate facts by our party. The fact is, we're continuing to receive letters like this, as I know you are, and that is what is motivating us to bring these concerns forward. It's not anything we're telling them; it's what the parents are telling us.

Hon. Mrs. Chambers: Like I have also said today, exactly 61% of the kids who are receiving IBI right now are age six or over. I don't know if the child who is referred to in this letter is currently on the IBI wait-list again. The letter that you read suggested that this child was discharged from services two years ago, so that child is probably on the wait-list right now. Some 45% of children on the wait-list are age six or over, so those parents do know that their children will not be discharged on the basis of age.

Mr. Arnott: So if they're not discharged on the basis of age, what are the criteria which lead to them being discharged?

Hon. Mrs. Chambers: The assessments that are done on the kids are intended to determine how they are progressing and whether or not they are ready to move on to different types of therapy. There's no indication that children need to remain on IBI therapy for many, many years, so their progress is measured. Places like the Geneva Centre have tools for assessing. The same kinds of tools that assess the child's needs during the early assessment processes and other tools are available and utilized in assessing how kids are progressing and what other needs they have and how best to serve them. This is where I speak about the continuum of services that we are building to support kids as they go through various stages of development. Kids with autism spectrum disorders go through various stages of development.

Ms. Wright: If you like, Mr. Arnott, we can walk you through the service model that a child would experience, if that would be of help to you.

Mr. Arnott: I would be very interested in hearing that.

Ms. Wright: Are you okay with that, Minister?

Hon. Mrs. Chambers: Yes.

Mr. Alex Bezzina: My name is Alex Bezzina. I'm the assistant deputy minister in charge of the program management division for the ministry. The program for children with autism, specifically the autism intervention program, is designed for each child. So while we use the

term IBI as a general terminology, every child with autism is different. The term “autism” is one that we use very regularly right now. I think it’s important to understand that every child’s presenting issues are different. They usually fall within three categories: social issues, communication issues and behavioural issues.

On the basis of assessments that are done at the outset of the program, which include two standard assessment tools that all of our regional providers must use—one is the Vineland assessment tool and the other one is called CARS, which is the child autism rating scale—children are assessed regarding their functional abilities, interpersonal social skills, communication and specific behaviours that need to be learned or problem behaviours that may need to be changed or the issues that lead to those problem behaviours that need to be addressed. At the outset, children may be identified with speech and language issues, and a delay in the development of fine motor skills, which is another hallmark of the autism spectrum disorder.

On the basis of those assessments, an individual, personalized plan is developed for each child, with specific goals that are to be attained through the intervention that’s done in the IBI. On a daily basis and on a weekly basis, data associated with the goals that are identified in the personal plan are documented by the instructional therapist assigned to that individual. Progress is reviewed on a regular basis but is reviewed more formally approximately every six months. It can be done more often than six months, depending on if issues arise or if the program does not seem to be making any progress with the child at all. A review of the curriculum of that particular child is done by the senior therapist and the clinical adviser to the program.

Once the child has achieved the goals identified in their individualized personal plan, there can be consideration of discharge or a reduction in the type of intensity or the duration or the number of hours provided to that particular child. But it is done on the basis of the goals attained by the individual child.

Mr. Arnott: At what age does the child have his or her first assessment after the commencement of IBI therapy? When they turn six?

Mr. Bezzina: After the assessment?

Mr. Arnott: You said the assessments are every six months approximately to determine and to ensure that the goals are being met.

Mr. Bezzina: The assessment is done at the outset to begin with and then it is done on a regular basis, typically every six months, as long as the child is in the service. So from the outset right throughout.

Mr. Arnott: How many children over the age of six have been discharged in the last year?

Mr. Bezzina: I don’t have specific data in front of me in that regard. I do know that we have had, in the first quarter of this particular fiscal year, 42 discharges from the program. But, off the top of my head, I don’t know what age those 42 are at.

Mr. Arnott: What recourse does the parent have if they receive notice that the service is to be discharged? Is there any appeal mechanism?

Mr. Bezzina: Again, the work that is done with the child on the individual plan is done with the parent and with the therapist. They can ask for a revisit of the decisions that are being taken with the clinical supervisor, the psychologist, but these are clinical decisions that are being made about the attainment of the goals that have been identified in the plan. They have to speak to the clinical psychologist who is responsible for the program.

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Mr. Arnott: Tell me if I’m wrong, but what you’re telling me is that if there’s a discharge, it’s because the therapy is not working, to the extent that the plan’s objectives are not being met.

Mr. Bezzina: Or that they have been met, because children do progress through IBI therapy and learn the skills or diminish the problematic behaviours that have been identified from the outset. They do that, and we do get satisfied letters from parents who have seen great progress in their children and are thankful for the intervention in their child’s life. So children do progress.

Mr. Arnott: And, in essence, graduate from the program. Is that what you’re saying?

Mr. Bezzina: Yes.

The Vice-Chair: Mr. Arnott, we’re pretty well at the end of your 20 minutes. Now to Ms. Horwath.

Ms. Horwath: I wanted to just finish off some of my questions around the children’s treatment centres, the relationship between that service and other services for children as they engage in the education system.

Ms. Wright: Can I just add something to your previous question? The children’s treatment centres can have classrooms in them. They’re called section 23 classrooms.

Hon. Mrs. Chambers: Section 20.

Ms. Wright: They changed them to 23 [inaudible]. It’s a terrible name for that class, anyway. So when I said there was no connection, I just wanted to clarify my too quick response. The CTCs do often have classrooms for kids who are working with them in their centres. My apologies for my glib response.

Ms. Horwath: That’s no problem at all. I thank you for the clarification.

I read your remarks again because I know that you had raised in your opening remarks, Minister, the investment in more therapists for children and youth with autism. You talked about 5,000 educational assistants being trained. That comes from your budgets, the training of the special education assistants who are then going to go into the schools?

Hon. Mrs. Chambers: The education assistants: Some \$5 million, I think, is from the Ministry of Education; the training for the early childhood educators sector is from our budget.

Ms. Horwath: How much is that?

Hon. Mrs. Chambers: It’s \$2 million.

Interjection.

Hon. Mrs. Chambers: Annually.

Ms. Horwath: Okay. You would probably know that there was some criticism during the education estimates about funding for autism spectrum disorder consultants in schools. I don't know if you've gotten feedback about that, but that's my understanding. So they fund the education assistants through the Ministry of Education. There's something in the opening remarks that you made about growing demands for service, including "creation of a college-level program to train more therapists for children and youth with autism." That, I would imagine, is education-funded as well.

Hon. Mrs. Chambers: No. I should try to clarify the difference, because I know we have thrown a lot out in terms of training here, there and wherever. I don't know what was discussed in estimates in the Ministry of Education session, but one thing I can tell you in terms of ASD consultants in schools is that the school support program is actually part of our autism services budget. These are the consultants who actually go in to provide training to the educators, to the teachers, and supports to teachers.

There's another area that you have probably heard of. I don't know if this could be it. I don't want to open up yet another category, but parents of autistic kids have complained to me that the school systems do not allow them to bring their therapists into the schools. If the child has their own therapist, they're not allowed to bring their therapist into the schools. I don't know if that could have come up during the education estimates debate.

The training for education assistants in ABA is a newly announced initiative which will take two years to be completed.

Ms. Horwath: That's the one that was in your remarks.

Hon. Mrs. Chambers: Yes.

Ms. Horwath: Okay, that's good.

Hon. Mrs. Chambers: That's the 5,000 education assistants.

Ms. Horwath: How much in terms of dollars is dedicated to the consultants who do the ABA in the schools?

Hon. Mrs. Chambers: The school support program consultants? That's the \$25 million. That's also the category where we had overestimated the cost of the program, so it's on the school support program.

The \$25 million is 2006-07. The 2006-07 budget at \$25 million is based on the 2005-06 actual. That 2005-06 year we had budgeted \$32 million. In 2004-05, we had budgeted \$22 million. We ended up underspending that budget.

Ms. Horwath: It seems awkward to me and I guess you probably find this yourself because of the nature of your ministry, interacting with so many other ministries, which is not necessarily a bad thing—I think it's a good thing—but I'm just wondering, how do you monitor the use and effectiveness of that program, those consultants or supports that are going into the school?

Hon. Mrs. Chambers: We track the activities of the school support program consultants because they're

actually ours. They're associated with our service providers and our regional offices and our ministries. So we know, for example, how many visits they have made, how many teachers have received consultations with them, etc. We are assessing how that program has worked, because it has been in full implementation mode for more than a year now.

Ms. Wright: One and a half years.

Hon. Mrs. Chambers: One and a half years. We are in the process of reviewing and evaluating how that program has gone. I know it's not enough, which is one of the reasons we are training education assistants. The reason I know this is because I've talked with teachers who have said, "This is great. Now I know what to expect, how to help. But if I have one child with autism in my class, it's hard for me to give that child the support that that child needs when I have other children to take care of as well." This is why we're trying to put more supports into the classrooms beyond just what the teacher has been trained to do.

Ms. Horwath: Again, I apologize if this is an obvious question, but are these consultants only working with children with autism spectrum disorder, or is it special education overall?

Hon. Mrs. Chambers: The consultants are autism-focused.

Ms. Horwath: Just autism. Okay, that's fine.

Ms. Wright: If I can clarify, their primary role is actually to work with schools and school boards and teachers to ensure that the expertise exists in the school for how to meet the needs of children with ASD.

Ms. Horwath: So, not directly with the children.

Ms. Wright: It's less directly with children, which is why the investment in the education assistants, because, as you know, those people are in the classroom. So it's actually to expand the knowledge and skill set of the education assistants in working with children who have ASD. It's to extend and complement the school support system, if I can put it that way.

Hon. Mrs. Chambers: And the teachers who have been trained through the school support system.

Ms. Horwath: How many consultants do we have in our systems across the province? How many are there?

Ms. Wright: There are 188 school support consultants.

Ms. Horwath: Is it on request? A school board requests those services and they're provided, or a regional office?

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Ms. Wright: When we actually first established the program, we established a mechanism, a memorandum of understanding between the provider and each school board. The school board and the provider had a set of negotiations about the number of consultants they needed and the role they would play, so that we could actually make it flexible enough to meet the different needs of school boards in the north, the south and rural areas. They're slightly different in their role, depending on what the school board has said they need.

Ms. Horwath: I'm just trying to get a grip on what exactly that looks like. Would someone who is a consultant have a number of different schools that they're responsible for, so they kind of travel around and provide service, advice, program development and that kind of thing to different schools?

Hon. Mrs. Chambers: As you mentioned program development, I actually have some information that I'm going to ask my ministry to provide to the committee on some education initiatives which include curricula for supporting kids with autism. I have a copy of that chart and I think that might be helpful to you in terms of the education commitment to a variety of special needs programming, but specific to the autism questions that you asked.

Ms. Wright: We'll get it for you.

Ms. Horwath: Thank you. That will be helpful.

My last question in that vein is, when I was asking about how many and how they engage with the school systems, I think you indicated that there's an identified need, your service providers in that area or that region send the consultant into the school and then they work up the contract or whatever. Does that mean the service providers come from different transfer payment agencies? Where do they come from?

Ms. Wright: There are nine service providers, regional service providers and some subcontracting that have been identified as centres for delivery of autism services. We can get you a list of who they are, if you'd like.

Ms. Horwath: That would be helpful. The only reason I'm asking these questions—I'll be quite frank—is that I'm just wondering, is there consistency, are they all the same, do they have the same training, the same qualifications, the same expectations in terms of what they're able to provide, or is it the luck of the draw, depending on what region you're in, what type of service you get?

Ms. Wright: You mean in terms of the school support consultants?

Ms. Horwath: Yes, the consultants themselves. Are they all paid the same wage? I'm curious about how that all works.

Ms. Wright: I'll actually ask Alex to come and answer that question in more detail. I think we do have program parameters that we have set up as part of the program which set out some of these questions. But as always in Ontario, there are variations from region to region.

Mr. Bezzina: When we rolled out the school support program, we actually asked the—

The Vice-Chair: Would you please state your name for Hansard?

Mr. Bezzina: I'm sorry; it's Alex Bezzina. When we rolled out the school support program, we actually asked the nine regional providers for the autism intervention program to take the lead in terms of hiring the ASD consultants. We identified a number of qualifications,

what we want to see in these individuals, and there is a standard rate of pay for the individual consultants.

Ms. Horwath: Is it hourly? I'm sorry, I don't mean to interrupt, but so I don't have to go back, is it hourly or is it based on contracts?

Mr. Bezzina: Some of the providers are unionized. They have to manage it themselves. We've given them a range in terms of what we saw this type of expertise requiring.

Ms. Horwath: So it's a range of pay as an envelope.

Mr. Bezzina: It's a range, yes. But each provider has to hire their own and they have to do that on the basis of their own human resources—

Ms. Horwath: Policies.

Mr. Bezzina: —policies and practices, right.

There is a standard set of activities that ASD consultants must provide. Although it's negotiated school board by school board, there are four general areas of activities.

Planning: working with the school board to identify the needs of their teachers and their teachers' assistants, how much they know about autism. Some school boards are really very advanced in that area and others are not. So there is an identification of need and a planning for the second activity, which is training.

The ASD consultants would work up a training program. The training program can be for school board personnel who are responsible for the special education program for the whole school board. It can be targeted at principals, teachers and educational assistants as well. It can be done on professional development days, after school and in summer institutes.

The third area is consultation. Specific teachers and principals may be experiencing specific difficulties with a child. Although the consultant wouldn't come in and actually do the work with the child directly, they can sit down with the teachers and the principals, identify certain strategies that may work with that child, look at the classroom setting, identify some of the environmental issues that might be associated with that classroom and make the appropriate recommendations for change.

The fourth area is resource development. If there is a desire for certain types of resources that might be required in that school for the meeting of a specific child's needs or for a group of children's needs or for that school board, then they are also responsible for the development of those resources and the distribution of those resources.

Ms. Horwath: Thank you. That's very, very helpful.

I have other questions about the autism piece, but I'm not going to ask them now. Sorry, you're going to have to go back and forth, if I can get to them at the end. Mr. Arnott has been doing a lot of those questions, and I just need to review materials that I received from my colleague and whether some of those questions have already been asked.

What I want to move on to now is a bit of a flow from children's treatment centres to children's mental health, because that, as you know, is an ongoing area that needs some attention and support. It's interesting how you

learn, in the oddest ways, where the pressure points are or where there may be cracks in the system. I can recall that at the beginning of this summer—in fact, we were still in session—I was called to my riding to go to an event. It was a very casual event in a local restaurant. There were a couple of other people there who had just come to have some fun time together. It was a Thursday night. I got to chatting with them. They weren't part of the group I was with, but it turned out that they were providers of children's mental health services in our community.

They took a strip off me, Minister, I've got to tell you. I kept saying, "I'm not the government, but as soon as I get a chance to tell the minister, I will," so I'm telling you now. I don't even know their names so I can't send them a Hansard. But I did want to let you know that there's an issue—well, you know what the issues are, I'm sure. I'm sure you're aware that there are significant pressures in children's mental health, but they are absolutely clearly causing stress, not only on families and children but on service providers and workers in that industry. These people were workers. They worked with youth in a mental health facility and it was something that they were very concerned about. I thought I would take this chance to talk to you a little bit about your plans with children's mental health.

I have an understanding that you're looking to bring a policy framework to the table. My understanding, when I met with Children's Mental Health Ontario recently, was that that is expected in the fall. I don't know if you actually mentioned that or not this morning; I think you might have. My question is, when was this first identified as a commitment that you were making to put this framework together? When was that first on the agenda, to put the framework together for children's mental health?

Hon. Mrs. Chambers: I'm going to ask Trinela to give you some detail.

The Vice-Chair: You've got about three minutes left, Ms. Horwath, in this round.

Ms. Horwath: Thank you.

Ms. Cane: It was first identified in the 2004-05 year, towards June of that fiscal year, as something that we actually wanted to embark upon, perhaps actually almost coinciding with the minister's arrival—just prior to the minister's arrival—if I've got my years right.

Hon. Mrs. Chambers: It's 2005-06.

Ms. Cane: I apologize. It was just in advance of the minister's arrival. There was a decision made, as part of the previous year's business plan, to actually begin the development of a child and youth mental health framework.

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I should mention that at that time, and really in the past 10 to 15 years, there's actually not been what we would call a policy framework or anything governing the development of children's mental health services, the types of services that would be provided, and describing the continuum of services that should be available. So it

was first identified at that time. Would it be useful for me to continue, Ms. Horwath, in terms of—

Ms. Horwath: I've seen some of the reports over the years—not many years, but it's fairly recent in terms of an initiative. I guess I'm going to get straight to the point. My understanding is there's a lot of hope that this time they're actually going to get the framework policy documents, because I guess it's been a long time coming. There have been some false starts, let's just say that, and I don't know what the reasons for those were, but people have been led to believe that the framework would be ready at a certain time. It didn't come. Then there's been another delay. My understanding was spring, then summer, and now it's fall. Are you fairly sure that you're going to be able to unveil the framework this fall?

Ms. Cane: What I can tell you is that the framework has been developed. It followed the consultations that took place through Children's Mental Health Ontario in the fall, culminated in their report in April.

At the same time, in a parallel fashion, we've been working on the framework. We have a final draft. We spent probably three to four weeks during the summer in a final consultation with experts in the field, the selected group of experts. So in discussions with the minister and the minister's office, the minister was quite clear, if I may say, Minister, that the framework by itself was not sufficient and we need to accompany it by an action plan that will actually allow the framework to land on the ground; not just be a piece of paper or a set of papers that would be shelved, but would actually set a plan for us for the next 10 years or so, which it does, and to identify a set of action items that we'd actually begin with in the fall with the tabling of the plan and the related action plan.

Ms. Horwath: One of the things that's come up in my own community is a lack of services in the area of eating disorders. We've had some real frustrations with trying to get people some treatment, particularly treatment that is available in their own community or at least in their own country. That's been a problem. I'm not sure to what extent Children's Mental Health Ontario deals with eating disorders. Is it Health and Long-Term Care? Is it Children's Mental Health Ontario? Where's that piece going to fall? That's one that seems to be, as many with this ministry, a cross-sectoral kind of situation.

Hon. Mrs. Chambers: I'm going to give Trinela some other opportunities to respond, but I want to tell you that one of the things I know you will have read, because you do your research, is the document that Children's Mental Health Ontario prepared. One of the things you will have noticed is that one of the problems we have in children's mental health is a lack of coordination of services, a lack of integration of services. We send money to more than 300 transfer payment agencies, most of whom have no relationship with each other. Is that a fair assessment? I know it may sound very harsh, but it is true. So for parents trying to navigate the system, therein lies a problem right away, and that's just within my particular portfolio.

In addition to that, the reason I wanted to comment is because you mention health. There is another challenge for parents with kids who have mental health issues to deal with, and that is that even the providers have some difficulty in pointing parents in the direction of whether this should be in-hospital type of care, your physician type of care or the social services, which would be our transfer payment agencies type of care. So the lack of integration of services is one of the areas that was identified as a weak area in the document provided to us by Children's Mental Health Ontario.

I'm going to send you back to Trinela now to see if she can give you some specifics on that.

The Vice-Chair: Your time is up. Just finish this up and then we'll get back to you in the next round.

Ms. Cane: The Ministry of Health actually has responsibilities for both addictions and eating disorders for children and youth, and operates a number of hospital-based programs across Ontario. Some of our children's mental health centres, as you can appreciate, Ms. Horwath, also provide treatment, because as they see the children coming through the door, the minister speaks about the need for coordination. I think there also needs to be an integrated approach to children, looking at the set of needs presenting as they come through the door. So a number of our children's mental health centres would also deal with both addictions and eating disorders.

What we do know, both from our consultations and from our discussions with Children's Mental Health Ontario, as well as a number of parents that we talk to on a regular basis, the feeling is that there's insufficient support for eating disorders and related treatment. They're terribly difficult and problematic disorders to treat, as you know, and may require long-term treatment and intervention. So I think it's an area of discussion that we've had with the Ministry of Health. It's also an area that we're trying to bridge to ensure children receive the type of cohesive and coordinated service.

The Vice-Chair: To the government members.

Mr. Wilkinson: Actually, we don't have any questions of the minister at this time, though we don't cede our time, so we'd ask you to stack it for us.

The Vice-Chair: Mr. Arnott?

Mr. Arnott: I'm glad to have the chance to ask a few more questions. I want to ask about the autism waiting list, because, Minister, you had made reference to the existence of a waiting list. That being the case, I assume the ministry has a number as to how many children are on the waiting list. I was wondering if you could divulge that information to the committee.

Hon. Mrs. Chambers: Yes. There are approximately 1,100 kids on the wait-list for IBI right now. Is that correct? Yes, it's 1,121.

Mr. Arnott: Does the ministry keep track of where those children are living geographically?

Hon. Mrs. Chambers: Yes. In fact, remember when we talked about the nine regional service providers? That's our source of information on wait-lists and also kids in therapy, so it would be by region.

Mr. Arnott: Can you give us information as to how those numbers are broken down, then, regionally? Perhaps Toronto versus northern Ontario versus eastern Ontario, southwestern Ontario?

Hon. Mrs. Chambers: We have the numbers by the nine regions. Should we provide it to the committee or shall we list them—

The Vice-Chair: You can provide them to each of the members who are present today.

Hon. Mrs. Chambers: Okay, all right.

The Vice-Chair: Through the clerk.

Hon. Mrs. Chambers: Through the clerk? All right, sorry. So we will provide those numbers.

Mr. Arnott: Of the 1,100 kids on the waiting list, how many are receiving treatment today in Ontario?

Hon. Mrs. Chambers: Of the kids on the wait-list for IBI? Beyond the—

Mr. Arnott: Autistic children who are receiving treatment today.

Hon. Mrs. Chambers: As of the end of June, I think it's 795 kids. Does that sound right?

Interjection.

Hon. Mrs. Chambers: It's 789 kids. With the announcement of additional funding a couple of months ago, that will add 120 more kids to that number.

Mr. Arnott: So the number of kids who are waiting is dramatically in excess of the number who are currently receiving treatment?

Hon. Mrs. Chambers: When the 120 are added to the kids receiving IBI, the number of kids receiving IBI will be about equal to the number of kids waiting, or very close.

Mr. Arnott: And you've said that you're not satisfied with the progress that's being made on the waiting list?

Hon. Mrs. Chambers: With the wait-list? Absolutely. I'm not satisfied.

Mr. Arnott: Is there a plan to eliminate the wait-list?

Hon. Mrs. Chambers: There is a plan to provide services and supports to all kids who have been assessed as needing services and supports.

Mr. Arnott: Is there a date upon which you would hope that the waiting list will be eliminated, as a long-term goal?

Hon. Mrs. Chambers: I don't actually have a date, but there are a number of things we're working on that do have some time frames associated with them. For example, the education assistants, the teaching assistants whom we're training, that's a two-year target for completion. What's the duration of that training?

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Interjection.

Hon. Mrs. Chambers: Sorry. The two years to complete the training of 5,000 education assistants would suggest that halfway through that two-year period we should have half of them trained. It's a training program that takes, in its first instance, a month with some refresher work. I believe that as we build confidence and are able to demonstrate to parents that the publicly funded school system is becoming better and better

equipped to support their kids, we'll see more of the kids who are school aged going to school and being part of the program that's delivered through schools.

Mr. Arnott: So is it fair to say that you're unwilling to give this committee a definite timeline as to when you hope the waiting list would be eliminated?

Hon. Mrs. Chambers: I don't think it's fair to say I'm unwilling. I just gave you a response. I guess you're not satisfied with that response. What I suggested to you is that we have a two-year target for completing the training of the 5,000 education assistants.

Think about it this way. The wait-lists have grown substantially over the past year and a bit since I provided direction to the regional service providers to stop discharging kids on the basis of age. Okay? If you do the math, we have approximately 790 kids receiving IBI as at the end of June; 60% of those kids are six years of age or older. Let's call it approximately 400 kids. Of the kids on the wait-list, approximately 45% are age six or over.

Mr. Arnott: I've heard you say that.

Hon. Mrs. Chambers: That, again, if you do the math, is almost equivalent to the number of spots in the IBI program that could actually be released to bring kids off that wait-list if kids who are age six or over were receiving the kind of supports that encourage them to go into school. Do you understand what I'm saying there?

Mr. Arnott: I think so. Is information pertaining to the wait-list being made public and updated?

Hon. Mrs. Chambers: I've actually told the media what the numbers look like. I have never withheld those numbers.

Mr. Arnott: Your colleague the Minister of Health boasts about the wait-list information that he has on a website on certain procedures. He makes a virtue of it. Are you willing to put the autism treatment wait-list information on a ministry website?

Hon. Mrs. Chambers: You know what? One of the things I've learned in government is that the information that I have is public information, whether it's been asked for already or is yet to be asked for. We are not hiding any information. We're willing to provide whatever information—in fact, maybe what we'll do is in the next newsletter we could also publish that information.

Mr. Arnott: So based on the spirit of that answer, it would lead me to believe that you would want to put it on a website. Are you willing to put the information on a website?

Hon. Mrs. Chambers: I'm willing to show, yes, where things stand.

Mr. Arnott: Is it true that the ministry employs wait-list coordinators for autism treatment to try to manage the wait-list?

Mr. Bezzina: It is not the ministry itself that employs wait-list coordinators. It's the nine regional providers of the autism intervention program that employ the wait-list coordinators, who have very specific roles that they need to be playing relative to families that are on the wait-lists.

Mr. Arnott: So each regional service provider has their own wait-list coordinator?

Mr. Bezzina: Yes.

Ms. Wright: Partially they have them because there are supports that are provided to parents while they're on the wait-list, so part of their role, besides managing the wait-list, is actually to make sure that parents have access to those supports.

Mr. Arnott: Thank you.

I want to turn now to children and youth at risk and that broad subject area.

Earlier this year, the Premier made an announcement that there would be a new \$15-million youth challenge fund, to be chaired by a great Canadian and a great football coach, "Pinball" Clemons, and that it was intended to sponsor local programs, training and jobs for at-risk youth. The fund, I understand, is intended to target 13 specific Toronto neighbourhoods but has had some difficulty getting off the ground. In fact, there's an article which appeared in the Toronto Star on July 16 which indicates that little of the money that ostensibly was allocated has found its way to the grassroots groups that had hoped to start making a difference this year.

I know you're aware, Minister, that our party's leader, John Tory, spent a lot of time studying this issue and talking to people about it and consulting with experts, and he came back with a report before Christmas, which he entitled Time for Action: A Report on Violence Affecting Youth. In that report, one of the recommendations he brought forward in a constructive, non-partisan way was regarding community programs and facilities, that dedicated funding, rather than ad hoc, must be set aside to fund programs and facilities specifically targeted for neighbourhoods with special challenges.

So my first question is, how much money has been allotted to the youth challenge fund to date?

Hon. Mrs. Chambers: The money allotted to the youth challenge fund, as you correctly stated, is \$15 million in its first year. It's called a challenge fund because the intention is to encourage private sector—corporate and individual—donations, which the Ontario government will match, up to another \$15 million. So that fund should be a \$45-million fund over its three-year duration.

Mr. Arnott: How much take-up has there been amongst the other partners that you had hoped would come forward, in terms of commitments and cash?

Hon. Mrs. Chambers: Pardon me?

Mr. Arnott: You had indicated that it's a challenge fund, to encourage other partners to come forward with some money. How much other money is on the table as a result of the Premier's challenge?

Hon. Mrs. Chambers: I am not aware of how much money has been raised by the fund so far. As you correctly stated, the fund has a board which is chaired by Michael Clemons. The trustee for this initiative is the United Way of Greater Toronto. I know that their board has met on a number of occasions. They are, in fact, an independent board. I can tell you that I am also disappointed that they haven't spent any of the money on programs as yet, but that's also why I'm so happy that

that was not the only investment we made in providing opportunities for youth in the greater Toronto area this year.

In fact, we have spent about \$6.2 million through the youth opportunities strategy on programs that I alluded to in my earlier remarks, which have been a great success and which we will expand beyond the greater Toronto area next year and the following year. We have a three-year budget commitment of \$28.5 million for the youth opportunities strategy.

So there have been a number of initiatives announced by our government in this regard.

Mr. Arnott: Getting back to the youth challenge fund, you said that \$15 million was initially allocated. A public challenge went out to partners to see if they would come forward with money. If additional money up to \$15 million was forthcoming from the partners, the province would match that; I understood you to say that.

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Hon. Mrs. Chambers: On the subject of the challenge, the government has not actually gone out and issued a challenge. The fund has been established, chaired by Mr. Clemens and supported by an independent board appointed by Mr. Clemens and trustees of the United Way of Greater Toronto. It is up to that board to actually issue the challenge for the additional funds to come in, and I look forward to our government providing them with the matching funds of up to \$15 million. I also look forward to hearing about the allocations they will have done out of this fund.

Mr. Arnott: Okay, but clearly the Premier would hope that partners would come forward with additional money.

Hon. Mrs. Chambers: Oh yes, certainly.

Mr. Arnott: At present, the ministry's not aware of how much money has been committed—

Hon. Mrs. Chambers: That's correct.

Mr. Arnott:—in terms of additional money. Would you not want to pick up the phone and find out what's happening there?

Hon. Mrs. Chambers: You know what? I'm expecting a report from them in the near future. Would I like to know? Yes, I would like to know, but more importantly, I'd like to see money being spent. I'd like to see organizations, large or small, receiving money from the money that the government of Ontario has set aside. I am not satisfied that it has taken a while for this fund to get going.

Mr. Arnott: Did I hear you correctly? You said that none of the money has been spent at all?

Hon. Mrs. Chambers: I don't think any funding has actually been allocated. I recently saw—and I don't even know if this is official—that there will be a request for proposals to be submitted by the end of October to the fund.

Mr. Arnott: What accountability mechanisms were built into this commitment of \$15 million plus potentially another \$15 million of the taxpayers' money?

Hon. Mrs. Chambers: There's a contract, quite a detailed, substantial contractual agreement, between the government of Ontario, the United Way of Greater Toronto and Mr. Clemens which was, in fact, executed in May of this year. It speaks to the expectations of the government. They are also required to provide us with periodic reports.

Ms. Wright: Correct, as well as an overview of a strategic plan.

The Vice-Chair: You have about three minutes.

Mr. Arnott: Thank you. The mayor of the city of Toronto, David Miller, was quoted in this same article that I made reference to in the Toronto Star on July 16 as saying, "It would have been more effective to build on the existing (city of Toronto) community safety plan."

It appears that the mayor was not consulted on this program in advance of its announcement. Was he consulted? Was the city of Toronto consulted in any meaningful way? How do you respond to his comment?

Hon. Mrs. Chambers: I don't know about consultations and what form they took, but I do know that the city of Toronto has a representative on the board—a member of the board. I also know the mayor of Toronto has been very, very complimentary about the youth opportunities strategy and what it has done in the city of Toronto.

Mr. Arnott: Are you in a position to comment on the relative merit of the city of Toronto community safety plan vis-à-vis what's being done with this program?

Hon. Mrs. Chambers: No. Actually, I'm not involved in the city of Toronto's community safety plan.

Mr. Arnott: Because the mayor seems to think it would have been better to work with him in that respect and build on the success of the city's program.

Hon. Mrs. Chambers: You know what? The city of Toronto's community safety plan is actually an initiative of the mayor of the city of Toronto.

What I can tell you is that the Toronto Police Services Board is thrilled with the youth in policing program and that the mayor is actually a member of that board, if I am correct. I think he's a member of that board. In fact, he is influential in appointing membership to that board, and there are city councillors on that board. I know he's very happy about that.

Mr. Arnott: Thank you very much.

Hon. Mrs. Chambers: You are very welcome.

The Vice-Chair: Ms. Horwath.

Ms. Horwath: If I can, Minister, I'd just like to give a few more questions to you about children's mental health, and then I'm going to move on. You'll know that Children's Mental Health Ontario in their budget submission provided some pretty serious information that I think needs to be addressed. I'm hopeful that the framework that we're talking about, with the plan attached, will address it. I think it's important to note what they're indicating is that for the first time in 12 years they got funding about two years ago, which was about a 3% increase in their base. What they're saying is that there was an additional \$13 million across the system that's

going to grow to a total funding of \$38 million annually. I don't know if their figures are right; I imagine they would be.

This document is very clear. They're pleased about that, but I think it's important to read this into the record because it really states the problem: "Sadly, given that it was the first increase in 12 years, almost none of it could go to actually closing the gap between needs and services for children and youth. The increase was even insufficient to pay for higher rents, salaries, energy costs, insurance premiums and core operating costs." It goes on to say that the "gap will keep growing as even more services must be cut to make ends meet. Wait times will not be shorter." It goes on a little bit later to say that "wait times for mental health treatment will continue to grow; more children and youth will fall behind in school and in life; more families will struggle with disruption and heartache of special needs that are not being met." In the conclusion, the final sentence is, "Children with mental health issues simply cannot be left out again."

This was in their budget submission for the 2006-07 budget cycle. Did you manage to get any increases to children's mental health through the budget process this time?

Hon. Mrs. Chambers: I don't know that that is an actual budget submission that they provided. Was it a budget submission?

Ms. Horwath: "Children's Mental Health Ontario Pre-Budget Submission," presented to the standing committee on finance and economic affairs.

Hon. Mrs. Chambers: Oh, the consultations. They're supposed to be coming back to us with an actual ask. That was the report that they published just around pre-budget time, around budget time, but they haven't actually come back with a specific financial ask, as far as I know.

To the points that you raise, they are now receiving \$38 million per year on an annualized basis more than they were receiving before 2003-04. In the 2004 budget they received the increase of \$25 million, and then in the following years that has gone up to—

Ms. Horwath: So that will be built into this—right?—because it's an annualized commitment.

Hon. Mrs. Chambers: It is annualized, yes.

Ms. Horwath: Was there anything that bumped that up over—

Hon. Mrs. Chambers: Over and above the \$38 million?

Ms. Horwath: —yes, that I'd be able to find in our budget documents, in our estimates?

Hon. Mrs. Chambers: No; the \$25 million grew to \$38 million and has not grown beyond that as yet.

Ms. Horwath: All right. When we see the framework and the plan, the plan is going to need dollars to implement it. So I would hope that we'll see, in the next budget, some of the dollars that are going to be required to begin to implement—I think Trinela was saying that you're looking at possibly a 10-year plan to start addressing some of these issues. The unfortunate thing

that we all know is that children who are children now, in 10 years unfortunately might be incarcerated because their mental health issues were not dealt with at an early enough stage for them to be able to go on to a life that was more productive. That will be a tragedy we'll all have to deal with.

I did want to ask you—it came up in the standing committee on public accounts—about issues and concerns around wait-lists in mental health. It has been reflected again in children and youth mental health. I guess it was reflected here. It has been reflected for several years in the public accounts documents. The most recent public accounts document I have in front of me is from the second session, 38th Parliament, July 2006. I just want to understand. It seems to be a theme that has come up for the last couple of years about fragmentation in this system, which is not unknown to you, I'm sure. I just want to understand how that then reflects on the ministry's ability to deal with addressing the ongoing needs within that sector. If we're not able to get the numbers to figure out exactly what's going on there, we can't really fix it.

I understand that the ministry needs to respond to the standing committee on public accounts. Will the framework that you're putting together include a better system of data collection, of getting an understanding of and a grip on what's happening with waiting lists? Is that part of that?

1440

Ms. Wright: Trinela can add to this in terms of the framework. I just want to say that since the discussion we had at public accounts on the question of wait times—at that conversation we did talk about the tool we are using, the BCFPI tool, to actually collect wait times. I think when we had that discussion we still hadn't got good baseline data because we were still implementing the tool. So we have made progress. We have a good set of data for 2005, which will give us some baseline data on wait times, not wait-lists, just to go into that ongoing discussion that we've been having. So I think the ministry has made some progress in being able to define what wait times are and putting a baseline in place.

As more and more agencies use that tool, we will get better data. I'll have Trinela speak to the extent to which the framework will help us begin to make sense of what those wait times mean, because it's one thing to collect the data, as you know, Ms. Horwath, and it's a whole other thing to say that's a meaningful measure of something. I'll ask Trinela to speak to that but I did want to flag that we have made some progress on the BCFPI data collection part.

Ms. Horwath: Are all agencies that are providing services for the ministry in this field required now—every single one—to use the same tool? Has that been implemented?

Ms. Wright: One hundred and twenty agencies are using the BCFPI now. I'm sorry, I was under the impression they were required to use it. Are they? Yes, they are required.

Ms. Horwath: It's 120 out of—is that all of them?

Ms. Cane: Perhaps if I could respond. When we last reported to the standing committee, I think we had 108 agencies using BCFPI, the brief children and family phone interview, and CAFAS, the child and adolescent functional assessment scale. Those 108 represented among the largest children's mental health centres in Ontario.

Since that time, Ms. Horwath, we've increased the use of those tools. Agencies using both of those tools number 120. Again, it does represent the largest agencies. As the minister indicated, we have in excess of 250 to 260 agencies, upwards of 300, that are providing some form of mental health programs and programming. They may only be providing one specific service or a small program. I think we're quite pleased that with 120 agencies using both of the tools and a few additional agencies—I think seven use BCFPI by itself and about nine others use CAFAS. We've made a huge number of strides in that area, so I think it does represent the lion's share of the largest agencies serving larger populations.

As the deputy minister indicated, we have our second baseline report, which does represent a full year, the year 2005. What we've tracked is not only wait time information, which indicated that for those children who were referred during the year 2005 and who were served, the average wait time was about 44 days—to some extent this reflects the fact that triage takes place and there is some prioritization in terms of those most in need. What we also know, which is troubling, is that those who were not served during that period were waiting, on average, about 170 days for services.

The information that we have is certainly much more than we had previously, but it does speak to the need for some appropriate investments. One of the challenges the minister referred to in discussions with Children's Mental Health Ontario and others is, really, begin to develop a bit of a business case for investment that focuses investments in the areas of highest needs and also identifies what evidence-based approaches should be being used, and we're working on that at the same time. So I think there has been a lot of progress in this area.

With respect to the tools that I mentioned, we do also have a better sense—children's mental health is a very complex area. It's similar to autism in many ways. It doesn't have one simple diagnosis; in fact, there are multiple coexisting conditions. We do know we have a good presenting picture, as of the 2005 baseline, of the types of issues that these children are dealing with, like oppositional defiant disorder—a better picture of the profile of the clients. Previously, we didn't have a good sense of what the presenting problems were. I hope that's helpful.

Ms. Horwath: It's extremely helpful; it really is. If I can just follow up, then, on a final question about the plan that's being developed to bring to life the framework, is that plan being developed in co-operation with Children's Mental Health Ontario? Are they a part of that process as well? Who is part of that plan development?

Ms. Cane: We've actually engaged in a consultation with a number of what I would call stakeholders, including Children's Mental Health Ontario, to ensure that with respect to the framework—Children's Mental Health Ontario has seen the framework—it actually identifies the right types of strategies. I should mention to you that one of the areas we've identified is the whole area of information and data collection, in part because, if we want to move in the directions of core services and common service standards, over a period of years, what we need is some foundational information about the services we're providing, about the wait times for services and the priorities for service. So that, as part of the framework, is identified as a priority foundational piece.

Ms. Horwath: Okay. Thank you, Trinela.

How much time do I have, Mr. Chairman?

The Vice-Chair: You have about nine minutes—eight minutes, actually. Sorry.

Ms. Horwath: Okay. I apologize for having to leave for a few minutes when Mr. Arnott was asking questions, because I was going to head into that area as well, so I'm apologizing in advance if I miss anything, or if I'm repeating a question, rather, that has already been raised by Mr. Arnott.

The first thing that I wanted to ask about is the plan for the Toronto area in terms of intervention programs for youth. I know that we spoke about some of those in detail, but when I was looking at your remarks, Minister, in fact I was listening for those comments when you first raised this issue in the Legislature, the idea that Toronto was the start and the rest of the province would flow off afterward. I think this is the opportunities strategy—

Hon. Mrs. Chambers: Youth opportunities strategy.

Ms. Horwath: Yes—including outreach workers, mentorship, youth leadership programs, job readiness, skills training and employment programs. I understand the specific program that's with "Pinball" Clemons and all that here in Toronto, but the pieces around outreach workers, job readiness, skills training, employment programs, where are those right now? Are those only in Toronto for now or is that across the province at this point?

Hon. Mrs. Chambers: That's the youth opportunities strategy. That started in Toronto this year and it comprises a number of programs. The school mediation program is beyond Toronto this year and in fact, as it turns out, Durham region got some of the youth outreach workers and Durham region also got some of the kids for the youth and policing program. Next year, the plan is to expand the youth opportunities strategy beyond Toronto. So far, we have identified Hamilton, Windsor, Thunder Bay, London and Ottawa.

Ms. Horwath: How did you identify those communities?

Hon. Mrs. Chambers: We identified them through our youth justice stats. In Toronto, we identified the specific areas within Toronto that we would focus on, based on information from the city of Toronto. So there is actually an example of listening to what the city of Toronto

has done. The United Way of Greater Toronto had identified 13 at-risk communities. That's how we determined where the focus should be in the GTA.

Ms. Horwath: So your next couple of lines in regard to this program indicate that there are 39 youth outreach workers in Toronto area currently and you'll expand to 62 across Ontario. The 62 across Ontario—actually, I guess it's an additional 23 who will be online for next year—those are the Hamilton, Windsor, Thunder Bay, London, Ottawa, so there will be 23 divided amongst those communities. Any idea of apportioning, or is the matter, again, statistical or—

1450

Hon. Mrs. Chambers: No, we're actually going into planning mode for that as we speak.

Ms. Horwath: Who do you consult with or connect with in the local communities or the cities identified when you're determining the needs? Do you get hold of the police, of the city, of the social services, the school system?

Hon. Mrs. Chambers: All of the above.

Ms. Horwath: That's the right answer.

Hon. Mrs. Chambers: That's how it worked out in Toronto and Durham this year. In fact, we identified what we called lead agencies by bringing community groups together to identify what was required in the various communities. For example, even in allocating the youth outreach workers in the greater Toronto area, we have allocated different numbers in different parts of the GTA based on what these lead agencies have come forward and told us the needs are. We are building on that experience, and because it really was a success, we are going to be using a similar approach as we move beyond the Toronto area.

Ms. Horwath: Okay.

I have a note to provide some information to Lynne about diverse communities from a previous—this issue came up. I had a round table discussion with immigrant and refugee community leaders in my community and they were very, very concerned that there was nothing available or there was no identification of other communities than Toronto, they thought. I did say, and I was fair about it, that my understanding was that there was going to be a rollout to other parts of the province. I also told them that I would come here and make sure we're on the list for that, so I'm fulfilling that obligation.

Again, it goes back to some of the conversation we had earlier. We really need to engage those communities and those community leaders, both the young people themselves as well as some of the community leaders who are active in the broader community. I guess I just want to make sure that that's—because when we talk about the lead agencies, again, sometimes those people are not identified as part of the lead agencies. I'm hoping that by bringing this up, we'll make sure that they are, and I will provide that information of who I think might be a good agency. I would say that they probably are on a list somewhere in somebody's books, but that's okay. I'll

provide it just so that I make sure it's on the radar, because it's extremely important.

Hon. Mrs. Chambers: That's for Best Start?

Ms. Horwath: Yes. Well, it's—

Hon. Mrs. Chambers: I was going to say I'd encourage you to provide that for the youth opportunities strategy as well.

Ms. Horwath: Yes, so I'll provide it to you, to the deputy.

Hon. Mrs. Chambers: In fact, Gilbert is the guy on that file, Gilbert Tayles, but if you provide it to anyone in the ministry, it will get to Gilbert. Now would be a good time. Mr. McNeely also asked that we engage him in helping us to determine how to deal with Ottawa's. We'd be happy to do that. Like I say, it was relatively easy in Toronto because of the work that had been done by the city of Toronto and by the United Way of Greater Toronto, which was highly acclaimed as being very legitimate in what they had found and reported on. So it would be good if we can come up with those types of ideas and guidance from the other—

The Vice-Chair: You've got a couple of minutes.

Ms. Horwath: Okay. Can I just ask, then: the youth summer jobs, it's the same idea? There has been an engagement of 800 youth during this year. Next year you're looking to more than double that. Same communities? So it's all part of the same program, right?

My next question then is about the police. Same? Do you have to engage the police to undertake this? Do you think they're all willing? Are there going to be bureaucratic issues there?

Hon. Mrs. Chambers: Let's put it this way: This year has been such an amazing success for youth in policing that, as I mentioned earlier, Durham wasn't actually on our list and Durham's chief came forward and said, "Please let us in on this type of thing." So we anticipate that at least in those other areas that I've mentioned, those five other areas, the police services there will be willing to take in some of these kids. We pay these kids, but they mentor—the youth in policing, for example, included a first week of what they call civilian police college and they were all assigned mentors. Not one youth dropped out of that program. So it says that the police helped to make it a success and took ownership of the program.

Ms. Horwath: Excellent. I'm just wondering, on the piloting of a school-based program in six Ontario high schools for the peer mediation, are those high schools currently in Toronto, or are they across the province?

Hon. Mrs. Chambers: Gilbert can speak to the details of that and where we're going with that.

The Vice-Chair: Your name, please.

Mr. Gilbert Tayles: My name is Gilbert Tayles. I'm the assistant deputy minister for youth justice. Thank you for the question.

The first six programs are in northwest Toronto, Scarborough, Ottawa-Carleton, Nipissing district, London and Bruce-Grey.

Ms. Horwath: How did those communities get chosen?

Mr. Tayles: We did a consultation through our regions. We have a regional structure of four regions, and the regions did consultations with the different school boards in selecting the first six. That's part of a strategy that will expand to an additional six school boards in January and another six school boards next September as well, again consistent with the rollout strategy that the minister has been talking about under the opportunities strategy.

Ms. Horwath: That's great. Since you're here, I have some other questions about youth justice issues.

The Vice-Chair: I have to tell you, Ms. Horwath, your time is up on this particular round.

Ms. Horwath: Sorry about that.

The Vice-Chair: We're right at 3 o'clock. Let's take a five-minute stretch to get a glass of water, have a washroom break or whatever. Just give us five minutes and we'll come back and start the rotation.

The committee recessed from 1457 to 1503.

The Vice-Chair: We'll reconvene. Thank you very much, everyone. I hope you had a bit of a stretch. It's now the government's turn. Are there any questions at this point?

Mr. Wilkinson: At this time we don't have any questions for the minister, but we don't cede our time, so we'd ask you to stack for us.

The Vice-Chair: Okay, Mr. Arnott.

Mr. Arnott: I want to return to the youth opportunity strategy. The minister made reference to that in her speech in her presentation this morning. You referred to it, Minister, as being a great success. Obviously it has met your expectations and then some, I would guess from that statement. You said that the summer jobs for youth program provided employment placements for 800 youth. Does that mean 800 youth were actually employed or 800 placements were created?

Hon. Mrs. Chambers: Is there a difference between the two? Eight hundred youth had jobs as a result of the summer jobs for youth program and 105 had jobs as a result of the youth in policing program.

Mr. Arnott: So those students would have worked for eight weeks? How long was their tenure?

Hon. Mrs. Chambers: The youth in policing program started at the beginning of July and wrapped up at the end of August. The summer jobs for youth program started around the same time but it also had an orientation period, a sort of pre-employment period, before the jobs actually started. The Civilian Police College Week, as we call it, was the first week after the start of the program. So the kids were paid for that as well. We had actually targeted to place 750 kids, not 800, in the summer jobs for youth program, but some of the kids wanted part-time placements. So the money actually extended to 800 kids.

Mr. Arnott: That particular program focused on Toronto?

Hon. Mrs. Chambers: Yes, and will be expanded to at least five other communities next year.

Mr. Arnott: You hired 39 youth outreach workers in the Toronto area. It says 35 in the city of Toronto and four in Durham region.

Hon. Mrs. Chambers: That's correct. Those are not summer jobs; those are permanent positions.

Mr. Arnott: So those aren't university students who are working for four months on the streets of Toronto?

Hon. Mrs. Chambers: No, they're not. A lot of them are young people, but they're full-time jobs. They're permanent positions.

Mr. Arnott: How would you evaluate the success of that particular program?

Hon. Mrs. Chambers: Of the youth outreach worker program?

Mr. Arnott: Yes.

Hon. Mrs. Chambers: How that one came about? Well, very successful. A lot of organizations actually had wanted to be able to do that. What some of the organizations told us was that the funds they had gotten in the past for program-specific initiatives, whether through government envelopes or through Trillium, were so inflexible in that they had to meet the particular criteria defined up front for the program, whereas what they were finding was that they needed to be more flexible in how they reach out to kids and how they design their programs to support the services that the youth would require, where they could base their individuals etc.

What it came down to was that youth outreach workers have the advantage of the flexibility of being where the kids are at the times that the kids are there, and examples of that can be subway stations, shopping malls, cinemas, schools, and have the flexibility to respond to the needs of the kids and provide them with the information they need.

We also launched the website youthconnect.ca, which of course will serve kids throughout the province with a variety of information that should be useful to them.

Mr. Arnott: Are the youth outreach workers in the direct employ of the ministry or are they affiliated with other community agencies?

Hon. Mrs. Chambers: There are lead agencies in the various parts of the city, and the money flows from the ministry to the lead agencies who in fact have worked with other community service organizations in their areas to identify where youth outreach workers would be beneficial. So the ministry funds the money to the lead agencies. The lead agencies work with community service organizations in their areas to hire, to train and to provide ongoing support and relationships for the youth outreach workers. So they are not Ministry of Children and Youth Services staff.

Mr. Arnott: To what extent were community agencies providing this sort of program previous to your announcement? To what extent is this a duplication of what has already been in place?

Hon. Mrs. Chambers: Youth outreach workers are not a duplication but an enhancement. There were other youth outreach workers out there in the city of Toronto hired by the city of Toronto, and these add to what has already been out there. So it's not a duplication, but it's not a new concept.

Mr. Arnott: But I would guess that churches, for example, have these sorts of programs in the city of Toronto already. Is that not the case?

Hon. Mrs. Chambers: No. From what we had gathered, churches do not have paid youth outreach workers. They have a lot of volunteers. They have a lot of good people who provide programs for youth.

This is not faith-affiliated or anything like that.

Mr. Arnott: I see.

1510

Ms. Wright: If I can just add to that, When we were looking at and talking to the agencies about how the youth workers could be most effective in addressing youth who were at risk and making sure they were not duplicating, we put in place a planning process. We divided the city roughly into quadrants and brought together the organizations that served those quadrants, as well as additional organizations. There was a round table planning process where it was agreed that the youth workers would be most useful if we could use them for this.

That was really an attempt to address the very important issue you've raised, Mr. Arnott, which is: Are we just duplicating? We believe not, because the agencies themselves said, "Here's the gap that we would really to have filled."

Mr. Arnott: I'd like to turn now to the issue of child protection. I have before me a Hansard with a question that was asked to you on May 16 by our party's critic, the member for York North, about a story which was broadcast on the CBC the previous day, regarding a young boy who apparently had been overmedicated while entrusted to the Durham Children's Aid Society. In response, you told us that you would be investigating this situation. Are you in a position to advise us as to what was the outcome of your investigation?

Hon. Mrs. Chambers: Yes. We did conduct a review.

As a matter of interest, who did you say asked me about it?

Mr. Arnott: The member for York North.

Hon. Mrs. Chambers: For York North?

The Vice-Chair: Julia Munro.

Hon. Mrs. Chambers: Okay, because another of your members, John O'Toole, was actually the first person who brought it to my attention. I'm pretty sure he wrote to me about it. The reason I mention this is that I've actually provided him with a copy of the report from the review. He has received that.

There were a few recommendations from that review which we have been working on in the ministry. One of the steps we are taking is the creation of a psychotropic medicine advisory committee to the minister. We are in the process now of pulling together membership for that committee.

Mr. Arnott: It's your intention to set up that advisory board in the near future?

Hon. Mrs. Chambers: Yes.

Mr. Arnott: When would you hope to have that set up?

Ms. Wright: We're just finalizing the membership now, so we will have the advisory committee set up fairly quickly. It will produce a set of guidelines that children's aid societies and group homes can use—

Hon. Mrs. Chambers: Or residential services.

Ms. Wright: —or residential services—thank you, Minister—to better identify these issues as they rise. In addition, we're going to undertake some training and produce, in combination with the Children's Hospital of Eastern Ontario, a booklet that will help the workers who work with these kids better deal with those situations.

Mr. Arnott: Another issue that came up during the spring sitting of the Legislature, with respect to your responsibilities, was whether or not the Ombudsman should be given enhanced powers to investigate complaints against children's aid societies. Could you explain the position of the government with respect to this issue?

Hon. Mrs. Chambers: Our response has been to pursue the independent and neutral body in the form of the Child and Family Services Review Board. Earlier today I outlined which types of cases—a really wide range of cases which are not court-ordered types of situations—that can be brought to the Child and Family Services Review Board. We're also creating direction in terms of timelines on how cases must be handled in order to ensure that there's timeliness and reliability in what people can expect from the board.

The Ombudsman will have the ability to review appeals that may come out of that board. So that board basically falls under the jurisdiction of the Ombudsman.

Mr. Arnott: So if someone is dissatisfied with a children's aid society, they can complain to the Child and Family Services Review Board, and if the review board rules that there's no merit to the complaint, then the applicant can appeal to the Ombudsman at that time?

Hon. Mrs. Chambers: If they wish, certainly, yes.

Mr. Arnott: And then the Ombudsman can review the decision of the Child and Family Services Review Board?

Hon. Mrs. Chambers: Yes.

Mr. Arnott: And comment on it?

Hon. Mrs. Chambers: Yes.

Mr. Arnott: He doesn't have the power to overturn it, I would assume, but can publicly comment on it?

Hon. Mrs. Chambers: Well, the Ombudsman doesn't have the power to overturn the decision, but the Ombudsman will certainly be able to make recommendations if he or she sees fit to do so.

Mr. Arnott: Turning again to the issue of child care, it's my understanding that the leader of the Liberal Party, in the 2003 election campaign, promised to spend \$300 million to create 25,000 child care spaces. How far along are you toward achieving that promise or meeting that commitment that was made to the people of Ontario?

Hon. Mrs. Chambers: In terms of the creation of new child care spaces, by the end of this month, there will be 15,000 new child care spaces created, and at this point in time exactly, we're at about 92% of that target.

Mr. Arnott: Again, it's my understanding the commitment was 25,000. Three years into office, you've got a long way to go to meet that commitment.

Hon. Mrs. Chambers: I certainly don't think we'll end there. According to the federal government's child care spaces initiative, if the spaces are allocated on a per capita basis and are provided with operating funding support, and the province and territories are given the opportunity to continue the work that they have started in terms of planning that has been done, for example, in Ontario with our municipalities, then that should mean that we ought to be able to get 10,000 new spaces per year out of that initiative. I come to that number because on a per capita basis, Ontario should receive approximately 39% of that number.

Mr. Arnott: I want to ask you a question about child and youth mental health. I want to see if you can tell me how many children are on a waiting list for mental health services in the province of Ontario, and what is the average wait time for access to treatment for children?

Hon. Mrs. Chambers: I'm going to ask Trinela to address that question.

Ms. Cane: As we indicated, we are currently not tracking wait-list information at the corporate level. Agencies individually track wait-lists, but we do not record them at the corporate level; rather, our effort has been to focus on wait-time information at the provincial level and at the regional level.

At this current time, I know there are numbers that Children's Mental Health Ontario and others have cited, which identify in the range of 7,000 children on a waiting list or upwards of that. We have no way of confirming that. In fact, we would say our view is that by tracking wait times, children may be waiting on multiple waiting lists. We understand that. Children with mental health problems have multiple issues that need to be addressed, so it may be quite appropriate for them to be waiting for a number of different services.

At this moment in time in the province, our commitment has been to track wait times, and that's what we've been doing through the monitoring with BCFPI and CAFAS.

1520

Mr. Arnott: If you've been monitoring wait times, what is the average wait time at present?

Ms. Cane: At present, what we do know from our 2005 report is that for those children who were referred and served during 2005, the average wait time was 44 days. As I suggested previously, that would reflect a triage approach that would be taken by the various children's mental health agencies to deal with those children identified as a priority for service. For the children who were referred in 2005 and were not served by the end of 2005, what we do know is that the wait time was 170 days, and those children were not served during that period.

Mr. Arnott: You said that you're not tracking the waiting lists at the corporate level; you're leaving that to the local agencies. Would it not be very simple to can-

vass the agencies that you fund and get some accuracy in terms of the overall—

Ms. Cane: We don't actually undertake that, although through our regional offices, they have a good understanding of what the gaps in service are. In fact, as part of the community planning exercise for the budget announcement from 2004, we actually undertook what we called the community planning exercise for the child and youth mental health fund. It actually gathered people in geographic locales together and identified service gaps and issues with respect to wait times and waiting lists to identify priorities for service, which was funded as part of the mental health fund that the minister had mentioned.

Mr. Arnott: I want to turn to the issue of youth justice and refer to an article which appeared in the *Globe and Mail* on Saturday, August 12, about the greater Toronto area youth centre that is being built, which is intended to house 192 high-risk young criminals, at a cost of \$81.1 million. It's my understanding that this is to be built outside of the city of Toronto and that it would, on average, take people from Toronto about four hours and cost \$20 to get there and back via public transit. If I'm mistaken in that, I'm sure you'll correct me, but that's my understanding.

This facility appears to be "a reversal of the philosophy of youth incarceration that the government appeared to adopt after a 2004 inquest" into the suicide of 16-year-old David Meffe. The coroner's inquest recommended that the Toronto Youth Assessment Centre be replaced with multiple small locations that "would make it easier for family members to visit inmates, make for better relationships between inmates and prison staff, and reduce the risk of peer-on-peer violence."

Why is the government ignoring the Meffe inquest's recommendation with respect to building the GTA youth centre?

Hon. Mrs. Chambers: I will start the response, and then I'm going to have Gilbert provide you with more information.

Regarding the article that you made reference to, I also had a young person quote that "four hours" to me, and it was interesting, because in that meeting I had staff in my office who live in Brampton who thought that was rather strange, because they don't take four hours to get to work every day.

There are a few things that Gilbert can provide more details on, but in terms of responding to research and recommendations, some of which you referred to, the design of the centre will in fact promote the kinds of principles that are being recommended as being better for rehabilitation and the reduction of recidivism; for example, the 16-bed-unit design. So whereas there are 192 beds in total planned for this facility, the beds will be in 16-bed units on this large campus-style design. Two of the 16-bed units will be allocated to young women and the other 10 of the 16-bed units will be for young men, very much along the same design as the centre at Brookside in Cobourg, which I've also visited.

The design will also take into consideration the whole issue of peer-on-peer violence and the safety of youth in residence in the facility. For example, we actually have a requirement, by law, to move youth out of shared youth-adult facilities by the year 2009.

Mr. Tayles: April 1, 2009.

Hon. Mrs. Chambers: So 2009. We still have about four of those facilities, one of which is in Hamilton, the Hamilton-Wentworth facility, which I have also visited.

Ms. Horwath: The Barton Street jail.

Hon. Mrs. Chambers: It is in fact a jail, and the youth facilities are part of that adult—let's put it this way. Youth started going there in 1985 as a temporary measure. The cells there are in fact the old-time jail-type cells, with bunk beds, a sink and a toilet in a very small cell.

This facility has single-bed rooms with bathroom facilities separate from the rooms—bathroom facilities are considered to be one of the areas that provide vulnerabilities for youth—with security designed to protect the safety of youth in those facilities. The design also enables us to provide appropriate school facilities and training facilities that are, again, a model in the Brookside type of design that we are using, so a proven model.

You will recall that we closed the Toronto youth facility, which is the reference that you made in your question. We closed that facility early in 2004, and since then have been having to send GTA youth outside of the GTA, sometimes as far away as northern Ontario, sometimes to Cobourg, sometimes to Hamilton, sometimes to Bluewater. This has indeed been a concern for parents.

We believe that we are taking into consideration the issues that have been raised with regard to safety and the location. Some of the people we have in the youth justice system actually live in Brampton as well, so who is to say that they have to come from downtown Toronto to get there? I'm going to ask Gilbert to add whatever he thinks is useful.

Mr. Tayles: Mr. Arnott, in fact, in reference to the inquest, the ministry has taken a very concerted effort to respond to the recommendations of the inquest in the design. As well, the decision to close the Toronto Youth Assessment Centre was based on one of the recommendations in the inquest itself.

Beyond the structure of the facility that the minister has talked about, I'd like to comment on the fact that we have also implemented a position called a youth service officer, which emphasizes relationship custody, which is beyond just your traditional image of someone providing basic security. Relationship custody emphasizes interaction with the youth so that everything that happens while a youth is in our care is part of the program that we provide.

Building on the minister's comments around the number of units and the fact that they are separate and apart, it offers us the opportunity to make placement decisions within the facility based on risks and needs that are identified through a comprehensive assessment of every youth who comes to us from the courts. It also

allows us, as the minister alluded to with regard to educational programs, the opportunity to provide an enhanced education program which would not be available to us if we did not have the sufficient capacity of numbers. For example, we plan to have 12 classrooms for the boys and five classrooms for the girls in two separate education buildings, because the girls will be held separate and apart from the boys in the facility.

There's another benefit of proceeding with the design that we have, and the research supports the approach that we're taking. It also offers the opportunity to build on economies of scale in that we're able to attract, in a better way, clinical professionals who can develop in a facility of this nature a collegiality, a professional collegiality, to enhance the services that they provide.

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The design itself in the individual units, in response to some of the other recommendations in the inquest, includes meeting our established target to reduce peer-on-peer violence by making sure that staff who work with the youth have direct sightlines so that there aren't what we call hot spots. Typically in an older building where the youth have been housed in the adult facilities, there are places, if they're on multiple floors—the stairwells, the washroom facilities—there tends to be more peer-on-peer violence in those types of locations.

With the design of this facility, the nature of the type of staff, the interaction, the relationship custody emphasis, the opportunity to provide enhanced programming which goes beyond education—the minister mentioned skills and trades. As well, we will be providing different types of programs, things like anger management, substance abuse, life skills, parenting skills, health, focusing on our objective, which is that we want to reduce recidivism. We don't want the youth to come back to us.

With regard to the location of the facility, I would like to comment that we have to build a facility in the greater Toronto area to replace the Toronto Youth Assessment Centre. We also have to respond to the fact that the Hamilton-Wentworth Detention Centre, where we have 108 beds for youth in that adult facility, needs to be closed, and we have to replace those beds as well.

For the youth, as the minister alluded to, who are travelling, say, to Hamilton right now or to Cobourg and Brookside or distances, we have arranged special funds to enhance families' visits in the interim. As well, when the youth centre out in Brampton is built, if a family expresses some difficulty in getting there, we will take measures to make sure that there's family contact and enhance their visitation opportunities, because, as you know, family interaction and a stable family, and developing that and nurturing that, are important to increase the likelihood that the youth won't come back to us.

The Vice-Chair: With that breath there, I'm going to draw Mr. Arnott's time to a close. That was quite an answer, and I appreciate the answer.

Ms. Horwath: I'm just going to continue on this discussion, if I can, so you can actually stay this time.

I'm just wondering, Minister, if you can give me some information about how many youth beds exist currently without that facility having been brought on line yet.

Mr. Tayles: Across the province? I have that with me. It's 805.

Ms. Horwath: What about for this catchment area that the Brampton facility would be expected to cover?

Mr. Tayles: In the greater Toronto area, we have approximately—I shouldn't say "approximately." I have the numbers. Just give me a minute.

Hon. Mrs. Chambers: The number of beds in the greater Toronto area in secured facilities right now?

Mr. Tayles: Yes. There's one in Oakville, the Syl Apps: 52 beds. There's the York Detention Centre. We also have the Kennedy House in Durham region. Of course, they're under a labour dispute right now.

Ms. Horwath: Okay. While we're looking for those figures, what about the four you mentioned that are still mixed with adults? How many beds are in those four facilities?

Mr. Tayles: There are 110 in Hamilton. We have one in Kenora, and we have one in Thunder Bay and one in Ottawa. Ottawa has 24 beds, Thunder Bay has 32, and Kenora has 18.

Ms. Horwath: So 108, 110?

Mr. Tayles: It comes up to 186 beds.

Ms. Horwath: Thank you very much. Now, of those beds, are they all filled to capacity?

Mr. Tayles: No, they're not. The current average in the secured custody system across Ontario is at 63.2%, which is a slight increase from this time last year when I was asked. It was in the high 50 percentile, but this past year, we have actually closed the shared unit in Windsor, which was an adult facility. We also were able to decommission, close, the Invictus Youth Centre, which is in Brampton on the grounds of where the new youth centre will be built, to make way for the construction.

Ms. Horwath: So, then, of the 805 beds, I think you said—

Mr. Tayles: Yes.

Ms. Horwath: —across the province, that figure of about a 63.2% capacity is where it runs?

Mr. Tayles: Just under 500.

Hon. Mrs. Chambers: No, just under 600.

Mr. Tayles: I'm sorry, just under 600.

Hon. Mrs. Chambers: Occupancy.

Ms. Horwath: Occupancy. I don't have my calculator here, but if we have in this general area about 186 beds that are closing, theoretically we need those beds, which will be made up in that facility, but if it's only running at, let's even say 65%—I'm really bad at math. I can't do it in my head, not even percentages. Don't ever tell my son. So what is it?

Mr. Tayles: The numbers you're referring to there include, if I understand you correctly, Kenora, Thunder Bay and Ottawa, which will not be contemplated as part of the GTA facility that we're talking about. We closed the Toronto Youth Assessment Centre, which originally had 142 beds—

Ms. Horwath: But my understanding was the occupancy was at about 40%.

Mr. Tayles: We reduced the occupancy in response to the number of concerns because it was an unsuitable location. So when we closed it, we had 106 beds. That was the capacity of that facility.

Ms. Horwath: So what about the occupancy? I mean the capacity—

Mr. Tayles: At that point in time? Actually, we were occupying it. In fact, we were moving youth to other locations as well.

Ms. Horwath: Okay, because I'm just wondering. I have some information that says that the previous minister indicated that when the facility was closed, with a capacity of 130 prisoners, there was less than 40% occupancy in that facility when it was closed.

Mr. Tayles: I would have to verify that fact.

Ms. Horwath: Could you do so for me, please?

Mr. Tayles: Yes, I can do that.

Ms. Horwath: So when I'm talking about the 186 beds, that's the figure we came up with in terms of the four mixed facilities right now that we need to—

Hon. Mrs. Chambers: Except that they're not all in the GTA.

Ms. Horwath: They're not. Okay, right. That's what we were getting at. So they're not all in this catchment area. How many of them would be?

Mr. Tayles: The beds that would be contemplated for this would be a combination of that—110 from the Hamilton-Wentworth Detention Centre, plus the 48 beds from the Invictus Youth Centre, plus, in addition to that, there are a number of youth who, historically, due to capacity requirements and other things in terms of programming, have been allocated to other youth centres such as Brookside in Cobourg, Sprucedale down in Simcoe and even as far away as Goderich.

Ms. Horwath: How many of them are we talking about in that scenario?

Mr. Tayles: I'd have to verify the numbers, but it's usually—I know, for example, in Cobourg, it would be around a dozen at any given point in time.

Ms. Horwath: I'm sorry?

Mr. Tayles: Around 12 for Cobourg. I'd have to verify the other numbers.

Ms. Horwath: Okay. Where's the Hamilton-Wentworth Detention Centre in terms of its capacity right now?

Mr. Tayles: Actually, it's at approximately the 63%.

Ms. Horwath: Let me just finish this one thought. So we have a facility that's being built of 192 capacity, but what we're saying is, at least from what the numbers look like, that it's replacing about 170 or so beds, so you're adding capacity to the system by putting this facility in. How did you get the figure of how many beds to put in the facility when we're running at about a 63% to 65% occupancy rate, and when the government has made commitments to deal with the other end of these issues, some of the root problems around what gets kids into trouble in the first place? So how do you justify increas-

ing—sorry, I don't mean "justify" that way. Where is your thinking in terms of building a quite large facility while on the other end making commitments in the ministry's perspective around investing in the interventions that prevent youth from getting into the criminal justice system in the first place?

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Mr. Tayles: If I may, the beds that the new youth centre would replace actually add up to, based on capacity, 274. It's the combination of Hamilton-Wentworth Detention Centre, the Toronto Youth Assessment Centre and the Invictus Youth Centre. The basis of the decision for the youth centre is that when the youth centre was originally announced, the number of beds basically identified as needed was 350. That was under a different piece of legislation at a different time. In response to the Youth Criminal Justice Act and the community interventions, the alternatives to custody and the responses of the courts, and the things that we've been doing in our ministry, the number of youth referred to custody has dropped substantively. At this point, as I indicated, we're running at about 63% across the province.

In terms of the Toronto—

Ms. Horwath: Just before you go on, can you tell me where that number of 350 came from?

Mr. Tayles: The first number?

Ms. Horwath: Yes. Can you give me a time frame for when that figure was contemplated?

Mr. Tayles: That was in—before the YCJA.

Hon. Mrs. Chambers: The new Youth Criminal Justice Act was proclaimed in April 2003 and has since resulted in a reduction of about 40% in terms of youth going into custody and programs.

Mr. Tayles: So in the short term, originally in response to the Youth Criminal Justice Act, the capacity for this facility went from 350 to 224. Then, again, while we continue to monitor the trends of referrals from the courts, basically 192 is where we're at—so 160 male and 32 female. Based on our projections—we use what we call a profit model; we have people in one of our operations support branches who track this type of information, and based on demographic trends.

The other things that we need to contemplate as we continue to move forward are the YCJA and discussion about it, which you've read of in the paper recently, responses to violence, enforcement practices of police and those types of things, as they may impact on our system. We are a mandated service. We have to administer the Youth Criminal Justice Act. We receive youth who are in detention and in custody. If they're in detention, that's prior to being found guilty, so we have to maintain a capacity to allow for us to receive youth. For example, if we have 160 male beds, we need to be able to receive 160 male youth at any given point in time. We have to build a little bit of a buffer in there to be able to do that. That is consistent with, in the spirit of, the recommendations of the inquests. It's single-room

accommodation and a number of other initiatives that we have.

Ms. Horwath: Thank you. That's very helpful.

Can I just ask then, Minister, one last question about this. In your remarks you were talking about providing some—let me see if I can find it—"\$10.7 million to support both the new and established centres across the province." Is that this, or is that something else?

Hon. Mrs. Chambers: No.

Ms. Horwath: Okay.

Hon. Mrs. Chambers: In youth justice, there are basically, I would say, three levels of severity, if you like. So this centre and the other centres like Hamilton-Wentworth, Brookside etc., for example, that we have been talking about would fall under secure custody. So that's your most serious offences. We also have open-custody facilities that are typically group homes, which we have also been rationalizing and have reduced significantly in the number of beds.

We also have community-supervision-type programs and, just to give you a sense of how the numbers work out—and these are rough numbers—based on daily stats, we'll have on average 600 or fewer people in secure custody, roughly 300 in open custody and 11,000 or so in community-supervision-type programs.

The community-supervision-type programs come with a requirement—because these kids live in their homes, go to regular schools; nobody would necessarily know that they had been in conflict with the law, but their sentences, whether they're pre- or post—

Interjection: Custody?

Hon. Mrs. Chambers: No, that's not the word.

Interjection.

Hon. Mrs. Chambers: They are required to do certain programs as part of the decision—sentences from the courts or determinations by law enforcers who might also choose not to charge them and not to send them through the court system. So these attendance centres that I spoke about are part of that suite of programs and services.

Ms. Horwath: Okay, that's helpful.

Hon. Mrs. Chambers: And the attendance centres provide a variety of programs to help these kids smarten up.

Interjection: Let's hope.

Ms. Horwath: How much time do I have left?

The Vice-Chair: You have seven minutes left, and in the manner we're going today, it will likely bring you to only a couple of minutes left later on. Okay?

Ms. Horwath: Okay, thank you. Can I just ask a few questions about how the facility that's being put together in Brampton is going to move forward? Is this facility a private facility or is it publicly owned and operated? Is it totally public, fully private?

Mr. Tayles: This will be a publicly owned and operated facility.

Ms. Horwath: Is it a partnership or is it completely designed, built and run by—

Hon. Mrs. Chambers: Government.

Mr. Tayles: By the government of Ontario, yes.

Ms. Horwath: Apparently there are two phases; right? There are younger and older kids in this facility, or not?

Hon. Mrs. Chambers: We don't call them "phases" anymore—

Ms. Horwath: Oh, I'm sorry. It's "phases" in my notes.

Hon. Mrs. Chambers: —because we don't want it to sound as though they're graduating from one to another.

Ms. Horwath: That's a good point.

Hon. Mrs. Chambers: That's how I felt about it, anyway.

Ms. Horwath: But will both the younger people and the older youth be in the same facility?

Mr. Tayles: Yes. We will be providing for ages 12 to 17 at the facility, and male and female.

Ms. Horwath: So are they going to be intermingled or will there be separation by age?

Mr. Tayles: When we moved to the ministry to create a dedicated youth justice system and to bring together the two former phases that you referred to, the decision was made based on a comprehensive assessment. We will be mixing ages on the basis of need and identified risk.

Ms. Horwath: I think I understand, reading between the lines, what you're getting at in terms of the program: so that you're not ruling out the possibility that there might be older kids or certain older kids kept separate from the regular population, but the general policy is to keep the kids mixed in terms of age?

Mr. Tayles: Yes. We will be mixing ages, and then decisions on individual placement will be made on a comprehensive assessment of every individual.

Ms. Horwath: I guess one of the other concerns comes up in regard to children or youth in contact with the criminal justice system or the youth justice system. What kinds of steps are being taken—this one's probably more to your area, Minister—to deal with the fact that we still see statistically the overrepresentation of certain youth in our criminal justice system? That's a tragic reality that exists, and can you tell me, through some of the things that we've talked about today, what you identify as the initiatives that are going to get us to a place where we know for sure that we're not racializing in the criminal justice system for youth?

Hon. Mrs. Chambers: Certainly that was one of the factors that was revealed in the Toronto program this summer, because even though we did not target racial groups, the communities that had been identified as being underserved, at-risk communities that we targeted were our recruiting ground for the kids for youth in policing and summer jobs for youth.

As we move around the province, the kids may look different, right? Certainly in the Toronto area, in youth in policing, for example—and I don't have stats for the summer jobs for youth program—91% of the kids were visible minority kids.

Interjection.

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Hon. Mrs. Chambers: It will vary from place to place, but that's why it was so important for us to focus

in on areas that are considered underserved, because as I indicated earlier today, we have other programs, some of which were started by previous governments to create summer employment subsidies for kids. They are wonderful and they work, but they work for certain kinds of kids. They don't work for these kids who are more accustomed to having doors slammed in their faces, which is why this program actually involves our paying the entire tab.

One thing I don't think I've mentioned before is that we had more 200 employers recruited to employ these kids. We paid them, but these employers gave them the training and the experience opportunities.

Ms. Horwath: Excellent. I have a few questions I had been asked to ask you about autism. I'm going to get them in now, because I don't know how much time I'll have left. I listened a lot to Mr. Arnott on his questions and comments around the autism issues. Unfortunately, I haven't really had time to compare them with the things I've been asked to raise by my critic, but I will ask you if I can hand these off as two particular situations.

One is the Barrett family. There has been two-year wait for her younger son, who has been diagnosed and has gone through the process and is eligible for service. He's been waiting two years already. As we know with this kind of condition, every year is a wasted opportunity for this young person to have a different quality of life; let's put it that way.

The mother is very frustrated. She's just beside herself, and she can't figure out why it has been a two-year wait for her son, who is now already three. Her name is Paula Barrett. She got in touch with my office. She's from my riding, and I guess she has corresponded with you in the past, Minister. Now that I look at this letter, it is a copy of the letter I sent to you, actually, at the end of July. She has contacted me, and I have contacted you by letter.

I wanted to know if there's been any looking into this issue, any understanding of what can be done to figure out how this woman can get some services for her son who is three years old.

Then we received another one just the other day from a member in the Hamilton area. It's not from my riding, but it's one of the Hamilton area ridings. Again, this woman asks me specifically to raise this today. Her name is Shelley Thorpe, and she is extremely frustrated because she has been on the waiting list for two years. Her number came up in terms of finally getting the offer, but apparently she ran into some roadblocks and was denied the treatment after all. I guess, at the end of the day, there's just no way of explaining why this woman wasn't able to get the treatment. Quite frankly, what it ended up being was not a very positive response from Chedoke.

Her daughter had an opportunity to go to summer camp. She was on a waiting list for IBI, and basically her number came up, but she had already been registered and had started summer camp. She was basically told by the IBI facility, "You have to choose. You either get the IBI or your kid goes to camp, but you can't have both."

That's not the kind of response we'd like to see from people who are supposed to be sensitive to these kinds of issues.

Again, that's what's in here. I haven't personally verified any of it. She's not my constituent. She's a constituent of one of the other members in the area. The member knows about her and her case. It's one of those where you just think, "How can this happen? Aren't we all supposed to be working for the good of the kids?"

If you don't mind, I'd like to pass those over to you.

The Vice-Chair: Thank you, Ms. Horwath. That brings us to the end of your allocated time.

The Liberals, do you have any questions at this time?

Mr. Wilkinson: We don't have any questions at this time.

The Vice-Chair: Okay. Ladies and gentlemen, that leaves us with just five minutes left in the estimates period today. I'm going to ask if Mr. Arnott has any final closing comments, if Ms. Horwath has any, and then if the minister would like to make any final remarks before we go to the vote.

Mr. Arnott, have you got any questions?

Mr. Arnott: Mr. Chairman, I just want to thank you for the fairness that you've demonstrated as you've conducted yourself today, and thank the minister for her replies, and thank the ministry staff for assisting her today.

The Vice-Chair: Ms. Horwath, have you anything further you'd like to add today?

Ms. Horwath: No. I could have spent a lot more time on these issues, because I didn't even scratch the surface on the IBI. Can I, even just in writing, send some of these over? I know it's not the proper process, but I just have a couple of questions.

Hon. Mrs. Chambers: You can. Please.

Ms. Horwath: I'll send them over. If you have the opportunity to answer them, I would appreciate it, if you don't mind. I do appreciate both the minister and your deputies. You've done a great job today, and I want to thank you for having given us the information that we were asking for.

The Vice-Chair: Ms. Horwath, if you could just run those through legislative research, that would be great.

Ms. Horwath: Absolutely.

The Vice-Chair: Minister, have you any closing remarks you'd like to make today?

Hon. Mrs. Chambers: Chair, thank you. Thanks to the committee members. This portfolio, as I said in my opening remarks, is a very special portfolio. One of the sources of encouragement that I have for this portfolio is that people like yourselves really do care. That is very encouraging to me.

It is a difficult file. We're dealing with some of the most vulnerable kids in the province. I feel we're making some progress, but I will also be the first to acknowledge that there's a lot more for us to do, a lot of work for us to do. Some of our issues will require more money to address, but some of our issues also can do with a view on how we can do things differently and what other options we have.

I would like you to know that I feel very well supported, not only by the staff in my ministry office but also by very capable and committed deputy, ADMs, directors, staff, all 2,000 of them, in this ministry. So I look forward to continuing to work for these kids and their families in Ontario.

Thank you very much for a very fair and constructive day.

The Vice-Chair: Minister, on behalf of the committee, I'd like to thank you and the deputy for being here for such a long period of time today, and all the ministry staff and the minister's staff.

With that, we have a few short votes that we'll have to do here, and then we can adjourn right after the votes, if it's all right with everyone.

So the first question is, shall vote 3701 carry? That's carried.

Shall vote 3702 carry? Carried.

Shall vote 3703 carry? Carried.

Shall the estimates of the Ministry of Children and Youth Services carry? Carried.

Shall I report the estimates of the Ministry of Children and Youth Services to the House? Carried.

Thank you very much, committee. This meeting is adjourned.

The committee adjourned at 1559.

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