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**Official Report  
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**Tuesday 4 November 2014**

**Journal  
des débats  
(Hansard)**

**Mardi 4 novembre 2014**

**Standing Committee on  
Estimates**

Ministry of Community  
and Social Services

**Comité permanent des  
budgets des dépenses**

Ministère des Services sociaux  
et communautaires

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## LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

## ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

STANDING COMMITTEE ON  
ESTIMATESCOMITÉ PERMANENT DES  
BUDGETS DES DÉPENSES

Tuesday 4 November 2014

Mardi 4 novembre 2014

*The committee met at 0901 in room 151.*MINISTRY OF COMMUNITY  
AND SOCIAL SERVICES**The Vice-Chair (Miss Monique Taylor):** Is everybody ready to begin?**Interjections:** Yes.**The Vice-Chair (Miss Monique Taylor):** The committee is about to begin consideration of the estimates of the Ministry of Community and Social Services for a total of five hours.

As we have some new members, a new ministry and a new minister before the committee, I would like to take this opportunity to remind everyone that the purpose of the estimates committee is for members of the Legislature to determine if the government is spending money appropriately, wisely and effectively in the delivery of services intended.

I would also like to remind everyone that the estimates process has always worked well with a give-and-take approach. On one hand, members of the committee take care to keep their questions relevant to the estimates of the ministry, and the ministry, for its part, demonstrates openness in providing information requested by the committee.

As Vice-Chair, I will stay consistent with the Chair's practice of allowing members to ask a wide range of questions pertaining to the estimates before the committee to ensure they are confident that the ministry will spend those dollars appropriately.

In the past, members have asked questions about the delivery of similar programs in previous fiscal years, about the policy framework that supports a ministry's approach to a problem or to service delivery, or about the competence of the ministry to spend money wisely and efficiently. However, it must be noted that the onus is on the member asking the questions to make the questioning relevant to the estimates under consideration.

The ministry is required to monitor the proceedings for any questions or issues that the ministry undertakes to address. I trust that the deputy minister has made arrangements to have the hearings closely monitored with respect to questions raised so that the ministry can respond accordingly. If you wish, you may, at the end of your appearance, verify the questions and issues being tracked by the research officer.

Any questions before we start?

I'm now required to call vote 701, which sets the review process in motion. We will begin with a statement of not more than 30 minutes by the minister, followed by statements of up to 30 minutes by the official opposition and 30 minutes by the third party. Then the minister will have 30 minutes for a reply. The remaining time will be apportioned equally amongst the three parties.

Minister, the floor is yours.

**Hon. Helena Jaczek:** Thank you so much, Madam Chair. I would like to start off by introducing those with me at the table. We have Bohodar Rubashewsky, acting deputy minister; Erin Hannah, acting assistant deputy minister for social policy development; and Karen Chan, assistant deputy minister for community and developmental services.

I'm certainly pleased to be here today to speak to the commitment that our government has made to support vulnerable Ontarians through the work done by the Ministry of Community and Social Services. Our government is committed to improving fairness in Ontario and remaining fiscally responsible, while making sure people in need are able to participate fully in our communities and economy.

With this agenda in mind, we will build on our work since 2003, and especially over the past two budgets, to make significant investments into programs that serve some of Ontario's most vulnerable people.

We know that better access to jobs for the most vulnerable will help build a fairer society and a more prosperous economy. Giving those at the low end of the income scale a boost means more money spent in communities, more jobs created and greater gains to the economy as a whole.

Through our social assistance programs, the Ontario Disability Support Program and Ontario Works, through programs for people with developmental disabilities, the work of the Family Responsibility Office, as well as our community programs supporting violence against women shelters, intervenor services for people who are deaf-blind, and services provided by the aboriginal healing and wellness strategy, the Ministry of Community and Social Services impacts the lives of hundreds of thousands of Ontario families each year.

For more than a decade, our government has committed to treating people with compassion and dignity. We have strengthened critical services and made them

easier for people to access help while taking steps to streamline our programs and reduce unnecessary duplication.

Ours is a ministry of partnership. We need involvement of our partners from other ministries, municipalities, First Nations, organizations and community agencies. Our communities grow and prosper when all of our citizens can contribute. While we have made strides in all of these areas, we continue to modify these services according to our long-term goal of improved services and outcomes for those who access our programs while providing the best possible value to Ontario taxpayers.

Turning first to our social assistance programs, the Premier has tasked me with the long-term transformation of the social assistance system with a priority on increasing fairness and remaining fiscally responsible, while making sure people in need are fully able to participate in our communities and economy.

Social assistance affects more than 900,000 people every day, each of them with their own unique needs. We currently have more than 447,000 beneficiaries in the Ontario Disability Support Program and about 451,000 in Ontario Works. We aim to build relationships between caseworkers and clients that are based on trust and collaboration.

In 1995, social assistance rates for Ontario Works recipients were cut by 22% and then frozen for eight years. Rates for people with disabilities were also frozen for eight years. Since 2003, our government has increased rates for people with disabilities receiving ODSP and Ontario Works families by 17.2%, and 24.4% for singles without children relying on Ontario Works. In fact, our government has increased social assistance rates every year for the past 10 years.

Our 2014 budget investment continues to raise rates. Single people receiving Ontario Works are getting another \$30 a month, about 5% more. Families receiving Ontario Works are getting a 1% increase; so will people with disabilities who rely on ODSP. There is also a 1% increase for assistance for children with severe disabilities.

Adding this to last year's investments, this means that support for single Ontario Works recipients who do not have children, those identified as having the lowest overall support levels by the commission on social assistance reform, also known as the Lankin-Sheikh report, will have increased by \$50, or about 8%, to \$656 per month, and support for individuals with disabilities receiving ODSP will have increased by 2% to \$1,098 per month. With these increases, we continue to increase consistency and fairness across the system.

Another step is harmonizing rules in both the Ontario Disability Support Program and Ontario Works. In 2013, our government increased asset limits for singles receiving Ontario Works from \$606 to \$2,500 and from \$1,043 to \$5,000 for couples, to bring these asset limits more in line with those in ODSP.

We are also replacing the northern allowance with a new remote communities allowance, so people get an

additional \$50 per month for the first family member and \$25 for each additional family member. The high cost of food, heating and other necessities creates a significant challenge for people in these communities north of the 50th parallel.

Additionally, promoting employment remains a fundamental pillar of the social assistance system. The government believes that all Ontarians, regardless of their economic status or background, should have an equal opportunity to reach their full potential and contribute to the prosperity of the province. Based on the recommendations of the Commission for the Review of Social Assistance in Ontario, we continue to move forward on new policies to promote work, while ensuring that employment services are effective and easy to navigate.

#### **0910**

We began by making work pay for people on social assistance; today, individuals on both programs can earn \$200 in income a month before their assistance is reduced, and earned income over \$200 is subject to a 50% exemption. As a result, more families can get a foothold in the labour market and see a direct impact on their quality of life. We have also made changes so that social assistance clients can keep drug, dental and vision benefits while they are transitioning into work.

With the 2014 budget, we are expanding our efforts to include reforming employment benefits for social assistance recipients. Starting next spring, clients will have access to a simple, flexible, employment-related benefit that focuses less on rules and more on outcomes. This new benefit is directly linked to individual employment plans and aimed at reducing barriers to work by helping with the actual costs of training and starting work. It will treat Ontario Works recipients and non-disabled members of ODSP similarly by offering them access to the same maximum amount of support per year, while making a higher amount available to people with disabilities on ODSP, recognizing the greater challenges they face in both entering and staying in the labour market.

These changes will promote greater independence by improving incomes, encouraging work, and enhancing access to core supports such as health benefits outside the social assistance system. We are already working with municipal partners and a broad range of stakeholders to set priorities and work through the choices required to continue to move ahead with social assistance reform.

The areas we are examining include: determining how best to support transition into employment where possible; opportunities to use technology to improve service delivery; providing supports outside of social assistance; and aligning our work with broader government-wide priorities such as poverty reduction. We are also seeking separate discussions with First Nations, including leadership, delivery partners and clients, to ensure that their needs are properly understood and appropriately addressed.

Over the long term, we envision an Ontario with a modern income-security system where all low-income Ontarians have access to integrated and effective human

services that will alleviate poverty and enable participation in our economy and communities.

Our multi-year plan for social assistance reform is based on several objectives: encouraging employment by enhancing supports and incentives to work with individual plans tailored to each case; promoting increased independence by improving incomes and providing access to core supports such as drug, dental and vision benefits outside the social assistance system; and improving client services by introducing more self-service online options, so that clients can do more without coming to an office or using the mail.

These objectives will lead us to more fundamental long-term reform and begin to address the challenges identified in the current system, as identified by several reports to our government.

We are mindful of links between social assistance and other government work focused on improving opportunity and fairness for all Ontarians, such as: the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities' work on integrating employment and training programs to better align services with client needs; the Ministry of Economic Development, Employment and Infrastructure's work to increase employment opportunities for people with disabilities; and the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care's Healthy Smiles Ontario program, which offers dental care services to over 460,000 kids from low-income families, including regular cleanings, diagnostics and treatment.

The Ministry of Community and Social Services also knows that improving social assistance isn't only about improving the programs; improving the way we deliver those programs matters as well. This fall, we are launching a new computer system called the Social Assistance Management System, or SAMS. We will use SAMS to administer ODSP and assistance for children with severe disabilities, as well as Ontario Works. It will replace the current social assistance delivery system this month, and over time will be used by approximately 11,000 users in provincial, municipal and First Nations delivery sites.

SAMS is the second phase of our modernization efforts. Two years ago we began the first, with the implementation of the online application for social assistance. A key new feature of SAMS is Social Assistance Online, a secure online self-service tool for clients to fill out forms and make changes to their information which will be available 24 hours a day, seven days a week once implemented by early 2015. Overall, SAMS means better service for clients and better use of staff time.

Our ministry is also planning to introduce reloadable payment cards for social assistance recipients who do not receive their payments by direct bank deposit. The card, similar to a bank debit card, would allow clients to access the social assistance funds through ATMs and make point-of-sale purchases.

Similarly, our ministry is exploring ways to replace the current paper drug benefit card used by social assistance recipients by allowing them to use their provincial health card instead. This would again streamline service

delivery by reducing administrative costs while offering our clients more convenient and better service. Overall, changes to the social assistance system are a priority for my ministry.

This spring, with the 2014 budget, our government placed an emphasis on the transformation of developmental services. Today, our vision is for people with developmental disabilities to be fully included into our communities and to live as independently as possible. We are now assisting some 40,000 individuals and families to get supports in their communities.

Along with our partners across the developmental services sector, we have helped transform developmental services since our government's decision in 2004 to make major changes to the sector. We have closed institutions for people with disabilities, accelerating this process in 2006 and finally closing the last three institutions in 2009. This meant finding placements for the nearly 1,000 people who resided in those facilities.

We have introduced a common assessment tool, which is now being applied through Developmental Services Ontario. This brings long-needed consistency as to who is eligible for service, how they apply and what factors determine support needs.

We have implemented community networks of specialized care that bring specialized supports and clinical expertise closer to home for people with complex needs. We have also created the Passport direct funding program to promote inclusion, independence and choice to support caregivers of adults with a developmental disability. Passport funding gives people with developmental disabilities the option to choose their own supports and services and purchase them directly.

Along with the new direct funding through Passport, which I will address momentarily, we have also updated the expenses allowed under Passport. For example, families can now get respite support.

In 2013-14, we provided more than \$100 million to support more than 16,000 people through Passport. Similarly, the Special Services at Home program, which is administered by my ministry—though the policy direction is provided by the Ministry of Children and Youth Services—this particular program helps families who are caring for a child with a developmental or physical disability to pay for special services.

Demographic trends show us there is considerable diversity in the population we serve. There is not a one-size-fits-all solution. Individuals with complex needs—medical, mental health and behavioural—require more intensive supports and greater integration of service delivery.

There is the reality of an aging population, both in those with developmental disabilities, whose needs are often more complex or require more supports as they age, and in their caregivers, most often parents who support adult children.

We are working to provide choice and flexibility through direct funding within the existing transfer payment agencies and residential services system. We're

investing \$810 million over the next three years to build stronger services and supports for individuals with developmental disabilities and encourage new approaches and partnerships to advance system transformation. This represents the largest single infusion of dollars ever and is a catalyst for change in the sector.

As I stated in my ministerial statement on developmental services last week, we have made tremendous progress since the 2014 budget, notably in extending direct funding. We have already approved new funding for more than 7,900 people and their families, 1,900 through Passport and 6,000 through Special Services at Home. This compares to the 4,300 people who received new direct funding all of last year—almost double already to date this year. Through the investment strategy, we are also providing planning, transition and navigation support to help 4,200 young people map out their futures.

#### 0920

In the 2014 budget, we have allocated \$200 million over three years to support agencies and front-line workers. This was in recognition that this sector in particular requires a stable workforce of dedicated front-line workers to ensure consistency and care for individuals with developmental disabilities. We are working with employers and bargaining agents to discuss an approach that ensures the significant investment supports a service system for the future while promoting labour stability and a qualified workforce.

We also recognize that more must be done to address housing needs for thousands of individuals and to make our communities more inclusive. The Developmental Services Housing Task Force will help us consider broader, more inclusive housing options for people with developmental disabilities. This will be a multi-year task, collaborating across governments and with community partners to find innovative housing solutions.

Our investment strategy is about building a developmental services system that has the capacity to grow into what this vulnerable population needs for the future. I see workplace opportunities for people with developmental disabilities as the next frontier for true community integration. Our goal is to make meaningful employment in the community the preferred outcome for individuals with developmental disabilities. Our new employment and modernization fund will offer financial support to projects that promote greater inclusion and independence for individuals with developmental disabilities through employment and for projects that increase the efficiency, collaboration and innovation in our service delivery network.

I recognize the need to work across ministries with my cabinet colleagues to properly support people going through transitions in their lives. Indeed, the Premier, in my mandate letter, directed me to both continue the transformation of the developmental services sector and to work with my colleagues to do so. For example, we are working with our partners at the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Children and Youth Services on a transition planning initiative. A transition plan will help

young people with developmental disabilities completing high school to chart out their futures; as an example, arranging for the appropriate training for future employment. To this end, we are creating new partnerships with school boards to improve transition planning for young adults, and also with the health system to improve care and linkages, particularly for individuals with specialized health needs and those with mental health conditions, and also with the Law Commission of Ontario to strengthen supported decision-making for adults with developmental disabilities. We are also strengthening the very foundation of our developmental services system by bringing consistency to how the system works so that decision-making is fairer, clearer and more transparent.

Created in 2011, the Developmental Services Ontario agencies are relatively new entities. We know that there have been concerns with their service delivery, which is why, together with other partners and the ministry, they have put in place a plan to refine and improve their services, particularly in terms of connecting people with services in their communities. Through the 2014 budget, the ministry has provided resources to hire new assessors to speed up and ensure the consistency of assessments across the province and is working with DSOs to improve their ability to provide information about the system, the application process and other services and supports. In addition, last summer we introduced a provincially consistent process for responding to individuals in urgent need of short-term, time-limited supports.

We have come a long way in the time since our government closed residential institutions for people with developmental disabilities, but I know that the system has a long way to go in order to properly integrate these individuals into our communities. With the 2014 budget investments, we are taking the next step needed to ensure that transformation.

The Ministry of Community and Social Services also holds responsibility for the Family Responsibility Office, known as FRO, which distributes and enforces child and spousal support payments. This means we help families in Ontario get the support payments they are entitled to by enforcing court-ordered support responsibilities. We work to flow payments from the person who pays the support to the person who is entitled to it.

Every year, FRO manages more than 180,000 cases, involving 380,000 clients, including the payers, recipients and third parties, including children. This is truly a massive undertaking.

Last year, FRO collected about \$664 million on behalf of support recipients, processed about 150,000 payments every month and made more than 8,000 court appearances to fight for the funds owed to support recipients across Ontario.

As part of their enforcement efforts, FRO can:

- garnish wages from income sources;
- garnish bank accounts;
- suspend driver's licences and impound vehicles for up to seven days;

—request passport suspensions from the federal government;

—file writs of seizure and sale to affect a default payer's ability to negotiate a mortgage or sell real estate property;

—issue credit bureau warning notices and report payers in default to the credit bureau;

—seize income tax refunds and HST rebates;

—garnish lottery winnings; and

—take defaulting payers to court, which can result in a maximum jail time of up to 180 days.

FRO's client services branch receives approximately 4,500 calls every day, and the interactive voice response system averages 4,100 calls per day. Despite the challenges, FRO has made numerous improvements in client service and enforcement, including implementing a client-focused service delivery model in 2011.

For example, we have virtually eliminated clients hearing a busy signal. Previously, clients calling FRO could have gotten a busy signal up to 80% of the time. Our current rate for busy signals is zero. FRO clients now have a case contact assigned to their case and are able to leave that person a message, any time, night or day. This means that they no longer encounter a call centre where they have to repeat their full story every time they call FRO.

We also introduced the FRO case management system, called FCMS, a new computer system, in April 2013. This has allowed FRO to streamline program delivery and more efficiently manage FRO's caseload. The new computer system allows FRO to provide more timely and consistent case management service to our clients and eliminate many manual processes. This, in turn, allows us to devote more time and resources to effective enforcement. FCMS will also enable us to roll out a securer self-service website for FRO clients called FRO online in spring 2015.

FRO online will allow payers and support recipients to view their case-related information, including their personal information, their obligations, active enforcement actions and case financial information. This capacity is an improvement for our clients and something that, again, will improve case management for FRO's case workers.

We have also implemented a host of other business improvements that are resulting in significant efficiencies. For example, FRO receives almost half a million incoming documents annually, each of which is now processed within 48 hours. In the past, FRO was able to process only half of the documents it received within 30 days of receipt. This means that FRO's staff has access to relevant case information sooner, can enforce faster and can get money to recipients more quickly.

Lastly, we are reviewing FRO's current case management model to identify opportunities to improve enforcement and increase support payment collections. Overall, our work to improve the service that FRO provides to clients continues.

Our 2014 budget also offers new support for my ministry's community service programs. Our violence against women programs offer a continuum of supports to help women and their children escape abuse and rebuild their lives. We deliver community-based emergency shelter services and crisis support services through 96 agencies across Ontario.

These shelters make a difference in the lives of women facing an immediate crisis situation by assisting them with crisis phone counselling, safety planning, information on rights, and referrals to available services. In 2013-14, these emergency shelters served approximately 10,700 women and 7,400 children.

We also fund community-based counselling services delivered by 177 agencies that provide support and referral services for women and their children who have experienced abuse.

### 0930

Our transition housing support program, which is delivered by 126 agencies, helps women develop a transition plan that could include securing legal assistance, finding and maintaining housing, and connecting with other community resources.

Our child witness program provides early intervention for children who have witnessed domestic violence.

This year's provincial budget increases our support for these programs by nearly \$14.6 million over the next three years. This represents a 4% increase to the base budget of \$142 million.

Similarly, more than 11,000 people who are deaf, deafened or hard-of-hearing or who are deaf-blind rely on our ministry for interpreter and intervener services. We've improved the intervener services program for people who are deaf-blind by tripling funding since 2004, establishing minimum hours of services and, this year, in partnership with CNIB, we are launching a 24-hour emergency service.

This year's budget increases our support for interpreter and intervener programs by nearly \$8.4 million over the next three years. This includes a 4% increase to the base budget of \$37.3 million and an investment to ensure availability of supports for adults who are deaf-blind, including graduates of the two provincial schools for the deaf-blind.

Lastly, our Aboriginal Healing and Wellness Strategy partners with 14 First Nations and aboriginal groups and is aimed to reduce family violence and improve health through programs that are aboriginal-designed, -delivered and -managed. The strategy supports services on- and off-reserve that include crisis intervention, counselling, health and family violence awareness and education—

**The Vice-Chair (Miss Monique Taylor):** Minister, you have two minutes left.

**Hon. Helena Jaczek:** Thank you—and ongoing supports for women, children and families at risk.

In 2012-13, the Aboriginal Healing and Wellness Strategy served more than 18,000 clients through 208 agencies. This year's budget provides a \$2.07-million increase to Aboriginal Healing and Wellness Strategy

programs to support agencies and low-wage workers. This is a 4% increase to the base budget of \$37.8 million.

In conclusion, as a ministry, we will continue to believe in and invest in the abilities of Ontarians to contribute to and build a more prosperous Ontario. The Ministry of Community and Social Services is contributing to building a fairer, healthier province, because the support we offer to vulnerable Ontarians makes them full and active participants in our communities and in our lives. By maintaining the integrity of our programs and modernizing them to ensure their long-term viability, we are protecting them for the people who need our help today and those who will need it tomorrow.

Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

**The Vice-Chair (Miss Monique Taylor):** Well done on time, Minister.

We'll move over to the official opposition and Mr. Walker.

**Mr. Bill Walker:** Thank you, Madam Chair. Before I start, thank you very much to MPP Soo Wong for the wonderful delight of breakfast here this morning.

**Ms. Soo Wong:** I promised, and I deliver on my promises.

**Mr. Michael Harris:** Hopefully, he doesn't fall asleep.

**Mr. Bill Walker:** Yes, we were a little concerned that there might have been something in there to put me to sleep, but—

**Hon. Helena Jaczek:** It would take a lot.

**Interjection:** We ate from the same pot.

**Mr. Bill Walker:** Thank you very much, and thank you, Minister. As my colleague alluded to, and just in case we're not here tomorrow, happy early birthday tomorrow.

What I'm going to bring to your attention today are things that I'm hearing in my riding of Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound as well as my colleague's. I'm going to share my time this morning with my colleague Mr. Harris from Kitchener-Conestoga, who is going to speak specifically about FRO.

I think one of the things that I'm hearing big-time, right in my riding today and from some of my other colleagues, is your new computer training program. We're hearing directly from front-line staff that they're concerned with regard to the training. They don't feel comfortable that it's going to be seamless, that it's not going to create challenges. Their biggest concern that they're bringing forward to me is that a number of the clients who depend on those cheques are not getting them.

I note, looking through the file, that back in 2006, a computer program at that point was abandoned after spending \$21 million and three and a half years on development. I know that's obviously not on your watch, but I think it makes me a little concerned when I hear those types of stories and now we're doing another one, and I'm hearing from front-line staff that it hasn't been good training. I'm hearing from municipalities that they want to continue to go ahead, because they've invested a

lot of money. But at the end of the day, what we need to care about are the people that are reliant upon those cheques. Can you give me some assurance of what's in place to ensure that that doesn't happen?

**Hon. Helena Jaczek:** Would you like me to respond now, as we go through?

**Mr. Bill Walker:** Yes, please.

**Hon. Helena Jaczek:** Absolutely. Well, certainly the new SAMS system that I alluded to in my opening remarks has made, we believe, and will make a huge step forward in terms of our ability to process applications and so on.

In terms specifically of training, I've spent the last several months trying to get out and visit a lot of front-line situations. I have been to OW, actually, in Hamilton, and I was out to ODSP in Newmarket. I must say that in the early days, the early part of the summer, I attended a training session. There was some anxiety on the part of the staff, but the workers there were feeling that they were making good progress and that they knew there was sufficient time for the rollout, which actually happens November 11, I believe it is. By the time I got to the ODSP office in Newmarket, people were feeling a lot more comfortable in terms of the training they had received and their ability to manage the new system.

We do feel that it is going to provide significant streamlining. We feel it will allow caseworkers to spend a lot more time one-on-one with clients, as opposed to on the old computer system.

As it relates to the computer system in 2006, I think perhaps I'll turn to my ministry officials. They may know a little bit more about what led us to introduce this new system. But from my observation, whatever it is, I feel fairly confident that the new system will have a pretty seamless rollout next week. Change is always difficult for everybody, and we acknowledge that.

**Mr. Bill Walker:** On that perspective, then—and I grant that, obviously, you can't be in every office that's out there, but I'm obviously hearing it from a variety of offices. Do you have any kind of mechanism in place so that people can actually provide feedback? I don't even know how to ask this from the perspective of—if I think of Ornge, you know, we had people come forward, and they felt that they were going to be penalized if they stepped forward. So I think there may be some people who are coming through a side door to us because they're afraid to come directly to the ministry. I want to be assured that those people—because it obviously is a case where you've been to a couple of offices and they're feeling comfortable. I'm hearing the exact opposite: that they are extremely concerned, and they are concerned about those people who aren't going to have that cheque.

The second part of my question would be: What is the backup? Do you have a contingency, if there's a flaw, to ensure that those people—an unintended consequence, perhaps, but they are still not going to have that money.

**Hon. Helena Jaczek:** Okay. I quite understand anecdotes are anecdotes, but they were certainly very free in Hamilton to tell me exactly how they felt early on in the summer.



In terms of our regional offices, we have five regional offices, and they are monitoring the situation. In terms of the handover to the new system, I understand there will be an overlap with the old system so that there will not be anyone falling through the cracks. But I think I'll turn it over to my ministry officials to see how they would like to respond.

**Mr. Bohodar Rubashewsky:** Thank you. I'll ask Richard Steele, who is the assistant deputy minister responsible for social assistance operations, to provide a little bit more detail on preparations, including training.

**Mr. Richard Steele:** Yes, there's no question that the transition to SAMS is a big transition. It's a complex transition. The ministry has been planning the launch and implementation of SAMS for nearly four years now.

There has been a lot of opportunity for staff to provide feedback as we've gone through the readiness and pre-training. The first round of training for staff actually began early in the year, in January, and we got a lot of very good feedback from staff around what was working and what was not working, and we made a number of changes to the training program. We launched a refresher program at the end of the summer, and again there were a lot of opportunities, both directly and of course through the bargaining agents, for staff to provide feedback.

It is a major transition. All of our staff, as well as ourselves, of course, are very focused on how to ensure the best possible service to our clients, so we certainly appreciate the level of anxiety that is out there. There always is a level of anxiety as we go through a major transition. The transition to SAMS is no different than any other. We are confident that staff are prepared and ready. We know there are staff who are anxious; again, there always are. The overwhelming sense that I get talking to staff, and I'll reinforce what the minister said, is, "We're as ready as we're going to be. Let's get on with it." So that's the sense we have.

In terms of contingency plans: absolutely, we do have contingency plans. If there was a problem, for example, in terms of making updates to the system, we do have contingency plans in place to make sure that social assistance recipients still get paid. So we're not concerned about that. We have contingency plans to ensure that doesn't happen.

So overall, we believe we're ready to go. It's a large, complex undertaking. There have been years of preparation and readiness activities happening, but we think we're as ready as we can be to move forward.

0940

**Mr. Bill Walker:** Thank you. Minister, I should have asked right off the bat as well: Is it possible to have a copy of your opening notes for my colleagues and anyone at the table?

**Hon. Helena Jaczek:** I would imagine so. Hansard, obviously, records them all.

**Mr. Bill Walker:** Wonderful. Thank you.

I'm going to move into FRO a little bit. A little while ago, my colleague Jeff Yurek—and it's not dated here—introduced a petition. I certainly have asked, I think in

the last month, for an all-party committee to actually review all of FRO, because I think in the Auditor General's report, other than the volume of complaints about the exorbitant hydro rates that we're all experiencing today, FRO is probably the second-biggest level of complaints that they receive. We had asked for an all-party committee to review that. Are you prepared to strike that committee, Minister?

**Hon. Helena Jaczek:** Mr. Walker, first of all, I'd like to say that I'm really convinced that we have made great improvements in FRO. I was elected seven years ago. In those early years in my constituency office, certainly there was a huge number of calls coming in. Certainly, from my perspective, we've noticed a dramatic decrease. I did detail to you a number of the improvements that we've made.

I think it's worth noting immediately that the situation that FRO is engaged in is a highly emotional one. You have a couple who have separated, divorced, there's a court order, there's a lot of anxiety over finances, so it's a very emotionally charged situation that our staff are dealing with.

I think the sheer volume—this is why, in my opening remarks, I made note of the number: 180,000 open cases. This is truly massive, actually, if you really think about the numbers, if you think about what FRO is dealing with each and every day.

We're confident that we have made significant improvements. We continue to think of ways in terms of how we can better service our clients.

The acting deputy was actually, in his former life, the ADM responsible for FRO and is someone who has made these ongoing improvements to the services we provide.

Perhaps you could give some reassurance to Mr. Walker.

**Mr. Bohodar Rubashewsky:** Yes. Thank you very much, Minister.

In her statement, the minister did allude to some of the modernization initiatives that we've undertaken. In addition to the processing of documents, we've also streamlined our registration process. Previously, it would take up to 100 days, on average, for new court orders to be registered with the Family Responsibility Office. We have 30 days standard now, and we're initiating cases much more quickly.

We also have introduced changes in the way that we process outbound documents as well so that those are much more quickly available to clients.

A key foundational piece for the Family Responsibility Office to improve in the future was the implementation of a new case management system about a year and a half ago. That was also a complex undertaking, very similar to what we're facing with the social assistance management system, but it really does provide a foundation for us to improve the effectiveness of the program.

The technology enables us, for instance, to automate the review of cases and to present suggested enforcements to enforcement officers. We're going to be implementing that feature of the system before the end of the

fiscal year. In the past, unless a caseworker was able to review a case or receive a phone call from a client, the response to cases was often reactive as opposed to proactive in nature. With the implementation of the technology, we're going to have that feature as well as the ability of clients to acquire information about their cases without having to call the office, and allow our enforcement officers to focus more on actually managing cases.

**Mr. Bill Walker:** I certainly appreciate and respect all of those initiatives that you're coming to, but Minister, I guess I was more hopeful with the question. Your government, from day one, has said you want to work with the other parties. You want to work across lines and make sure we do the right things. I don't mean this in any kind of negative context, but when you're not prepared to implement a committee when others have called for it and believe we can bring something to the table—with all due respect, I don't think one party or one government has all of the answers.

It saddens me in the last couple of days that we've tried with Bill 10 to be able to go out to the community and listen and hear and the government has shut that down and, in fact, yesterday even shut down debate on it.

Here's another one that we are hearing, and certainly the volume of concerns we're hearing across my colleagues' offices—and I trust the third party won't be a whole lot different. There are other concerns that are being expressed to us. It would have been my hope that an all-party committee could actually come—you've sat on a couple of all-party committees that have done great work in this Legislature and I was hoping that because of your leadership we could maybe have looked forward to that.

It certainly is a case where there's a lot that needs to be done. Your former finance minister, in fact, even from a collection side, made the comment: "Why are we in the business of collections?" That could be an area that could be examined, again by an all-party committee, and truly say—because that staggering caseload that you're talking about and the \$2 billion in payments that aren't being made—people then have to find that somewhere else. They're either going to other social services, or the most sad case would be children and people in need going without.

I think there's a lot of opportunity that we could have struck there. It saddens me that we're not, by the sound of it, going to have that opportunity to work collectively with you in that manner.

I'm going to turn it over to my colleague—

**Hon. Helena Jaczek:** Mr. Walker, if I may, I'm always interested in constructive ideas, and any that you have I'm sure we would welcome. If you would like to hear a little bit about the idea of collection agencies and why we are in this business, we do actually have a little history on that and some pilot programs, if you're interested—

**Mr. Bill Walker:** Thank you. I would, but for the sake of time I'm going to allow my colleague to ask his

questions and then we'll revisit that because I think I have more time allotted for my questions later.

**Mr. Michael Harris:** Thanks, Bill.

Good morning, Minister, folks. I know we'll be on this subject this afternoon. There are in fact some folks coming in from my riding. They'll be in the Legislature this afternoon to hear a petition that they've been working on—a couple of moms who in fact have taken this issue on and are very passionate about fixing some of the problems that they, as moms, encounter in dealing with FRO.

I guess I'll just ask—and I don't expect an answer right now, but perhaps you can get back to the committee. In 2010, the Auditor General did another report on the Family Responsibility Office. They outlined the amount of staff, I suppose, at the Family Responsibility Office. I'm just wondering if you could provide to the committee—not now—a breakdown. There was a nice chart in his report in 2010—it was page 5 of 19—that listed the amount of staff based on the client services branch, the financial administrative services branch, the strategic and operational effectiveness branch and the legal services branch and outlined exactly how many staff members there were in June 2010.

I'm wondering if you can provide the committee a breakdown of a similar up-to-date chart in 2014 for us so that we just get a bit of an idea of staffing in 2010 compared to now.

You did talk about the Auditor General's report in 2010. He did criticize the office for its general ineffectiveness, of course. I'm just wondering if you can explain to the committee specific mechanisms you've taken to address his specific concerns in 2010.

**Hon. Helena Jaczek:** I think I'll turn to the deputy for those specific comments, 2010 through 2014.

**Mr. Bohodar Rubashewsky:** Thank you, Minister.

I don't recall all of the recommendations of the provincial auditor. However, one of the areas that he focused on was the call centre model that we had in place at the time and the fact—and the minister alluded to it in her comments—the difficulty, the challenge that clients had even contacting the Family Responsibility Office to speak about their case, the necessity, first of all, to tell their stories over and over again and also to face a busy signal rather than even someone to talk to them. We've introduced, in response to those recommendations, a case management model which provides a much more direct connection between clients and case contacts.

**Mr. Michael Harris:** He did mention that 80% of callers never got through in 2010 and in fact one in seven hung up.

**Mr. Bohodar Rubashewsky:** That's correct.

**Mr. Michael Harris:** What are the stats on that today?

**Mr. Bohodar Rubashewsky:** In terms of busy signals, virtually zero. There are very rare occasions when the call volumes are such that all of our lines, even direct lines to case contacts, are occupied, but that happens very rarely. Clients are able to either speak directly with their case contact—and we have a 25% live call

standard in the organization—or also leave a voicemail, and we have a two-business-day response standard for that.

**0950**

In terms of call abandonment, which is when people do call in but before they leave a message they hang up, our average now is about 10%. It's understandable that clients may have left a voicemail. They're looking for an immediate response; they are anxious to speak to the case owner. They try again, they hang up, and they may try again. So that figure, the abandoned rate, is down to about 10% now.

**Mr. Michael Harris:** There was also a chart in his 2010 report—it was on page 8 of 19—that despite a number of calls, they failed to get through to the call centre. It broke it up into three weeks: total calls, answered calls, failed calls and then the percentage of calls. That's how he got to the point of 80%. Would you be able to provide to the committee any data or the most recent data that you have from the ministry or the Family Responsibility Office similar to this, perhaps updated?

**Hon. Helena Jaczek:** Yes, I think we'd be very happy to do that. I did want to point out, Mr. Harris, that the Auditor General did do a follow-up report on FRO in 2012, and he acknowledged at that time that there was really significant progress on several of his recommendations—and that was two years ago. But we will be, no doubt, happy to provide whatever we can in response.

**Mr. Michael Harris:** Sure. I know I want to get into it later this afternoon when folks are here, but the Family Responsibility Office has failed to collect an additional \$500 million of outstanding payments. Why is that?

**Hon. Helena Jaczek:** Actually, if we can give you a little sense of what's happening with arrears and outstanding payments: In Ontario, we actually have accumulated all the arrears that have been incurred since—I think it was 1987, so some of these numbers look very, very large. Essentially, we collect the vast majority of the money owed, and the deputy will give you specific figures.

I think it's worth remembering that there are some cases, unfortunately, where people are really bound and determined not to pay. I've been to the FRO and I've sat beside caseworkers trying to reach payers, and these are people who unfortunately just don't want to be found, whether they give not their home address but a commercial address where they're no longer known—that was one case that I sat beside—phone numbers where the voicemail box is full. There's incredible frustration on the part of the workers. They really are like detectives trying to find these individuals.

Obviously, it's most unfortunate. We want to try to find every one of those payers and make sure that payees get what they are owed, but it is a very, very difficult thing to do in terms of when you're dealing with people who are just determined not to be found.

Maybe the deputy can give us some numbers.

**Mr. Michael Harris:** Yes, and I look forward to hearing from the deputy. There was a mention in his 2010

report that it took four months before FRO started its enforcement process. How long would you say it now takes FRO to start that enforcement process?

**Mr. Bohodar Rubashewsky:** From the point in time at which we receive a court order, our average—unless the court order has a complication in it that requires it to be returned to the court for clarification—we initiate those cases and begin enforcement in around 30 days, compared to the average as it existed in 2010.

**Mr. Michael Harris:** Sorry I interrupted you quickly, because I know you talked about arrears, but I don't know if you want to explain my first initial question on really the \$500 million in outstanding payments and what they're doing to bring that number down, I suppose.

**Mr. Bohodar Rubashewsky:** Yes. First of all, just to put the \$2.1 billion in some context, which is the total accumulated arrears, those have accumulated, as the minister—

**Mr. Michael Harris:** Sorry, I said “failed to collect an additional \$500 million.” It is over \$2 billion?

**Hon. Helena Jaczek:** That's the cumulative amount, yes.

**Mr. Bohodar Rubashewsky:** That's right. These arrears have accumulated now over almost 27 years. Over that period of time, FRO and its predecessor organizations have collected about \$12.5 billion in actual payments.

The collection of arrears is challenging, particularly in such a long-standing program. A significant portion of our arrears are within a small number of our cases. About \$1 billion of our arrears are within 10% of our caseload. They're generally older cases where we have, at different points in time, exhausted avenues for collection of those arrears.

We're actually doing analysis with the part of the ministry that is responsible for social assistance forecasting—so therefore, very deep, analytic capabilities—to review the cases that have long-standing arrears and look at opportunities, see if there are strategies that we can follow to deal with those hard-to-collect cases.

We do try to benchmark ourselves with other jurisdictions to see how we are doing. It is a very difficult comparator to find. In Canada, we are by far the largest maintenance enforcement program. We have almost half of the caseload in the country. We do look at the United States; given their relative volume of cases, they're somewhat more comparable to ours. When we look at maintenance enforcement programs in North America, including the United States, about three dozen jurisdictions have caseloads of 150,000 cases or over. We collect, actually, more per full-time-equivalent employee than any other jurisdiction of that order of magnitude. On that basis, we average about \$1.48 million per employee collected in FRO, which is a very efficient standard, and our compliance rate is a little bit above the average of comparable jurisdictions in North America.

So the work is very challenging at the best of times—

**Mr. Michael Harris:** So tell me: The minister mentioned listening to the calls up at FRO. What tools have

you asked for to step up enforcement in Ontario, perhaps, since 2010?

**Mr. Bohodar Rubashewsky:** We have tried to utilize the tools that we have available to us to better effect. One area that we and other maintenance enforcement jurisdictions have approached the federal government on—not as an enforcement tool but as a trace-and-locate tool—is to have better access to federal data, particularly Canada Revenue Agency data and information that is collected by Human Resources Development Canada on new hires, on employees who are being brought into the workforce by employers. If we can't find them, it's very difficult for us to engage in enforcement efforts—

**Mr. Michael Harris:** Has there been an official ask of the federal government on that?

**Mr. Bohodar Rubashewsky:** It has been an official ask. Two ministers from Ontario have written the Minister of Human Resources Development Canada. I would anticipate that Minister Jaczek will as well. And there have been formal requests from—I know of at least two other provinces: British Columbia, through their justice minister, who is responsible for their maintenance enforcement program; and Manitoba as well. At the official level, these inquiries have been made probably over the course of a decade, and we've not had much success.

**Mr. Michael Harris:** Alberta uses an interest model; they charge interest on outstanding payments. Is this something Ontario has looked at ever?

**Mr. Bohodar Rubashewsky:** If there is interest applicable in the court order, then we do apply interest. And there are different ways in which interest is calculated. That is specified in the court order. So if it is not specifically outlined in the court order, and the methodology is not outlined in the court order, then we don't collect interest.

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**Mr. Michael Harris:** But in Alberta, the equivalent to FRO actually has the authority to charge interest. I'll make the assumption that it doesn't need a court order to do so. Has the province looked into asking for the ability to just simply authorize or have the authority to charge interest on these? Because it seems that Alberta has a much more successful compliance rate than Ontario, and I think a lot of it has to do with interest being charged. If you're a deadbeat dad or what have you, knowing that interest is ticking away, you're perhaps more apt to pay. Why hasn't Ontario taken that action? If you talk about asking the federal government for more tools on employment information, why haven't they gone this route like Alberta?

**Mr. Bohodar Rubashewsky:** I'm not sure if I have an answer on the history, but I do want to say that you made a point about the compliance rate of Alberta relative to Ontario, and I'm not sure if that is the case. If you look at average arrears per case, Alberta is one of the provinces that does not write off arrears. The province of Quebec, for instance, does, so they're not a good comparator. But our average arrears per case are relatively in the range of Alberta.

The issue of whether interest should be automatically charged: I don't have enough of an understanding of the Alberta system to be able to speak to exactly under what circumstances they do it.

**Mr. Michael Harris:** We all know that enforcement is a difficult part of collecting things, and I'm just wondering what changes the ministry has made to assist their folks other than making a phone call and begging for money. If the phone isn't working, what else are you doing or what other tools are you asking for within the government of Ontario to assist your folks at FRO to get money out?

**Hon. Helena Jaczek:** One of the new initiatives that impressed me was the impoundment of the vehicle for seven days, because when I was talking to the FRO case-workers, they said, "If you can suspend the driver's licence, that is a very good tool to"—

**Mr. Michael Harris:** When did that get brought in?

**The Vice-Chair (Miss Monique Taylor):** Excuse me: You have two minutes left.

**Hon. Helena Jaczek:** The impoundment of the vehicle was a relatively new—

**Mr. Bohodar Rubashewsky:** Yes, I think it was about two years ago.

**Hon. Helena Jaczek:** About two years ago.

**Mr. Michael Harris:** Could you provide to the committee the amount of impoundments since implementation that have been done? You can also remove the licence from someone as well, right? So impoundment of the vehicle for seven days and you can actually remove one's licence as well, right?

**Mr. Bohodar Rubashewsky:** That's correct.

**Mr. Michael Harris:** Can you provide to the committee—it doesn't need to be now; just another follow-up question—how many licences have been taken away and how many vehicles have been impounded in the last two years, I suppose?

**Hon. Helena Jaczek:** We have those numbers.

**Mr. Bohodar Rubashewsky:** We do have the numbers related to driver's licence suspensions. We will have to look into whether the Ministry of Transportation actually breaks out vehicle impoundments by reason. I'm doubtful that they will have a figure related to FRO specifically, because those impoundments arise out of driver's licence suspensions. So if a driver's licence is suspended for any reason, including enforcement through FRO, vehicle impoundment can follow.

**Mr. Michael Harris:** Quickly, because I know my time is—

**The Vice-Chair (Miss Monique Taylor):** The time is up. I'm sorry. We have to move on to the third party. Ms. Forster.

**Ms. Cindy Forster:** Thank you, Madam Chair. Good morning. I'm only going to have a very few minutes here because, of course, we're going to be adjourning shortly, so I'm going to focus on the regional centres: the Huronia, Southwestern and Rideau Regional Centres. You spoke a little bit about that, Minister, in your opening remarks, about the fact that they closed in 2009 and that the

ministry is investing significant dollars over the next three years with respect to people with disabilities.

What you didn't talk about was the class-action suit that happened. In December of 2013, a settlement was reached, and again in 2014, a similar settlement was reached with respect to the Rideau and Southwestern facilities. Then in December, the Premier delivered an apology. The facilities were closed in 2009. My questions are actually going to be around them. I have five or six of them. At the end of that, if you don't have the answers, perhaps this afternoon we can get to them.

The \$67.7 million in compensation for the former residents of the three facilities: Where is that money now? How many former residents have actually received the money? How much of that money is still outstanding? And where do we find that in the estimates? When we look at the estimates briefing book, where do we actually find those dollar values?

After the legal fees were paid, how much funding was available for the people who were due compensation for the damages?

How many staff are responsible for finding and processing the files of former residents who have applied for compensation? We know that it was reported this past summer that at least 90 former residents of the Huronia facility were told that the ministry could not locate their files. There was no file that they had ever lived in that regional facility; they had no records of that. These aging former residents—we got to meet a lot of them, actually, when they were here last year—were told that there was no record of their time in these institutions. Many of them are feeling re-victimized at all three of these institutions, when you're told that a minister who was responsible for your care for many years doesn't even know that you actually existed.

How many of these individuals have we actually found files for and how many residents have you located files for who have still not received any compensation? Once again, this is an aging sector of our society and hopefully they'll receive their compensation soon so that they can use it to improve their quality of life.

My last question is: When some of the survivors first requested their files, the ministry told them that they would have to pay for the FOI, the freedom-of-information request. Is that still the process or has that changed? Have the people who had to pay for the FOIs been compensated and had that refunded to them?

Finally, if you don't have the answers to these questions, could you actually provide the committee with any reports or documentation as to this compensation process: what's been paid, what's outstanding, how many clients have been paid, and how many clients still have compensation outstanding?

**Hon. Helena Jaczek:** I can make some general comments because, of course, I have been quite involved in the whole situation. I visited Huronia to unveil the plaque up there and I've also been down to the Southwestern Regional Centre, which I actually visited back in 1987. It's certainly a very important milestone that we have

been able to, obviously, place individuals in the community and to have settled the claims that were made, and you've detailed those dates.

You probably also know that the Superior Court did lengthen the claims deadline so that the settlement actually has been extended until November 30, 2014. It has been a challenge to locate the files. One of the figures I was given was that the file for someone who had resided in an institution was an average of 500 pages. Individuals did move from facility to facility, so there was very intensive work done over the last year or so in terms of trying to locate those files and doing the very best that the ministry could to locate them.

**1010**

I do have one number which is as of August 5, so maybe it has improved since then. At that point, 98% of all resident files had been found, and so there were 47 at that point not located.

In terms of the staffing that was put in place, because additional staffing was there to move this issue forward, I know that there was intensive work done. We will, of course, get you the very specific numbers that you've requested, to the best of our ability, that we can.

But perhaps the assistant deputy minister, Karen, can detail that whole process for you.

**Ms. Karen Chan:** Absolutely.

**Ms. Cindy Forster:** Could I just ask one more question before you do? So, for the 47 people that you haven't found files for, is there a process for them to swear a declaration or something to that effect, that in fact they were residents and—

**Hon. Helena Jaczek:** They can still make a claim; absolutely.

**Ms. Karen Chan:** Absolutely. So just in follow-up to that specific point: A file isn't necessary for anybody to make a claim, and that was really made quite clear.

Just on the status, as the minister stated, actually the deadline for claims doesn't end until November 30, so once all of the claims come in, the claims administrator, which is Crawford Class Action Services—we don't manage them, as a government; it's a third party that actually manages the claims process. Once they are all in, they will then go through a process of assessing them and giving them certain levels of ratings that will then allow the claims administrator to determine the amount of dollars that will go to an individual claimant. They can't do that until all of the claims are in; so once everything is in, then they will go through that process.

Specifically, in answer to your question, does anybody have any money in their hands? The answer is no, they don't, because of the process that's been set up by the courts and then with Crawford Class Action Services. I do have all the phone numbers and the contact information. That's also available on our website. People can go and look at that.

As far as the freedom-of-information requests go, it's true, we received more than 2,900 requests under FIPPA—

**The Vice-Chair (Miss Monique Taylor):** Excuse me. I'm sorry to interrupt. There's two minutes left at this time.

**Ms. Karen Chan:** I'll do this real quick. There were 2,900 requests made. Of those, there were 46 that were not found. The average size was 500 to 600 per file. We had staff on-site working three shifts, in order to get those files—you can imagine if you're going back in files 50, 60, 70 years. You're talking about paper files; you're talking about small bits of paper. They all had to be redacted. How people kept files 50, 60 years ago wasn't quite, maybe, the same as we would, so if there was information about another resident in that file, which there often was, that had to be redacted. This was all done, keep in mind, in mostly handwritten files that were brought forward. So there was a lot of work and a lot of effort, and there was personal contact made with all those 46 people. A call was made from the administrator of FOI, who talked to them and explained to them the dilemma.

**Ms. Cindy Forster:** Thank you. How much time will it take, once the November 30 deadline is here, to actually process payments to all of the claimants?

**Ms. Karen Chan:** That isn't a question I can answer. It really is under the guise of the third party and the judge that will be overseeing that. So there is a judge that oversees this whole process, so it really is in their control once all the claims come in. Obviously, they understand the interests of the individuals, as do we, and I'm sure the judge will take that into consideration.

**Ms. Cindy Forster:** Well, I hope it's not going to take as long as it does in the area of labour around severance pay and pension issues, because I know from living in Niagara that we have people who are waiting seven years for their pension monies out of pension plans.

**The Vice-Chair (Miss Monique Taylor):** Thank you. You'll be able to pick up your remainder when we come back this afternoon.

**Ms. Cindy Forster:** How much time will I have this afternoon?

**The Vice-Chair (Miss Monique Taylor):** Approximately 20 minutes.

**Ms. Cindy Forster:** Thank you.

**The Vice-Chair (Miss Monique Taylor):** It being close to 10:15—actually, it being 10:15—I will recess the committee until this afternoon at approximately 3:45, following routine proceedings in the House.

*The committee recessed from 1015 to 1600.*

**The Vice-Chair (Miss Monique Taylor):** Okay, we can begin. When we left off, the member from the third party still had 20 minutes remaining, so we will go back to Ms. Forster.

**Ms. Cindy Forster:** Oh, thanks very much. I'm just going to go back to the regional centres for people with developmental disabilities for one more question. Part of the compensation package that was struck in the class-action settlement was a \$7.7-million fund to be invested in programs that benefit people with disabilities. Do you have any idea at this point what those programs are and

what they're going to look like? And is that over and above the \$810 million that's being invested into this sector?

**Hon. Helena Jaczek:** I think we'll hand this over to ADM Karen Chan for the details.

**Ms. Karen Chan:** Yes, thank you. Yes, it is over and above. It is not part of the \$810-million investment. That's still to be negotiated. Once we get through all of the claims process, then we will finalize the work on where the program dollars actually go.

**Ms. Cindy Forster:** Thanks.

Now I want to move to the Family Responsibility Office. Last month, the CBC did an investigation that found that Ontario was trailing the rest of the country in collecting child support—in fact, that 80% of cases are in arrears, that \$2.1 billion of support orders are outstanding and unpaid and that each of 450 caseworkers in the province is responsible for 400 open cases.

I want to know: How does that math work? I mean, how do we ever expect to collect unpaid money when each caseworker has 400 open cases that they're supposed to try to bring into the coffers and distribute to people? In fact, you've effectively frozen the FRO budget this year with an increase of just 0.05% over last year. If we look at page 98 of the estimates, it shows that the funding was \$53.78 million last year, and now it's just \$53.8 million.

I guess the question is: Why are you freezing the Family Responsibility Office when it clearly doesn't have enough resources to actually collect what's in arrears to date?

**Hon. Helena Jaczek:** First of all, you referenced the CBC program. We actually would not agree that we are in any way worse at collecting these support payments than other provinces, and I think the deputy has some specific numbers to actually show that. We do collect the vast majority of the funds that are due to the recipients. We have a collection rate that is entirely comparable to similar jurisdictions. We never close a FRO case, so when you see the total amount in arrears, that's cumulative since 1987.

In terms of workload for staff and so on, I will ask the deputy to address those issues. The staff per case is, I believe, something that is looked at very carefully. We want to ensure that caseworkers do have sufficient time to interact with clients, to do their work appropriately, and it's something that we monitor very carefully.

If we do not see any need for an increase in spending, it obviously would be irresponsible to do so. As we all know at this point in time, we want to be very careful with expenditures, but it's obviously something where we have to look very carefully: Is each client being appropriately served?

I think perhaps if you'd like some more detail from the deputy on your points, this would be a good time to get those—

**Ms. Cindy Forster:** Could we just actually have a copy of that kind of reporting? We only have a very few minutes on this file, so it would be helpful, I think, if the

committee members actually had those numbers, comparing our collection rate—

**Hon. Helena Jaczek:** You would like a written response for tomorrow, perhaps?

**Ms. Cindy Forster:** That would be great, yes.

**Hon. Helena Jaczek:** We can do that.

**Ms. Cindy Forster:** That would be great.

I want to move on to the Ombudsman's investigation with respect to FRO. Consistently, FRO is the number-one complaint issue to the Ombudsman's office. In fact, the complaints increased by 46% over 2012-13, to 1,157 complaints last year. The Ombudsman uncovered, and I quote, "a grave miscommunication between" FRO and ODSP, two programs within your ministry, and that had a dire result. According to the Ombudsman, it "deprived families of hundreds of thousands of dollars over several years," with one woman not receiving 14 years' worth of child support payments because they were sitting in ministry bank accounts. The two ministries, I guess, weren't talking to each other.

The Ombudsman also learned that after informing the ministry of this huge problem, an employee of the ministry manually reviewed ODSP records on her own initiative and identified at least 350 more similar cases. As of June, your ministry has already reimbursed about \$845,000 to these families. Can you update the committee today as to how many have actually received the money that they were owed? Did the ministry pay these families the total amounts they were owed including interest, and what is the total amount of the money paid out to date and how much more is left to be disbursed?

**Hon. Helena Jaczek:** Again, because of the detail involved, I will turn to the deputy.

**Mr. Bohodar Rubashewsky:** Yes. Richard Steele has been working with FRO, the Family Responsibility Office, on this whole repayment issue, so I'll ask him to speak to you.

**Mr. Richard Steele:** First of all, I think the ministry absolutely would acknowledge that this is something that should never have happened. It is absolutely an unacceptable situation that social assistance recipients would not be receiving the payment they were due. There's no question: This has been an error on the part of the ministry in managing what is a fairly complex relationship between the two programs.

We've been working very closely with the Ombudsman's office, first of all, and I know the Ombudsman's office has been very satisfied with the ministry's response in responding to this.

In terms of the detailed numbers, we'll have to bring that back because it is a work in progress and it kind of changes every week. What the ministry did do, though, is establish a dedicated team of staff to review the specific cases where we were able to identify that while the client had left social assistance, the assignment from the Family Responsibility Office to the ministry of the child support payments had not been terminated.

On the ODSP side, I think the number was around 300—between 300 and 400 cases—that fit that defin-

ition. Not all of those would actually be clients who would be due some money. In some cases, there would be no money owing, but we have had a team of staff working through all of those to determine which, if any, should be refunded and starting to process those refunds. We're at the point now where we've almost completed the review of those files and refunds are going out to some clients. We can certainly provide the committee with the details, what those numbers are and how much money is being refunded.

Moving forward, clearly our objective is to ensure that it doesn't happen again. The medium-term solution will certainly be to build a better interface between the two systems for the two programs, FRO and ODSP, to ensure that there's a more automated process to make sure that doesn't happen.

In the meantime, we have been able to establish essentially some reports from the two systems that will allow us to better track whether the process hasn't worked as it's supposed to and whether other clients are falling into this situation so that if it does happen, there certainly won't be long delays in addressing it moving forward.

**Mr. Bohodar Rubashewsky:** And if I could speak to the general relationship with the Ombudsman, the way that we interact on inquiries, we do have—and I believe the Ombudsman's office would acknowledge a strong working relationship. We have the Family Responsibility Office. We acknowledge that we are, as the Ombudsman would say, the most complained-about general government program, and that is a combination of inquiries that the Ombudsman receives where we legitimately have made mistakes or not managed the case appropriately, but in many other cases the Ombudsman hears from clients who have approached us who have not been satisfied with the outcome that they brought forward to us and wanted to have a right of appeal. In many cases, the Ombudsman does confirm that the actions taken by FRO were appropriate, but because the issues are obviously so emotional and oftentimes so complex, our clients do take the opportunity to use whatever means and avenues they have to seek a resolution that's more satisfying to them.

#### 1610

The 46% increase in complaints year over year was obviously troubling to us. It was in quite large measure due to the implementation of our new case management system. This was a system which replaced a 26-year-old system, so it's much more significant than, I would suggest, many technological renewals. It was almost a three- or four-generation change for our employees. We did a significant amount of training and preparation, but that being said, there was a period where we did have backlogs, backlogs in responses to clients. Certainly the complaints about lack of responsiveness, as opposed to necessarily actions taken by the organization, did increase.

**Ms. Cindy Forster:** Someone mentioned moving to an online type of system. We understand that you're planning to charge an administration fee to parents when the

online child support system is up and running in 2015. It was approved in the budget bill. It's the first of its kind in Canada. I guess my question is, how much will that fee be? It doesn't really seem right that people would have to pay a fee to actually go online and perhaps reduce the work of that ministry. They should actually be rewarded instead of penalized by having to pay a fee to log on to get what is ordered by the courts to help them support their kids.

**Mr. Bohodar Rubashewsky:** The enabling legislation, the budget bill, did contain provision for a fee. The fee level has not been determined at this point. It will be done, I believe, through regulation.

I think there is a clear intent to keep the fee at a reasonable level simply to offset, because there is an additional development and maintenance cost for this online automated child support calculation service. It will be operated by the Ministry of Finance and ServiceOntario. It will offer significant advantages to recipients and payers who wish to avail themselves of it, including the very significant cost that's associated with having their support orders established in court.

The fee, when you look at the cost in particular of legal fees or even appearing in court to establish these child support orders, is likely to be nominal. There is certainly active consideration for an exemption based on the low-income cut-off or similar.

**Ms. Cindy Forster:** So what are you anticipating that you'll recover per year when the system is up and running, and how many parents will actually use the system?

**Mr. Bohodar Rubashewsky:** Do you mean in terms of recovery of cost?

**Ms. Cindy Forster:** Recovery through the fees.

**Mr. Bohodar Rubashewsky:** Recovery through fees—it will only be to offset the cost of the operation of the service and no more than that. It's not intended as a revenue source.

In terms of how many families or how many recipients and payers will avail themselves of the service, it's not entirely clear. There is an estimate that has been provided by the Ministry of the Attorney General that up to 25% of child support orders that are brought to court for establishment or variation do not have complicated elements associated with them. If we are able to promote the service and the advantages of the service, we would anticipate that several thousand child support cases that would otherwise go to Family Court would actually be diverted to this service. The service itself would allow for variation of support orders to occur based on latest taxation information or alternative financial information—so, much more nimble in terms of being able to keep those support orders up to date and realistic on the part of the payer as much as fair on the part of the recipient.

**Ms. Cindy Forster:** Thanks. How much time do I have left?

**The Chair (Miss Monique Taylor):** Exactly five minutes.

**Ms. Cindy Forster:** I'm going to turn to a constituent complaint with respect to her ODSP file and the ministry.

A person who has been on ODSP for a number of years with chronic mental health issues received a letter recently, by mail, telling her that she owed almost \$25,000 in repayment over the period between, I believe, 2011 and 2014, because she had failed to provide A, B, C, D, E and F in a form letter.

She attempted numerous phone calls to the ODSP branch and left voicemails. No one returned her calls for a number of days, leaving this woman who already suffers from chronic mental illness very stressed out for a number of days before she finally got a call telling her that she had received the letter in error; it was a computer-generated mistake.

So my question is, what are the time frames in ODSP, the mandate for returning phone calls, the time frame? What kinds of audits and reports are kept on these types of errors? Is there any reporting mechanism so that you could generate a report for this committee with respect to how many times these kinds of issues happen?

**Hon. Helena Jaczek:** Well, I'll just respond in general. Obviously, we can't comment on a specific case. I'm sure we can give you some general responses in terms of occurrence of administrative errors and time frames in terms of response. It obviously sounds like a very unfortunate case, and hopefully your constituent is not being very much disturbed by it, because obviously there was a lag in terms of getting the letter detailing the error.

But perhaps we can turn to Richard to give you maybe chapter and verse on how we respond to that.

**Mr. Richard Steele:** As the minister says, in terms of the specific of a client situation, I can't comment. Certainly, if you have details, we'd be happy to take a look at what specifically happened in that client's situation.

First of all, service quality is something that we take extremely seriously—

**The Vice-Chair (Miss Monique Taylor):** Excuse me, Mr. Steele. There's two minutes left of this period.

**Ms. Cindy Forster:** We have two minutes.

**Mr. Richard Steele:** Okay. Service quality is something we take extremely seriously as one of our organization's objectives, both in terms of clients coming into our office, clients calling in, clients leaving phone messages.

There is no question that the caseload and workload is high for our clients, so we don't always hit the mark in terms of where we'd like to be, in terms of responsiveness. It's something we continue to work at very, very diligently. The objective is certainly to call clients back within 24 hours. Again, that doesn't always happen, but that is what we try to do in order to be as responsive as we can. It can take a little longer.

One of the things we have started to implement over this last year and make available to clients is secure email. That's a way that clients can actually communicate with their caseworker without having to speak to them on the phone or go through our phone system. It's certainly helpful for some clients.

In terms of your question around tracking of service quality, there are a few things we do. Our current



telephony technology doesn't allow us to track wait time and so on, on our phones. It's certainly something we would be looking at as part of our service modernization agenda, but at this time we can't track that at the individual call level. We certainly do client satisfaction tracking in terms of looking at the overall service experience our clients are getting and monitoring that on an office-by-office basis.

**Ms. Cindy Forster:** And do you actually put the office-by-office into a report once a year?

**Mr. Richard Steele:** Excuse me?

**Ms. Cindy Forster:** The office-by-office tracking: Does that go into an annual report once a year?

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**The Vice-Chair (Miss Monique Taylor):** Thank you. I'm sorry, that's your time.

The minister now has 30 minutes for the right of reply. If she does not use all of her 30 minutes, the extra minutes will then be left to be split equally between the three parties.

Please go ahead.

**Hon. Helena Jaczek:** Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

Because we've had so many thoughtful and in-depth questions to date during this estimates committee, I want to assure the members that we intend to catch up with all the responses, including the most recent by Ms. Forster.

Just by way of introduction, I would like to say that since I was appointed the minister four months ago, I have made every attempt to understand this ministry, with its complexities. As we've heard from the questions, there are a lot of very precise details involved. Sure, they need to be pursued and we need to be assured in every case that, first of all, we're helping vulnerable people to the extent possible, and that we're doing it in a fiscally responsible way in terms of their eligibility and that sort of thing.

I've been most impressed by the front-line workers. I've had the opportunity to visit, as I mentioned this morning, OW, ODSP, women's shelters, employment agencies, Community Living agencies, as well as unveiling the plaques at both Huronia and Southwestern Regional Centre, known as Cedar Springs. At all times, I really have been incredibly impressed by the dedication of the workers, especially in the developmental disabilities sector. When you ask, "How long have you worked in this group home?" you get responses like "15 years"—that seems to be the norm. I really want to emphasize that because with the deinstitutionalization, I think there were fears on the parts of relatives and maybe the system as a whole: Would we be able to appropriately house those individuals? Everything that I've seen has really reinforced that we have transformed the developmental disabilities sector in particular. But we obviously have a lot more work to do.

I'm going to go back to the questions that were posed this morning because there was a lot of interest in the new SAMS, the new computer system that's going to go live on November 11. We had an overview from ADM

Richard Steele a little bit as to what has gone into the training of staff and preparation for this handover, but the man on the ground who has been leading this over the last few years is ADM Martin Thumm. I'd really like you to hear from him in terms of this transition to the new computer system.

**Mr. Martin Thumm:** Thank you, Minister. I should say that this is an extremely exciting time for myself and my team. We are deploying this new technology over the next couple of weeks.

In terms of a bit of context first: The legacy system, the service delivery model technology, is an antiquated system. It is 14 years old. It was custom-built and it's highly dependent upon notes. What that means is that caseworkers have to enter a lot of open text throughout the case management system to record what and why they're doing what they're doing in terms of their case management with clients.

The social assistance management system, or SAMS, is a modern, commercial, off-the-shelf application and it's based on Cúram. Cúram, for those of you who are unaware, is the world leader now in human services applications. It's used across the world in many jurisdictions—south of the border, in Australia, New Zealand and Europe—for human services applications, including a lot of income support programs, as we're using it here.

It is data rich, it is highly automated, and that really means that caseworkers don't use notes. They don't put in notes; they put in data. That forces a lot more consistency in terms of the application and the calculation of benefits for all of the programs. That definitely enhances program integrity.

This new system is also a lot more adaptable to change. The old system, the SDMT, just as an example, when this government went to put in their first rate increase in 2003, unfortunately that took nine months to promote in the legacy system, SDMT. That shouldn't have been the case; that was the case. It was a custom-coded system. That change in SAMS today would be an administrative table change that could literally be done overnight. We would have to test that, so it would take longer, but the change itself is that simple.

This is, most importantly, going to lead to a lot of improvements in customer service. The minister has already talked about the client portal. That's going to give our clients 24/7 access to their case information. It's going to allow them to report income online. It's going to allow them to make changes to their circumstances, and it's also going to allow them to figure out what's going on with their case, to get information and receive correspondence online.

I can't understate what a huge fundamental difference it is between the two systems. It is a major transformation for staff. We can't deny that. There are 11,000 staff across the province, and what we see is a wide spectrum in terms of the comfort they have to adopting this new technology. Some definitely struggle. There's no doubt about that, and we're there to support them as much as we can. Then there are others who adopt it quite readily.

In terms of what we're doing to support staff, first of all, there were 40 hours of end-user training at a minimum over a 10-week period, leading up to the early summer. So that took people right through the application, end to end, and all of its functionality. Into the summer and up until very recently there's been up to 20 hours of refresher training for all staff, and that's really focused on those areas of the application that are used more commonly and those that staff actually expressed more of a difficulty with after end-user training.

We also have actually been able to put the application itself in all of the offices across the province. For the past three months, the application has been available for staff to go into and actually use the application, try out different tests on it, and management has generally had ways of making time available for staff to go in and spend a few hours every week in that environment.

In ODSP, we've increased the staffing complement by 47 to help with the workload over this transition phase. In Ontario Works, similarly we provided additional administrative funding to all of our delivery partners so that they can also ease the burden on their staff as they go through this transition.

I think the most important kind of illustration that I have or the most successful initiative that we've had in terms of developing staff in SAMS is, we've been able to actually cycle through over 700 caseworkers in our testing centres. So we have a testing centre in Toronto. We had one in Sault Ste. Marie and one in Hamilton. Caseworkers actually support us in application testing and validating data conversion and in user acceptance testing. What we've seen consistently is that once staff are in that training centre for a week and they've been hands-on with the application for a week, they get it. They get to that point where they understand, "Okay. Now I understand why I don't have notes. I understand how to navigate around the system, and I understand why it's got so much data that's used to calculate those outcomes." Those are really the people whom I call "converted." Often they help to relieve a lot of the anxiety of their colleagues when they go back to their home offices.

In terms of staff engagement, because I know that was another one of the comments and questions, that's really been a cornerstone of this project. We've had extensive staff engagement over the past four years. Staff have been engaged right from the actual design of the applications, validating the business requirements and right throughout the build. We've surveyed staff twice. So across the province we've surveyed our ODSP workers and also provided those surveying tools to our Ontario Works delivery agents, and the results that we've gotten back from staff have actually resulted in some adjustments that we've made to the training and the refresher.

I've personally been out across the province three or four times over the past three years. I've engaged with over 300 staff, and while I do have an opportunity to meet with senior managers, managers and supervisors in our delivery agents, it's really the staff that I value the most: meeting them, talking to them and getting their

perspective. I will say, the one thing that I always tell them is, "Do not pull any punches," and they don't. They tell me what they think, so they certainly do have the opportunity to tell us. We hear some brutal realities, of course, because of that spectrum—people who do have a lot of anxiety and are struggling with the learning.

#### 1630

I will say that I tell them that they don't need to know everything on day one—I think that's really important, and we really reinforce that with our delivery partners and with staff when we talk to them—that there's going to be a lot of tools and supports for them. It's actually those engagements with staff that help us to develop those tools and supports. We listened to what they tell us, what they would like. We've developed job aids. We've developed placemats that they can put on their desks where they're going to get a good illustration of how SAMS works and what the common areas of functionality are that they need to know from day one.

Ultimately, this is going to be easier for staff. We know that when people get that comfort and familiarity, it is easier for them to use. It is highly automated; it is more consistent. There's also a lot of streamlined business processes. One example is that today, when SDMT, the legacy system, sends a letter—and there is a lot of correspondence to over 600,000 cases—a duplicate letter is actually created on paper and delivered in boxes to the local offices, and those staff actually have to file those duplicate letters back into the master files for those cases. SAMS will just produce those electronically. Those will be linked to the case; those will never be printed. That's just an example of the kind of business streamlining that this presents.

Then, of course, there's also the portal. We're not going to be implementing the portal until early in 2015 so that our caseworkers can just get used to the system before they start getting calls from clients who are using the portal. But once we get that uptake, that's also going to make it easier for staff, because a lot more of their clients will be finding out information on line. They will be reporting income, and they will be changing circumstances themselves.

The other point I want to make is that these efficiencies are not intended to reduce the number of staff. What it will do is give staff more time to spend face to face with their clients and really working towards real outcomes rather than just doing casework.

I guess the last point that I'd like to make is just on the deployment itself. Obviously, this is an extremely complex and very broad implementation. There are 250 offices across the province. We're certainly never going to be more confident than we are now in terms of our readiness for this implementation. There have literally been thousands of person-days of testing: system testing, application testing, testing the performance of the system, user acceptance testing.

There are a couple of tests that I would like to highlight just to make the point in terms of our confidence. We've actually done seven full data conversions, so that

means taking all of the data from legacy and converting it into SAMS and running tests and validations of that. That obviously gets better every time, but the last few tests have actually surpassed the metrics that we had set in terms of the accuracy of data conversion that we needed to hit. With each one of those data conversions, we have run a parallel pay run. We run 600,000-plus payments out of SDMT and then the same number of payments out of SAMS with that converted data and actually do a match of all of those payments, and that has improved every time. With the last parallel pay run—that is, the one that we're going live with—we are down to under 1% of those payments where there's actually a variance. That's all being managed with our delivery agents in terms of them receiving that information and knowing that they have to go into those cases and take some action before the first pay run.

The other thing is that we have retained the capacity that we have in terms of the development and implementation of this project for several months post-implementation. We have the full project team; we have all of our vendor partners, particularly IBM. We have retained the full IBM development capacity for post-implementation so that we know that we can be highly responsive to issues as they come up, particularly those that might have an impact on clients' entitlements.

**Hon. Helena Jaczek:** Thank you very much. I hope that members of the committee will find that reassuring as we go live with SAMS November 11.

**Mr. Randy Hillier:** Easy to remember, I guess.

**Hon. Helena Jaczek:** There were additional questions related to the 2010 Auditor General's report as it related to FRO, our favourite subject, specifically staffing issues and so on. We did point out, in the review in 2012 that the Auditor General did, that it was noted that there were significant improvements. But I thought it might be worthwhile to just elaborate a little bit further than we actually did this morning in terms of what has happened since 2010 so people have a fairly clear picture of the progress we've made from a call centre model to this client-centred responsive model that we have put in place, so you get a picture of what we're trying to do. We are trying our best to improve the system.

I'd like the deputy to just give us a bit of an overview of what's happened over the last four years.

**Mr. Bohodar Rubashewsky:** Thank you very much, Minister. A significant part of our work in the Family Responsibility Office has been, to the extent possible, to utilize the resources that we do have available to us to core services and core activities. Some of the modernization initiatives that we undertook, we spoke to earlier today. However, a few that I do want to reference—and again, these are initiatives to move activities out that could be done by others more effectively and more efficiently than we can do ourselves, as well as allow the resources that were formerly occupied to that activity to be used for registration of cases, financial adjustments and enforcement.

One that we undertook, and I referenced it this morning, was the transfer of our activities around simply

processing documents, both incoming documents and outgoing documents. Incoming documents require the program to obviously take them in to digitize them, scan them and index them so that they can be attached to the cases and so that our caseworkers can use that documentation in either responding to clients or making decisions around cases. We moved that activity over to a specialized centre of excellence in the Ministry of Finance, the Oshawa operation, that is responsible for processing tax payments as well as any provincially related tax forms; we get about 500,000 documents annually.

We used to, prior to November 2011, have technology that was probably—if you have a home office, you probably have better technology than we had: scanners, very rudimentary scanners, and almost 20 people simply involved in doing this work, because obviously these documents are very important to get on to a case and to attach to the correct case. The Ministry of Finance does that in a highly automated way. It used to take us, on average, 30 days to process this incoming correspondence end to end. The Ministry of Finance does it for us within 48 hours with almost 100% accuracy. That's a service expectation that we have of them.

As I said, there were almost 20 staff who were involved in this activity. We do provide the Ministry of Finance with an operating subsidy because it costs them money to do this work, but we were able to retain the staff or the positions within the organization and we redirected those resources to additional enforcement, but also to the establishment of a client outreach unit. We had piloted an outreach to new clients in the early 2000s on a temporary basis and weren't able to continue it. With these resources, we were able to establish this unit again in late 2011. When a case comes to us for registration, if the address information is unclear or that kind of information is unclear, we perform a trace-and-locate to attempt to confirm the location, in particular, of the payer, and we make an outreach call to both the recipient and the payer to introduce the program to them and to clarify the obligations that both parties have to the Family Responsibility Office. In the case of the payer, it's his or her obligations under the court order—and we articulate the consequences that could occur if those obligations aren't fulfilled. On the side of the recipient, it's to provide us with timely information about his or her own location, as well as information that might be helpful to locate the payer if we can't make that contact.

**1640**

We have confirmed income source information through those calls, the payer actually volunteering where he or she is working, so that we can attach wages at source. Since the establishment of that unit, we have contacted over 23,000 new clients. It is a way to start them out in the program in a fashion that, hopefully, encourages compliance.

Financial adjustments of cases is a very important feature of our work. We conduct over 60,000 such adjustments a year. These are adjustments due to varied court orders. Some of these are very complex. They can go

back retroactively over months or even years. They really do establish, on the one hand, what the recipient fairly should get under that court order, but on the other hand, what the payer should fairly be paying.

Again, we used to average about 30 days, if not more, to take in these adjustment requirements and to actually do the work. We're completing them within 10 days, 80% of the time, and within 30 days, 99% of the time, because there are occasions when the adjustments are unclear due to ambiguity in the court order.

Those are a couple of the areas. Again, we want to make the organization, and we have tried to make the organization, more responsive than it has been in the past.

We do make an effort to measure ourselves against other jurisdictions and other similar organizations. The comparisons are very difficult to make. As I mentioned this morning, in Canada we are the largest jurisdiction. We have the largest caseload by far—Quebec is second; British Columbia is third—so comparing us to the majority of Canadian jurisdictions is really difficult. It is around scale. If you have 15,000 or 10,000 cases to manage, it is less complex and it is a different kind of environment to work within than 180,000 cases.

We do try to measure ourselves against Canadian jurisdictions that are at least a little bit larger than completely small. We classify those as provinces that have caseloads of over 20,000. We also measure ourselves on a North American-wide basis. The measure that we use is jurisdictions with caseloads of over 135,000 cases—we have 180,000—primarily in the United States. Again, the order of magnitude of the efforts required to enforce cases and manage cases is a little bit more comparable when you look at that kind of threshold.

Among those jurisdictions, those over 135,000 cases across North America, we outrank all jurisdictions in collection of dollars per full-time-equivalent staff member. These are not just our enforcement officers. The measure that we use is all staff within our organization, comparably, because that's the comparator that is available through the United States Office of Child Support Enforcement.

We collect more than any other jurisdiction of that size—it's about \$1.48 million per FTE—and we collect more support per program expenditure dollar than any other jurisdiction of that level. It's about \$12 per dollar spent.

It's a similar comparator across Canada among jurisdictions that have over 20,000 cases, and there are only four that do: ourselves, Quebec, Alberta and British Columbia. All other provinces are smaller in order of magnitude. That's not to say that we rest on those comparisons: \$2.1 billion is a significant amount of arrears. It is in the context of \$12.5 billion collected since the program's inception. But we are comparable to or better than other jurisdictions in many respects.

The arrears per case, which is another measure that can be used—when you look at the three jurisdictions in Canada of that order of magnitude, above 20,000 cases,

that do not write off arrears—that's ourselves, British Columbia and Alberta.

Quebec writes off arrears. If they do not receive a payment on a case that has ongoing obligations and arrears within a two-year period, they will remove those arrears from their count. If there are no payments and no arrears, they'll write off after one year. If there are payments made on the case subsequently, they'll put the arrears back on. But they have a variety of ways and they have the latitude to write off arrears. We do not. Even if the payer is deceased, we do not write off those arrears, because there is always the potential for us to pursue a collection of arrears from the estate of a deceased individual.

On that basis, our arrears per case are roughly \$11,600 or \$11,700. That's a little bit lower than British Columbia and Alberta. We did this comparison using the figures that were published by the CBC. Alberta's is almost \$11,900 per case and British Columbia is \$12,300. In both those cases it does cost more for those programs to collect every dollar.

We continue to look at ways to make the program more effective. We are looking at other jurisdictions, primarily in North America, and looking at the way that they actually approach different types of case profiles—cases that are in arrears at an early stage; cases that are very, very hard to collect on—and we're looking at best practices in other jurisdictions as well as using the analytical capabilities that we have in the Ministry of Community and Social Services—

**The Vice-Chair (Miss Monique Taylor):** Two minutes left.

**Mr. Bohodar Rubashewsky:** Thank you—to look at whether we can segment our caseload in a way that's more effective, whether we can employ strategies that are more effective, depending on the different profiles of the cases.

It's always hard to figure out what works and what doesn't work, because oftentimes we employ multiple and simultaneous approaches to enforcement. But we are looking at any avenue that we can, to improve the organization.

That being said, enforcement is a challenging exercise, because we are balancing competing considerations: our responsibilities to the recipients, because of the court orders that they have, but also the legitimate ability of payers, under the circumstances that they find themselves in at times, to be able to pay their obligations.

We're compelled to ultimately enforce the terms of the court orders that we have until such time as they are varied. But by the same token, we do not want to take a punitive approach to enforcement, to punish payers rather than finding ways to encourage them to provide what they are able to pay, as opposed to what they have no possibility of being able to pay. We can only do that on a temporary basis with the discretion that we have, but it does form some of the challenge that we face in this program.

**The Vice-Chair (Miss Monique Taylor):** You're done?

**Mr. Bohodar Rubashewsky:** Yes.

**The Vice-Chair (Miss Monique Taylor):** Okay, good. Thank you. We'll move on to the official opposition: Mr. Harris.

**Mr. Michael Harris:** Thank you for that. I guess that approach, although difficult, may be part of the problem in why there are so many arrears—that deadbeat dads are simply taking advantage of you for perhaps that approach.

My question is: In the AG's follow-up report in 2012, they found that the total amount of support payments in arrears as of December 31, 2009, was \$1.6 billion. I believe we talked about it being \$2.1 billion. That was an actual increase of 23% from 2003.

**1650**

They said your office had minimal information on the balance and could not provide them with the individual balances that accumulated to that total, or which portion of this balance was deemed uncollectable. I'm wondering if you can provide to the committee—the \$2.1 billion: You talk about it being cumulative, but is there a breakdown that you could provide to the committee of that to actually reflect that?

**Mr. Bohodar Rubashewsky:** Yes, I could—

**Mr. Michael Harris:** You don't have to give me the answer now. If you have it, could you just provide it to the committee?

**Mr. Bohodar Rubashewsky:** Okay, very good. I can give you just a flavour of the profile of these arrears. And again, some of the challenges—

**Mr. Michael Harris:** I guess I'm just curious on if you could provide—the \$2.1 billion, if you can get us the breakout on that it would be helpful. Because I'm sharing my time with my colleague today and I know there are some folks that are definitely interested in some of your other answers. So the enforcement piece is something we've definitely got to go back to.

I wonder if you can explain your work with other ministries, especially, perhaps, the Ministry of Health—I believe you're working with now. How is that going? They talk about the Ministry of Health, as well as MPAC, being fruitful in the enforcement piece. How is that going?

**Mr. Bohodar Rubashewsky:** You are likely referring to the Auditor General's report and his recommendation at the time to work with the Ministry of Health to expand FRO's ability to utilize the health card database for trace-and-locate purposes. At the time, in 2010, we had very, very limited access to that database; it was a very limited number of inquiries that we could do. Since that time, we have worked very collaboratively with the Ministry of Health and established real-time access to that database.

**Mr. Michael Harris:** You have unlimited access now.

**Mr. Bohodar Rubashewsky:** Unlimited access; in fact, in July of this year—the access originally was unlimited but restricted to our specialized trace-and-locate unit, and there were, I think, eight or nine individuals who had access—

**Mr. Michael Harris:** Seven, it said, but whatever.

**Mr. Bohodar Rubashewsky:**—seven; that's right. In July of this year we actually expanded access to all of our enforcement officers, so they now have—

**Mr. Michael Harris:** And they're frequently using that at their disposal?

**Mr. Bohodar Rubashewsky:** I certainly hope they are—

**Mr. Michael Harris:** I agree.

**Mr. Bohodar Rubashewsky:** We actually have a requirement with the Ministry of Health to monitor how that database is being used. For their purposes it's to ensure that the database is being used with integrity; for our purposes, it will allow us to see how much it's being used and what its effectiveness is.

Our staff have found it's much more effective than other databases, simply because when patients do come into doctors' offices, they do provide that information.

**Mr. Michael Harris:** Yes, for sure.

The other piece I hear about a lot in our offices is that when there's a garnishment of wages by employers they can be extremely slow in forwarding the payments to FRO on behalf of the payer, really despite court orders directing those monthly payments.

I'm just wondering: What relationship do you have with employers, or what mechanisms are there that we can get those employers to forward those payments faster? Why does it take so long, I guess is my question?

**Mr. Bohodar Rubashewsky:** First of all, our legislation—and this is the case across all the jurisdictions that I'm aware of—does not require, nor should it require, an income source, an employer to deduct support from an employee's pay before the support is actually due. So when the support accrual occurs at the beginning of the month, the actual support amount is garnished from the pays that occur after that obligation per the court order. And depending on the pay schedules of different employers—some of them remit to us on a biweekly basis—we do give them the discretion to remit within 30 days. It's a recognition that pay schedules are different; their scale is different. Small employers, because of the accounting that's required, might have more difficulty to do so more frequently than on a once-a-month basis. The legislation does provide that latitude, but within 30 days they must remit the amounts that are ordered through our support deduction notices.

**Mr. Michael Harris:** And are there those out there who delay post the 30?

**Mr. Bohodar Rubashewsky:** Some do. We contact them immediately when they do. If they persist in either not remitting—it could be for one payer or it could be for multiple payers—the full amount or not remitting at all, we have the authority to take them to court to have a judge order them to comply with the support deductions notices.

**Mr. Michael Harris:** How often has that happened perhaps in the past?

**Mr. Bohodar Rubashewsky:** It happens very infrequently because we contact income sources and convince them, short of actually taking them to court, to

comply. In many cases, it is through lack of knowledge. We do a lot of outreach. We provide a lot of information when we send what we call support deduction notices to employers and what the requirements are. But it is an issue of education oftentimes as much as reticence on their part.

**Mr. Michael Harris:** Sure. ODSP recipients who also have an active FRO case: Their support payments would be sent by FRO to ODSP to be distributed. Why is that even necessary? Why does that even happen?

**Mr. Bohodar Rubashewsky:** Minister?

*Interjection.*

**Mr. Bohodar Rubashewsky:** When a recipient is on social assistance and they are not—well, first of all, if they are receiving support payments on a regular basis, whether they're eligible or not for social assistance will depend on whether they're eligible, because child support is included as income for purposes of determining eligibility.

When those support payments become either infrequent or do not occur and a recipient is compelled to go on social assistance as a result of that, social assistance payments are made. But for the period in which they're on social assistance, should we collect funds from the payer, those amounts are remitted to the social assistance delivery agent to offset the cost of either ODSP or OW provided to that recipient. When payments do start again and the individual is not required to be on social assistance, then those payments obviously go to the recipient. We—

**Mr. Michael Harris:** So—go ahead.

**Mr. Bohodar Rubashewsky:** We have a requirement to offset, as I said, the cost of social assistance and to recover those funds from the payer rather than flowing them to the recipient. We do, as a matter of course, however, deal with those arrears at the end of a case rather than at the beginning. We do not cut a recipient off because we're collecting from—

**Mr. Michael Harris:** I guess here, if a child support recipient leaves ODSP, the office is responsible for informing the Family Responsibility Office to stop forwarding payments. The Ombudsman did find this year that ODSP was unknowingly holding almost \$1 million representing at least 350 assignment cases that were no longer active. Obviously the mandate is on ensuring that we're helping our most desperate citizens, not strip them of the resources that they're entitled to. How could the ODSP not realize it was accumulating such assets? And what are you doing to fix this problem, perhaps?

**Mr. Bohodar Rubashewsky:** I can answer part of the question and then Richard, as the assistant deputy minister responsible for social assistance operations, can add some more.

The Family Responsibility Office triggers either the flow of funds to social assistance delivery agents or ends that flow and has the flow go to the recipient on the basis of the office itself, the social assistance office, indicating whether the individual is no longer on social assistance. When those terminations do not occur on a timely basis,

then we continue to flow funds to the delivery agent, but because there's no social assistance being paid, those funds are held. As it transpired, there were, as you noted, significant funds held which should have been released when the individual was no longer collecting social assistance.

**1700**

The connection of information between FRO and ODSP offices and OW offices is highly manual at this point. As Richard alluded to previously, we need to get better at streamlining that process and ensuring that those assignments are cancelled on a timely basis. We are working through business processes at this point, and I'll point to Richard to—

**Mr. Michael Harris:** Working better with other ministries, especially the one in particular. So I'll cut it off there because I know my colleague has got nine minutes.

**Mr. Bill Walker:** Great. I'm going to ask for a couple of things that I don't need a response to, but if you could provide them in writing, it would be wonderful.

One would be the survey of the measurement against other jurisdictions; Canada and North America would be helpful. The arrears per case, the average cost per case, those types of things would be very helpful, to do that.

Your Good Parents Pay website: My understanding is that about \$470,000 have been collected from 62 parents over seven years. What I'd like to understand is what kind of cost you're putting into maintaining and administering that website versus the return: what type of dollars we are getting back on an annual basis, what it is costing to run that website on an annual basis, so we can really see whether there's value for money. Certainly, it's a nice option to have for people to be able to voluntarily, but I think the reality, when you're looking at \$2.1 billion in arrears, is that we're not getting there too fast from that perspective.

I think there's some information that we can try to find in regard to the whole FRO caseload. I'm reading that, on average, there are about 1,377, versus 300 to 450 in the other couple of large provinces. I'm understanding that the caseload actually went from 180,000 to 190,000. So at some point I'd like to understand: What's the plan to get that number down? You can't necessarily control how many are there, but the workload—it seems to me pretty untenable for anyone to have 1,377 cases and realistically expect that they're going to drop that down to a fairly significant number.

We've talked a lot about a couple of different areas and I want to move a little bit into the whole area of adults living with aging parents. It's something that I certainly experience in my riding. I've got some personal situations where I've known families and they are at that point where Mom is turning 92 or 93. The child that they've been able to support at home is 60 or 65 years old, but somewhere down the road that's not going to happen. I certainly have concerns. I've heard a number of times in the presentation and reading the materials that there is \$810 million that is going in there.

In March, the deputy Ombudsman stated that “there is too much bureaucracy and not enough service. They feel like they are facing endless waiting lists”—back to what I was just talking about. So I’d like to have a breakdown of where that \$810 million is going and what exact, specific areas it’s being directed to—again, not necessarily today in an answer, but if you could provide that to me in writing so that I understand where those are going, where you’ve allocated those estimates, so I can go back to my people and have that discussion.

**Hon. Helena Jaczek:** I think we could probably do that right now, but—

**Mr. Bill Walker:** That’s okay. I don’t really need that because, Minister, I think we’ll get limited on the questions and I have very limited time with all of the things that need to be covered. I appreciate it, but I think, as long as I can get that—it also gives me time to digest it and really understand it.

**Hon. Helena Jaczek:** We’ll make a note, yes.

**Mr. Bill Walker:** The other is, I think, what I’d like to really understand on behalf of my colleagues, certainly in our caucus, and I trust maybe the third party, and maybe even members of the government would like to know: How many people are currently being served in the adults living with aging parents? What are the wait-lists? So how many people are currently getting service from your ministry and how many people are on wait-lists for it? I’d like those broken down by riding, if we could, because it would be really helpful for us to understand and know where people are at, what type of planning we can do in regard—and if you don’t have those numbers, then it’s something that I think we need to be looking at, because if you’re planning and you’re doing budgeting and you are not looking at it on a geographic area, how do I then best serve the people of my area or at least answer them on your behalf?

**Hon. Helena Jaczek:** They’re definitely collected by geographic area, but through the Developmental Services Ontario office.

**Mr. Bill Walker:** Well, that’s at least a start. If we can at least get that by geographic area, then we may ask you at some point to do that further, because again I think it’s important and that’s the type of thing that I’m being asked by my local media and certainly the people: What type of resources are coming in here versus other areas across the province?

One of the things we hear in government a lot is “equitable,” and that’s certainly a laudable goal to try to achieve. But I’m not certain “equitable” necessarily means identical—same for same—and people sometimes get misconstrued, misrepresented, and I think it’s good for us to be able to do some of those types of things. These wait-lists continue to be a burden, Minister. I can only imagine that it’s one of those things where you have a concern. I’m going to quote you. At some point, you said these wait-lists “cannot be eliminated within 12 months,” although I believe the committee said that that’s what should happen and could happen. I’m not asking you, again, to regurgitate that or refute that, but I think it

needs to be put on the record again that that is the biggest thing that I certainly hear from my riding, and my colleagues across our caucus are certainly telling me, again, about that family member who truly is getting to the point where, “I can’t do this anymore. I cannot put the self-service at home. What’s going to happen with my daughter or my son? What am I going to do? Where are they going to end up?”

We hear horror stories in some cases that, actually, police are coming in and handcuffing that adult and taking them away to a hospital, because that’s their only recourse. There is nowhere else for them to go. They’re sitting in certain facilities that are not designed for that person who is 40 years old and has some challenges. They’re being put in an old-age home, because that’s the only thing there.

I know you well enough that I know that’s a struggle as much with you as it is with me, and particularly more for the people who are in those situations. I think what we really want to see—we truly want to open the door to say, “How is that being addressed?”

If it’s not able to be done in a year, then I think what the people of Ontario need to hear is, “I have a very credible plan, and I have a goal.” It’s a defined goal of a time period. We may challenge you on what that time period is. I think the people, certainly, in these circumstances may challenge you if it’s beyond the year, because someone at least has put that thought in their head. But I think what we need to be is credible and say, “We have an absolute plan. We are addressing this.”

I think it goes back to a lot of the ways we look at how we’re doing government. Can today’s current programs and services, and the way they’re being delivered, truly meet those goals? If they’re not, then I think we want to hear the answer from you, as the minister, of what you are truly prepared to do to change that approach to some of those types of situations that we’re experiencing.

**Hon. Helena Jaczek:** I do want to reassure you that everyone on a wait-list has been prioritized in terms of urgency. We do have a plan. The assistant deputy minister has been working diligently, since she joined our team, to ensure the kind of consistency you’re concerned about. But we do need to build some capacity into the system in order to get rid of those wait-lists.

It’s my goal that we move as fast as we possibly can. We are a little bit ahead of schedule at this point, which is good news, in terms of what we’ve been able to achieve, especially with the direct funding for Passport and special services at home. But we can give you a little bit more of a fulsome answer, obviously, as you’ve requested.

**Mr. Bill Walker:** I’d like to visit for a second, if I could, really briefly this morning, your former Minister of Finance, Dwight Duncan. He questioned it: “Why are we in the business of collection? Why are we doing this?”

I, again, would like a breakdown of the cost within your overall budget to do that collection piece. What truly is the cost of going out and trying to do that collec-

tion within your service? Let's open it up and let's forget the partisan stuff and say, "Is there truly a better way to do this?", so that, again, maybe some of those resources within that ministry can be utilized at the front line of care.

One of the concerns that I hear continuously—whether it's the Ottawa Citizen report that I'm reading, or what a lot of media that are investigating are saying, there are a lot of things happening. The assistant, or the deputy Ombudsman, again, referenced way too much administration, way too much bureaucracy. People need to see that front-line. That's certainly how I come to work every day—

**The Vice-Chair (Miss Monique Taylor):** Mr. Walker, two minutes.

**Mr. Bill Walker:** Thank you very much, Chair—ensuring that those front-line services are the absolute first priority that we're doing. Those wait-lists, the arrears—and I get that it's accumulated, but again, why are we allowing those arrears to build? We need to find changes in the process. We need to think lean and say, "What are the wastes in there that we're spending time regurgitating and moving paper, as opposed to truly getting there?"

Those types of things, I think, then show certainly that we're all looking at the same focal points. We're looking at truly those measurements and the outcomes and just a review of whether we are really measuring the outcomes that are going to truly serve the people at the front line, those people who truly need the programs and services across our community services. In my three years, what I am seeing at the very forefront are the people coming through my door, saying, "I can't get my son and daughter. I'm coming to the end of my tenure—my life-line—and I'm really, really, really concerned about where my daughter's going to end up."

When they hear of 23,000 people on a wait-list—they may already say, "Maybe a year is not where I have my expectation," but they may only have four or five years. They don't want to go to their grave, to be very frank, knowing that there is nowhere for their daughter to go.

That's something that I think we all have to show, that care and compassion, and it's helpful, in an estimates committee like this, to see truly where the numbers are going. Is it going to administration, or is the focus really on the front-line care?

**Hon. Helena Jaczek:** The questions that you've just posed are exactly what I raised at the briefings that I've had over the last several months. The answers that I have heard from the team at the ministry have certainly reassured me that we are going in the right direction. But thank you for that, Mr. Walker.

**Mr. Bill Walker:** Michael, do you have anything—

**The Vice-Chair (Miss Monique Taylor):** You've got maybe 30 seconds.

**Mr. Bill Walker:** Thirty seconds? I guess, then, I'll just put it in the record: One of your colleagues, with regard to the SSSMP new program—I think he referenced a 1% challenge in regard to error, I guess, if

you will. That's going to result in 6,000 people, some of our most vulnerable and our most needy, not getting their cheques.

In a quick line, it sounds very small and insignificant, but to those 6,000 people, that will be perhaps extremely detrimental to them.

**1710**

I'm not suggesting that anybody isn't doing their best effort. But again, our job here—we're going to hear that on the front lines. Our phones are going to come off the wall—

**The Vice-Chair (Miss Monique Taylor):** Thank you, Mr. Walker. I'm sorry.

We will now move on to the third party and Ms. Forster for her 20 minutes.

**Ms. Cindy Forster:** Thanks so much. Minister, you can see that there's lots of interest in your ministry, lots of questions. I'm going to kind of do the same as I did earlier today and ask a bunch of questions, and hopefully we'll get either some written answers or some answers tomorrow.

I'm going to start in the SAMS area. What is the total cost of the social assistance management system, including the training costs, the 18-month delay and the cost of compensating municipalities?

Why are you going to claw back even more from people through the overpayment repayment deductions—you and I talked about this last week—by deducting the overpayment 5%, not just from the basic rates but from the additional allowances as well? There are people receiving special diet allowances and northern allowances. My understanding is that you're actually going to be deducting some of that as well. That really doesn't seem to be a very good idea in lieu of the fact that it's about some healthy supports for people.

Have you had any conversations with officials in Minnesota and Maryland about the problems they encountered with this same system? I think it's called Cúram. They've had a lot of criticism about the flaws in the software. If you've had those discussions, have you taken any steps, made any expenditures or had any correspondence back and forth with respect to that? If so, could you provide us with that information?

What are the biggest risks that you see with implementing the system, which I think is going to begin this Thursday? Is it this Thursday or next Thursday?

**Hon. Helena Jaczek:** November 11.

**Ms. Cindy Forster:** Oh, November 11. Okay.

**Hon. Helena Jaczek:** Remembrance Day.

**Ms. Cindy Forster:** Finally, today there was a statement from Smokey Thomas, the president of OPSEU, regarding SAMS that was on our email earlier. Some of the caseworkers, and the union certainly, believe that the caseworkers will be spending less time with clients, not more; that the training—

**Hon. Helena Jaczek:** Ms. Forster, we're hardly having the chance to write this down. I know that there are people here who could provide some insight.



**Ms. Cindy Forster:** Let me just finish with the SAMS piece, and then maybe you can—

**Hon. Helena Jaczek:** I think so, because we've had—just to sort of wrap some of that up. That would be very useful, I think.

**Ms. Cindy Forster:** The training has not been adequate, and in the data system—and I know we have the data system fellow here—just to add a dependent child to a client's file actually takes 73 separate entries.

Those are my questions around SAMS. I look forward to the answers.

**Hon. Helena Jaczek:** I think, for continuity and for everyone's little grey cells, it might be useful to just have the responses related to SAMS at this point.

**Ms. Cindy Forster:** Great.

**Hon. Helena Jaczek:** The total cost—were you able to catch some of this, Martin?

**Mr. Martin Thumm:** Yes, the total cost is—

**The Vice-Chair (Miss Monique Taylor):** For Hansard's purposes, so they pick it up, just say your name, please.

**Mr. Martin Thumm:** Martin Thumm. I'm the executive lead for the project.

**The Vice-Chair (Miss Monique Taylor):** Thanks.

**Mr. Martin Thumm:** The total cost of the project is \$240 million. That goes right back to its inception in 2009. That includes the implementation of the online social assistance system that has already been implemented in 2011. So that is all-inclusive.

**Ms. Cindy Forster:** Training and everything?

**Mr. Martin Thumm:** That includes all of the costs, including training.

The question around deduction—

**Ms. Cindy Forster:** The clawback.

**Mr. Martin Thumm:** The clawback. What that really relates to is, the SDMT did not actually follow policy correctly in that it only recovered overpayments from basic needs and shelter, but the policy actually states that overpayments are a 5% deduction against your full budgetary entitlement, and that does include those other benefits that you alluded to, such as the special diet allowance. We used the opportunity of implementing SAMS to correct that.

That doesn't actually reduce an entitlement. It increases the rate at which an overpayment is recovered. That also means that a client will pay back that overpayment sooner. But on a net period, over a period of time, that isn't going to impact them; it's just that the recovery is quicker.

Say, if someone had a special diet, for instance, and that was \$250 a month, that would mean that the overpayment recovery would be 5% of that \$250 more every month.

**Ms. Cindy Forster:** So if they didn't have an overpayment in food allowance, it's not going to be clawed back from—

**Mr. Martin Thumm:** No, absolutely not. That's only for clients that have an existing overpayment, so it's the recovery rate. That's what we're talking about there.

In terms of Minnesota and Maryland, we watch all Cúram applications very closely. I'm actually the chair of the North American user reference group for Cúram users, and I talk with other leads on Cúram projects quite regularly. Both of those—Minnesota in particular—were implementing the Affordable Care Act, and they were up against some very tight time frames. What happened was that they didn't do the testing they needed to do before they implemented, particularly around the client portal and the performance. We were actually just blown away by how much they cut out the testing, and it was largely driven by the time frames that they were required to meet on the Affordable Care Act.

But we did spend a lot of time with both of those jurisdictions, and we did take lessons learned and actually beefed up some of our performance testing. We are implementing this in 250 offices around the province. We can manage our central system fairly closely, but they also have local infrastructure that we rely on, so we've actually tested with much of that local infrastructure as well. Some of that was lessons learned from those other jurisdictions.

In terms of the biggest risks, client entitlement and client services is job one, and that's what we spend the most time on in terms of testing and risk mitigation. I talked earlier about looking at the parallel pay run and ensuring really extensive testing on that.

I will say that when I said that in less than 1% of those there are still deviations in the parallel pay run, it's actually 1,900 payments—I suppose the member who asked that question isn't here right now, but there is a very careful process with the field. There are many caseworkers across the province. It's actually a very low number, maybe an average of two cases per worker or less, where they actually have to go in and look at those cases, but we've highlighted which ones they are, and they have time to do that.

In terms of the letter from Smokey, obviously we've read that, and we take that very seriously. I will say that that comes down to a lot about the spectrum that I talked about where, amongst our end users, the caseworkers, there is a wide variance in terms of how comfortable they are. That's always going to be the case with a large change management like this, and we're doing everything we can to support those who are struggling, and I think that's always going to be case.

That was an interesting comment about the 73 separate steps that it took to issue that one benefit. We actually did do a very detailed evaluation of how many clicks and steps all the processes take in SDMT and SAMS, and when you include the notes that I talked about, the fact that there is so much note-taking in the legacy, it actually does end up being less work and less time spent overall on similar activities between the two applications.

**Ms. Cindy Forster:** That's interesting, because I actually worked in an agency that moved to a data collection system, and about 25% of the workforce, because of all the entries, ended up with carpal tunnel and there were lots of compensation cases, so you need to be kind of cognizant of that piece.

**Mr. Martin Thumm:** Right, yes.

**Ms. Cindy Forster:** I'm going to actually turn it over now to share my time, because Ms. Sattler has some questions for you.

**Hon. Helena Jaczek:** I just want to reassure you on the overpayment issue, Ms. Forster, because I've been assured that, should there be some financial hardship with the new regimen in terms of the overpayment retrieval, discretion can be used. We're going to look at it, if there's hardship on an individual basis.

**Ms. Cindy Forster:** Great.

**Ms. Peggy Sattler:** I had a question specific to the new consolidated employment benefit. The question is: Will your ministry continue to administer the new consolidated employment benefit, or is that responsibility going to be transferred to Employment Ontario and the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities?

1720

**Hon. Helena Jaczek:** My understanding is that we will continue to administer it. I have my officials here. I think perhaps the deputy—can you elaborate a little bit?

**Mr. Bohodar Rubashewsky:** Actually, I'll ask Erin Hannah, our acting ADM, to elaborate.

**Ms. Erin Hannah:** Hi. Thank you for the question. The minister is absolutely correct. The Ministry of Community and Social Services, through both our Ontario Works program and the Ontario Disability Support Program, will continue to administer the new employment benefit within each of the respective programs for people with disabilities and people without disabilities.

**Ms. Peggy Sattler:** Okay, that's great. The next two questions I would like to request a written response to, because they require a bit more detail.

The first one is around the role of municipalities and local service managers. We know, obviously, that they have significant expertise and local knowledge to contribute to the implementation of the new consolidated employment benefit, so we would like to know what consultation, if any, has occurred with municipal service managers and if the committee can be provided with an overview of the concerns that were raised by the municipal service managers. That's the first request for a written response.

The next issue is around funding. In 2010, the government announced a change to funding for the cost of administration of Ontario Works, and at the time, your ministry committed to releasing monthly caseload statistics to municipalities and DSSABs so that they could plan and budget for the work of administration within multi-year budgeting cycles. We have been told that this information is not, in fact, being made available on an annual or monthly basis as promised, which creates difficulties for DSSABs and municipalities, obviously, in their budgeting process. We would like to know: Why is that information not being made available to municipalities? We would also request that you table with the committee the monthly OW caseload statistics for all CMSMs and DSSABs for the past 12 months as well as caseload projections for every CMSM and DSSAB.

**Hon. Helena Jaczek:** Okay, just a point of clarification on your first point related to the role of municipalities and local service providers: This relates specifically to the area of their role in employment service provision? Is this what you're getting at?

**Ms. Peggy Sattler:** Yes, and their delivery of the new consolidated employment benefit.

**Hon. Helena Jaczek:** Okay. In terms of actually working with clients related to employment opportunities, there was some thought to consolidating all employment services within—amalgamating smaller agencies under one Employment Ontario office. This is not what you're getting at?

**Ms. Peggy Sattler:** No, it's about the role of the CMSMs and DSSABs in—

**Hon. Helena Jaczek:** In the employment benefit.

**Ms. Peggy Sattler:** Yes. We're interested in knowing what kind of consultation occurred and what some of the issues that were brought to you during that consultation process were.

**Hon. Helena Jaczek:** We do have officials here. We can probably answer that very quickly.

**Ms. Peggy Sattler:** Well, I think we have a number of issues to address. If that could be addressed very quickly, that would be good, but if it's—

**Hon. Helena Jaczek:** Consultation.

**Ms. Erin Hannah:** Hi. Yes. We started—

**The Vice-Chair (Miss Monique Taylor):** Could you state your name for Hansard purposes?

**Ms. Erin Hannah:** I'm sorry. Erin Hannah, ADM, social policy.

We started engaging with municipalities on the employment-related benefit, actually, prior to it being announced in the budget. We had conversations conceptually about that direction. Since then, we have continued to meet with our municipal partners, both through a technical working group as well as a senior-level provincial-municipal working group. Most recently, we've been sharing information about how we might approach the allocation of the funding—because this will change how we provide the envelope to support the delivery of the integrated benefit—testing out options and getting their feedback on that.

I understand you want a quick answer, so I won't go into all of the feedback that we've heard. But I will say very briefly that, clearly, there is concern about ensuring that we provide the appropriate transition period, ensuring that we provide the appropriate transition period, ensuring that we tie the funding to the size of caseloads, ensuring that we allow for flexibility in the funding model and working with them on an ongoing basis to evaluate the effectiveness of the new approach on employment benefits.

**Hon. Helena Jaczek:** And on the second point, I just want to make sure that the deputy understands exactly what you're getting at so we can provide—again, Erin, are you clear, or would you—

**Ms. Erin Hannah:** I am clear.

**Hon. Helena Jaczek:** Okay? We can get that to you.

**Ms. Peggy Sattler:** Those were my questions. Thank you very much.

**The Vice-Chair (Miss Monique Taylor):** You still have five minutes.

**Ms. Cindy Forster:** Okay. On to ODSP medical reviews. We know that they're necessary, but we believe that the current system is flawed. They can be exceptionally difficult for ODSP recipients because they have to fill out that second package. It's intensive. It can take a long period of time. This year, your ministry is going to do an unprecedented 600 medical reviews per month. That in itself certainly creates work for our constituency offices and is going to create a lot of work within your own ministry as well.

The Commission for the Review of Social Assistance found that the application process for ODSP, which requires applicants to provide detailed medical assessments to provide the severity of their disability, may take months to conclude. What is the current number of cases in the ODSP medical review backlog, and how does that compare to last year?

I'm going to ask a number of questions. Can you provide the committee with the rate at which medical review recipients are no longer eligible for disability supports for last year and this year, and the rate at which those medical review decisions are overturned upon appeal? Is it every case that has a potential for review in the scheme of things, and what is the final target per month for backlog and new cases?

What percentage of applicants or recipients are required to have a specialist assessment, and how is the ministry facilitating that process to actually get people to specialists in light of the fact that many of them come from communities that are sorely underserved with specialists?

In other jurisdictions, there have been concerns about suicides amongst disability benefit recipients who are subject to a medical review and found no longer to qualify. Does the ministry collect any data on the number of suicides amongst persons who are forced to submit to an ODSP medical review a second time after they've been approved initially, and if so, can you provide us with some documentation around that data?

**The Vice-Chair (Miss Monique Taylor):** Two minutes.

**Hon. Helena Jaczek:** Okay. I'll turn it over to Erin Hannah, but I do want to say, Ms. Forster, that when I heard about the medical review, I asked to look at the package and go through it. I understand your concerns about it. Obviously eligibility is—it's very important to be assessed. We do have the need to be fiscally responsible. We need to ensure eligibility and we need to ensure consistency, so that form, as you know, is being used consistently.

But I'll turn it over in the last minute or so to Erin to respond.

**Ms. Erin Hannah:** Thank you. Erin Hannah.

The medical review process, just to start out as a reminder—and the minister touched on this—is really

focused on individuals whose condition might improve. Our goal isn't to try to reassess individuals for eligibility for disability support if there's really no hope that their condition is ever going to change or improve. So I just wanted to put that in that context.

You asked a number of questions, and I'll very quickly go through them. In terms of the backlog, we currently have about 63,000 cases in the backlog. What the backlog actually represents is all of the cases that have a medical review date that has passed. That's the simple definition of the backlog.

In terms of results on how many people were found not to qualify for disability support anymore and how many of those decisions were then appealed to the Social Benefits Tribunal and resulted in an overturn, we have limited amounts of data at this point in time. We actually only restarted medical reviews in February 2013, and because the process itself allows for the client to have time to collect the information—have the package completed with their health care professional; once the package is submitted, there's a period of time to review it—there's also an opportunity after a decision has been made for the client then to go through an internal review and then the appeal process, and we don't cut people off during that period. So it takes some time for us to get outcome data, is I guess what I would state—

**The Vice-Chair (Miss Monique Taylor):** Thank you, Ms. Hannah. Sorry.

We will now move on to the government, where you will have 20 minutes.

**1730**

**Ms. Soo Wong:** I'm going to start the first round of questioning.

Minister, thank you so much for being here today. I want to follow up on your opening remarks from this morning. You said in your opening remarks that your ministry is building a fairer, healthier province because of the support offered to vulnerable Ontarians to make them full and active participants in our communities and in our lives.

In terms of your ministry, can you share with the committee the targeted investment to address those who are most vulnerable, and those who have the lowest incomes, to ensure that these benefits are targeted to ensure these vulnerable Ontarians are getting the services they deserve?

**Hon. Helena Jaczek:** Thank you, Ms. Wong. As I think most people know, Ms. Wong and I worked for many years together at the health department in York region, and I know that looking after the vulnerable was something that we in public health were always extremely concerned about. We believe that the determinants of health certainly include income security, social inclusion and opportunities for education. These are all extremely important measures to keep our population healthy.

Many of those determinants of health are relatively easy for the majority of our population. For those who perhaps have a disability—whether developmental or

acquired—or those who lose their job, they need help. That's really the whole purpose of this particular ministry, and it's important that we do this.

It's also very important that when we have everyone achieving their full potential in our society they're able to contribute. If someone has income security, they're able to go out and purchase goods and services and be part of society. So helping individuals who are struggling in terms of putting a roof over their head and having sufficient food to eat is extremely important work. That's why we believe in this ministry that we need to continue to invest in the people of Ontario so that everyone can reach their full potential.

But we do not want to lose sight of the opportunities for employment. I've been saying to my ministry officials: To me this is almost the next frontier that we have to challenge, because in terms of those with disabilities especially, and those with mental health issues, gaining competitive employment is often extremely challenging. We're working with employers; we're doing everything we can to reduce that type of stigma.

We do have some champions out there in terms of employers who are actually learning from each other. One champion is an individual with a number of Tim Hortons franchises, Mark Wafer, and he is going to his colleagues in the business community to say, "I hired someone with a disability and you know what? It was great. They were so anxious to come to work, they felt they were contributing. Sure, you may need to tailor the workplace a little bit, and the opportunities to the individual, but it is rewarding work." So that type of inclusion is incredibly important. I've visited a number of places where individuals with disabilities are employed, and the sense of accomplishment in those individuals is really palpable.

Supporting the most vulnerable, providing what we do in terms of social assistance—whether it be Ontario Works, whether it be ODSP—is extremely important.

Our government, as you know, is committed to poverty reduction. The minister responsible is going to be establishing new goals to ensure that there is no more homelessness specifically, and that we take every measure we possibly can in terms of reducing poverty. Our ministry, as I've said several times through the course of the day, is absolutely committed to that work, doing it in the most efficient, streamlined—you've heard about some of the modernization efforts, the computerization and so on—doing everything as efficiently as possible, but ensuring that our most vulnerable do receive the types of supports that they need.

**Ms. Soo Wong:** Okay. Thank you.

**The Vice-Chair (Miss Monique Taylor):** Go ahead, Ms. Kiwala.

**Ms. Sophie Kiwala:** Thank you, Minister, for your previous reply. As you are aware, there is a lot of evidence suggesting that the developmental services system and the people it is intended to serve have been in need of attention and investment. This was certainly something that I became acutely aware of in my work in the

federal office. We shared the same building with the provincial office, and we very frequently saw cases that were extreme and worked on cases that were extremely challenging.

One of the things that became very highlighted during that period of time was families that would come in, and they would have children with disabilities who couldn't even manage a simple office visit. You can imagine—and I know you know this—how challenging it is for those families to even go to the store and buy milk or eggs. So I'm certainly very appreciative of how much we have invested and focused on families who are dealing with disabilities.

The 2014 budget is quite significant in terms of investment for the developmental sector and must surely have been welcome news. In fact, during the election period, many people approached me and said how glad they were that we were making this investment. As many of us heard during the election period, we were spoken about by leaders in the union movement who said that it was the most progressive and social-justice-minded budget for many decades, so I was very, very pleased to see that.

It is an area and a population that the government has recognized is in need of transformation. Obviously, many of us are very happy about that, but can you tell me what the government is doing to reform and improve the quality of support for developmental services?

**Hon. Helena Jaczek:** Thank you very much for that question. It does relate to one Mr. Walker asked earlier. Of course, this \$810 million over the next three years is one of the largest infusions ever into this sector. We really hope that it will take us to that next step in terms of transforming developmental services in Ontario.

Before I detail some of what we are going to do particularly with that \$810 million, I do want to say, though, that we have transformed the system over the last decade. I think it's worth noting that since our government took office, we have made dramatic changes in this sector, particularly in the last two years, but there was ongoing incremental improvement through the years, so that even if you look at the budget some 10 years ago, about \$1 billion was spent annually on developmental services in Ontario; now we have some \$1.7 billion spent annually on developmental services, and we have committed, with this new investment of funds, that that budget will grow to \$2 billion in 2016-17.

I think the greatest change is the move from large-scale institutions for adults with developmental disabilities into inclusion in the community, and having residential supports for individuals now out in the community. There have been references to elderly parents looking after adult children; and, certainly, a lot of the funding that we intend to invest in the sector is going to go towards housing those individuals who are now perhaps in their 50s or 60s and being looked after by elderly parents. Those situations are clearly urgent.

**1740**

We will be able to offer a variety of opportunities in the community, and those can vary from simply living

independently in an apartment unit with support coming in on a daily basis or checking in from time to time, through to group homes and through to pretty intensive residential support as well, with the involvement of the Ministry of Health, the CCAC and so on. We have a very diverse population in this sector. We know that each has a unique need.

We have a program that I'm really quite excited about. It's the Host Family Program. We have some 500 families in Ontario taking in individuals with developmental disabilities to care for them in their homes, which makes them part of a family. They are supported, obviously, in that endeavour.

We have a housing task force that's going to look at more opportunities for inclusion and perhaps look at some of the models that have proved to be the most successful out there, and also to help us manage the wait-list for residential accommodation.

Even this year we're very pleased with this investment. We have some 350 individuals who are in process of transitioning into a residential option suitable to their needs. Obviously, again, dealing with this population, moving to a new home may take some time. It requires visits, acclimatization and so on. But I'm very pleased to have heard that we're working on that first 350 individuals because this investment of the \$810 million will in fact house some 1,400 people who are on wait-lists. I think that's incredibly positive.

I mentioned in my opening remarks about opportunities for direct funding, through Passport in particular, and we're making real progress with that. This is the program that provides additional choice to individuals so that they can choose whether they want to join a municipal recreation program. They have the choice as to what suits their individual needs.

Again, since our budget was passed in July, we have provided an additional 1,900 individuals with Passport funding, which is, again, a little bit ahead of schedule, and we're going to keep pushing to ensure we try to get rid of the wait-lists as soon as we can.

We do believe that we have much better-coordinated assessment in terms of eligibility and opportunities for discovering what's available in a community. This is why we did establish Developmental Services Ontario's 11 offices in 2011. Of course, they are providing consistency—a common application form—and some fairness to the system. They are working with their community partners to ensure that a variety of services are provided in the community.

So in essence what we're doing with this investment is taking our developmental services to the next step. We've talked a little bit about the employment opportunities, and I'm really excited about that particular aspect as well. We do have a specific fund—it has been mentioned—the employment and modernization fund, that will literally tailor work opportunities for an individual.

I was actually in Kitchener, at a wonderful institution, Lutherwood. The caseworker there was literally assessing individuals with disabilities one by one, finding out what

their goals were, seeing if they needed some additional training and what they needed to get into the competitive workforce. In Kitchener, they're way ahead of their targets. It was excellent. I think that kind of local input is very, very important because this individual knew about the employment opportunities locally, was able to talk to employers and get them to check with people who had employed people with disabilities so that they were reassured that this could work for them.

It's very exciting news, I think, for the sector. I have met with many Community Living organizations across the province, and as I understand it, they are really very pleased with this infusion of investment into their sector.

**Ms. Sophie Kiwala:** That's excellent.

**The Vice-Chair (Miss Monique Taylor):** Mr. Balkissoon?

**Mr. Bas Balkissoon:** Do we have time?

**The Vice-Chair (Miss Monique Taylor):** Yes, you do.

**Mr. Bas Balkissoon:** Okay. Minister, it's a pleasure to see you here.

As you know, I had the privilege of serving on the Select Committee on Developmental Services with my colleague at the far end, Ms. Wong. We travelled the province from city to city. In almost every city that we went to, we heard from the public that they had concerns with eliminating the wait-lists for those children and adults who meet the requirements for support and weren't receiving it. I'm wondering if you could tell us what has happened since that committee report and where the ministry is going and what we can expect in the next little while.

**Hon. Helena Jaczek:** Well, clearly the government has responded to the select committee's report on developmental services—all 46 recommendations. I can say unreservedly that the spirit of those recommendations is exactly what the officials in my ministry are working very hard to ensure are implemented.

In terms specifically of wait-lists and some of the commitments that we had made with the additional funding, I can give you a number of figures. Certainly, we will be providing direct funding for approximately 21,000 people.

One of the areas, again, that the select committee was particularly interested in, and Ms. Jones did mention it last week after my ministerial statement, was support for transitions from childhood through to adulthood. Specifically, our investment is going to support more than 4,200 as they do navigate key life transitions, such as going to post-secondary school or getting a job. Our ministry, and actually my parliamentary assistant, through her mandate letter—I believe public today—has been charged with working specifically with the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Children and Youth Services to ensure that those transitions—

**The Vice-Chair (Miss Monique Taylor):** Minister, two minutes.

**Hon. Helena Jaczek:** I'm so disappointed.

I understand school boards are already signing on, because we need parents to be really aware that we want to start planning very, very early. For those who have a developmental disability, it was alluded to that often the course can be fairly predictable. We can probably start some planning around age 14 and ensure that there is a plan in place for each individual in terms of opportunities for training that helps the individual to reach employment. We want to get as much planning done in advance as possible.

As I mentioned previously, we intend to provide residential support for an additional 1,400 people. I mentioned the host family opportunities, the supported independent living programs. All of these will be supported through this additional investment—again, funding for front-line workers, which is a piece that is also very important.

I mentioned the dedicated workers that I've met. We've certainly enhanced their training opportunities to be a DSW, but we want to ensure that in fact they are compensated additionally. Those negotiations are ongoing as we move forward to implement some additional \$200 million over three years for support of front-line workers.

**Mr. Bas Balkissoon:** Minister, if I could just give a quick comment. You mentioned that your parliamentary assistant would be working with the Ministry of Education. I would ask you to also consider the Ministry of

Training, Colleges and Universities, because I have had some students coming out of the high school system—

**The Vice-Chair (Miss Monique Taylor):** Thank you, Mr. Balkissoon.

**Mr. Bas Balkissoon:** —and they want to go to community college, and there is not enough space.

**The Vice-Chair (Miss Monique Taylor):** Thank you.

**Hon. Helena Jaczek:** We will do that.

**The Vice-Chair (Miss Monique Taylor):** Okay. It is now 10 minutes to 6. We are expecting the bells to be ringing at any time for a vote. I'm going to test the room to see if the official opposition would like to start your time or whether you would like to adjourn at this point and start fresh tomorrow.

**Mr. Randy Hillier:** It's probably reasonable to adjourn now and start—you know, the bell will ring any time now.

**The Vice-Chair (Miss Monique Taylor):** Okay. We will do that, then. Thank you to the ministry.

I have a housekeeping matter. I believe we have an agreement not to bring the Ministry of Energy in tomorrow for possibly only 10 minutes, I believe it would be at this point, and have them return on the Tuesday following constituency week, which would be November 18. Are we in agreement? Agreed.

Okay. Adjourned. Thank you very much.

*The committee adjourned at 1751.*



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