

Legislative
Assembly
of Ontario



Assemblée
législative
de l'Ontario

**Official Report
of Debates
(Hansard)**

F-23

**Journal
des débats
(Hansard)**

F-23

**Standing Committee on
Finance and Economic Affairs**

Pre-budget consultations

1st Session
42nd Parliament
Friday 17 January 2020

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

Consultations prébudgétaires

1^{re} session
42^e législature
Vendredi 17 janvier 2020

Chair: Amarjot Sandhu
Clerk: Julia Douglas

Président : Amarjot Sandhu
Greffière : Julia Douglas

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



Service du Journal des débats et de l'interprétation
Salle 500, aile ouest, Édifice du Parlement
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Téléphone, 416-325-7400; télécopieur, 416-325-7430
Publié par l'Assemblée législative de l'Ontario

ISSN 1180-4386

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

**STANDING COMMITTEE ON
FINANCE AND ECONOMIC AFFAIRS**

Friday 17 January 2020

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

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

Vendredi 17 janvier 2020

The committee met at 0900 in room 151.

PRE-BUDGET CONSULTATIONS

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Good morning, everyone. We're meeting today for the purpose of pre-budget consultations. Each witness will receive up to seven minutes for his or her presentation, followed by eight minutes of questioning from the committee, divided equally amongst the recognized parties. Are there any questions before we begin?

ONTARIO HOSPITAL ASSOCIATION

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): I will now call up the first witnesses, from the Ontario Hospital Association. Please come forward. Please state your names for the record. You will have seven minutes for your presentation.

Mr. Altaf Stationwala: My name is Altaf Stationwala.

Mr. Anthony Dale: My name is Anthony Dale.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): You may start.

Mr. Altaf Stationwala: Good morning. My name is Altaf Stationwala. I'm president and CEO of Mackenzie Health as well as chair of the board of directors of the Ontario Hospital Association. I am joined here today by Anthony Dale, president and CEO of the OHA. We would like to thank you for this opportunity to present on behalf of the province's 141 publicly funded hospitals.

Since 1995, successive governments have called on Ontario hospitals to provide leadership and deliver results, regardless of the circumstances. From restructuring, which reduced the number of hospital corporations from 225 to 141 today, to improving accountability and transparency and building a focus on quality, hospitals have always shown tremendous leadership while improving patient care and operational performance.

We hope that the government of Ontario is proud that Ontario hospitals are without question the most efficient in Canada.

In late December, the OHA released a report on hospital efficiency with several important findings:

If Ontario was to fund hospitals at the average rate per capita for all other provinces, it would cost the province an additional \$4 billion.

Ontario has the lowest hospitalization rate, the shortest average hospital stay, and the lowest cost per in-patient stay in Canada.

Ontario has fewer acute-care beds than any other province, tying Mexico for the lowest number of beds among tracked OECD countries.

These findings can be looked at in two different ways. On one hand, it shows that hospitals have harvested a huge amount of savings, freeing up resources for other equally important priorities. On the other hand, with many hospitals now in a semi-permanent state of overcapacity, it also suggests that it simply isn't realistic to expect further major efficiencies to be found while simultaneously trying to end hallway health care.

We believe that Ontario hospitals are at a threshold. If we cross it, in our view, access to and quality of care at many organizations will be at risk.

Mackenzie Health, for example, consistently has one of the busiest emergency departments in the province, and we continue to experience unprecedented volumes.

Across the province, emergency wait times are growing too. There is now a daily average of 670 patients waiting in emergency departments for an in-patient bed province-wide. Some 10% of those patients will wait 33 hours for a bed before they're admitted.

For the first six months of 2019, Mackenzie Richmond Hill Hospital was overcapacity more than any other hospital in this province. In fact, within a 181-day period, there were only two days when we were not overcapacity. In December, we had approximately 400 urgent and emergent patient visits each day, with more than 500 on peak days. Our normal rate is about 350 patients per day.

These volumes result in increased hospital stays for patients, and increased stress, pressure and burnout for staff and physicians.

It is also costly. Mackenzie Health is now operating at a \$15-million in-year deficit as a result of opening unfunded beds to meet these volume demands.

These conditions are simply not sustainable—not for patients and not for those working in hospitals.

Now I'd like to turn it over to Anthony Dale for further comments.

Mr. Anthony Dale: Thanks, Altaf.

For years, the OHA has been concerned that this day would come. For years, we've been warning successive governments about the risk of flatlining hospital budgets without a significant expansion of capacity in other health services. This is a challenge that's not unique to Ontario. In the United Kingdom, policy experts are describing a collapse of emergency department performance this

winter. Royal College of Emergency Medicine president Katherine Henderson said recently that the national health system in England “is struggling to escape its spiral of decline.”

On behalf of Ontario hospitals, we call on the members of this Legislature, the government of Ontario and all the members of cabinet to ask themselves: Are you prepared to risk a similar assessment about Ontario hospital emergency departments in the not-too-distant future?

The reality is that there are no short-term, lasting solutions to ending hallway health care. Over the long term, the only way out is to build a very significant amount of new capacity outside the hospital setting, leveraging new technology to do so.

There are far too many patients waiting in hospital beds for the care they should be receiving in other, more appropriate places. The total number of ALC patients under hospital care reached 5,300 people this past fall—an all-time high. While the government has made announcements about its intention to expand access to long-term care, home and community care and mental health and addictions services, and has sponsored new models of care through Ontario health teams, the reality is that it will take years for these initiatives to take hold.

That is why, to our regret, we must continue to recommend a bridge strategy for Ontario hospitals as they deal with unprecedented and extraordinary conditions. There is no other choice but to invest in hospitals and maintain access to the services that are in place today.

As outlined in our pre-budget submission, the OHA is recommending an investment of \$922 million for the hospital sector, representing a 4.85% increase. We’re well aware of the magnitude of this investment, but it is necessary to address underlying inflationary pressures, increase service volumes and create capacity at the local level to ease hospital overcrowding.

To the members of this committee, I tell you: Backs are truly against the wall. Without this investment in Ontario’s next budget—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): You have one minute left.

Mr. Anthony Dale: —you will see many hospitals facing some very difficult decisions. And this is a decision that no government and no hospital would ever want to face.

This is, without a doubt, an inherited problem. This government did not create this dilemma. We deeply appreciate recent investments from this government and its clear, unequivocal commitment to ending hallway health care. And no matter what, hospitals will work with the government and their health care provider colleagues toward maintaining access and quality of care. But the truth is, in the absence of a significant investment, the amount of risk within Ontario’s hospitals next year will be very high.

We’re very happy to answer any questions that you might have.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you. We’ll start with the opposition side now for four minutes of questioning. MPP Arthur.

Mr. Ian Arthur: Good morning, and thank you for coming in today. You talked briefly about warning successive governments that this day would come, and then you went into the downward spiral that Britain is facing. Do you think we’re near the top of our own spiral if we don’t start investing in hospitals? Are we poised for that same path as the NHS is going through right now?

Mr. Anthony Dale: Well, I don’t think we’ve ever seen conditions like we are now seeing in Ontario. That’s the purpose behind our efficiency study. We said, “We have to present evidence to show that resources are being used to their maximum possible benefit,” and the evidence is clear: Ontario hospitals, by every single solitary metric, lead the entire country and, in some cases, the developed world, in their performance. So with the number of ALC patients as they are today, it really is a question of time, and we don’t think there’s much time left before we’re facing the situation that the NHS is.

Mr. Ian Arthur: And that chronic underinvestment: It exaggerates year after year and becomes worse and worse and worse.

Mr. Anthony Dale: Absolutely.

Mr. Ian Arthur: And can you touch on why there is a difference between health care inflation and inflation, and if you’re not being funded at the rate of health inflation, why that is a significant problem for hospitals?

Mr. Altaf Stationwala: I think it’s beyond health inflation. I think as we appreciate, it’s transforming the system and trying to recalibrate where care can be delivered more effectively. As Anthony pointed out, we in no way feel that we can’t be a champion in supporting care and moving patients out of hospitals and into more appropriate settings. But the reality is, we still have to invest in some of the more expensive parts of the system, like hospitals, until other parts of the system are able to absorb or manage some of that capacity.

It isn’t purely about inflation. We are unfortunately having to invest in a more expensive part of the system. But it is the fail-safe and it is what has to be sustained until the broader transformation can take effect.

0910

Mr. Ian Arthur: But you would need to be funded at least at the rate of health care inflation in order to maintain the current levels that you have to buy you enough time for that transformation?

Mr. Altaf Stationwala: Absolutely, and some of this is actually catch-up, right?

Mr. Ian Arthur: Right. That’s kind of what I’m getting at here.

Mr. Altaf Stationwala: Some of this is dealing with the fact that it’s not just dealing with going-forward inflationary increases, but it’s the fact that all of us have unfunded beds open today.

Mr. Ian Arthur: Yes. Go ahead.

Mr. Anthony Dale: May I comment?

Mr. Ian Arthur: Yes, of course.

Mr. Anthony Dale: If you look at per-capita funding for hospitals over almost a decade, the total amount for Ontario is just 5%. So you can see that even with some

recent reinvestments in the last three years, you're still looking at well under half a percent, on average, per capita for the entire decade.

Mr. Ian Arthur: Per year, per capita.

Mr. Anthony Dale: On one hand, that's an amazing performance—to do that—but you can see that it's not viable to expect that that can continue.

Mr. Ian Arthur: Sorry, 5% total funding increase over the last decade?

Mr. Anthony Dale: Per capita.

Mr. Ian Arthur: Per capita. Okay. That's remarkable. I think my colleague has some questions.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): MPP Shaw.

Ms. Sandy Shaw: Thank you for your presentation today. I do want to say that we have, in Ontario, some of the best health care workers that we can imagine who are essentially holding this system together by the work that they do every day. I've had an experience in the hospital very recently, and the only way it functions is because of those health care workers.

I would just want you to speak specifically about Ontario health teams very quickly. To me, I think that we're going in the right direction, but we still have to maintain the system—like changing a tire while you're driving down the road. Can you comment on how the funding will be impacted? Ontario health teams now will only have the one funding envelope.

Mr. Altaf Stationwala: I don't think we've gotten to that place yet in terms of the integrated funding, but what I will say is that the sector as a whole has embraced this opportunity to drive integrated care. We know that the hand-offs between various components or parts of the system are not working well. We know that, in our case and in any hospital, there's 15% to 20% of our patients who could be cared for in better settings with better outcomes.

So we absolutely do believe that those changes are needed and necessary—

Mr. Amarjot Sandhu: Thank you. I apologize to cut you off. We have to move to the government side now for four minutes of questioning. MPP Skelly.

Ms. Donna Skelly: We have very limited time, but please finish your thoughts.

Mr. Altaf Stationwala: I've forgotten where I was going—

Ms. Donna Skelly: Oh, okay. I'm going to be sharing my time with MPP Piccini, but quickly, what was your ask in terms of percentage of increase, to maintain the system?

Mr. Anthony Dale: About 4.85%.

Ms. Donna Skelly: And that was about \$900 million, you said?

Mr. Anthony Dale: Just over, yes.

Ms. Donna Skelly: About 4.85%. Okay, so 4.9%.

I wanted to talk about the Ontario health teams and the impact. It's a significant change in the way we will be delivering health care in Ontario. How do you feel that that will impact your budget in terms of—I know that you're saying that, as we get these rolled out, you still require funding to address the chronic underfunding over the past

few governments. How will it impact, in the long run, patient outcome?

Mr. Anthony Dale: We think that the major benefit of Ontario health teams, when they're fully developed, is that they'll allow providers, for the first time, to come together with very few barriers between them and organize services around the needs of individual people and local populations. Simple as it may sound, that's unprecedented. To do that, we do need, as Altaf was alluding to, to change the way we fund health care providers and allow them to make their own choices about how best to invest locally to meet local needs.

You can see that our system is in a terrible imbalance, with so many patients that are classified as alternate level of care. They're waiting to be discharged from hospital for another, more appropriate setting. If we can allow those providers to themselves invest in the right kinds of services at the local level, person by person by person, we feel that we'll definitely be able to provide better quality of care.

I did want to touch on one additional piece, if I could, because Ontario health teams are absolutely supported by the OHA, and we're very supportive of how they're being developed. To end hallway medicine and hallway health care, we do need to continue to invest in capacity-building across the whole continuum of care. One of the government's most concrete and significant commitments, to build some 15,000 new long-term-care beds, is something that the hospital sector is relying on, absolutely, in addition to significant expansion in home and community services, specialized services such as children's mental health that Kim will talk about later. But we need to make sure that that construction is on track, and we need to make sure that those beds are built in time. Best-case scenario, we're told, is that from announcement to ribbon-cutting, it's three years to open a new long-term-care facility, and I fear that we're behind in this province in that capital construction project.

So the math for us is relentless. We need to build capacity across the continuum. I encourage all members of the committee and the Legislature—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): One minute.

Mr. Anthony Dale: —to continue to examine that long-term-care construction and expansion initiative. But, in the meantime, that's why we're recommending a bridge strategy for our hospitals this year.

Ms. Donna Skelly: I have to tell you, we are aware of that. It's frustrating, and we're trying to get those beds rolled out.

I know that MPP Piccini wanted to speak to it, Mr. Chair.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): MPP Piccini.

Mr. David Piccini: Good morning, gentlemen. Thank you very much for being here this morning.

I just wanted to touch a bit on small and medium-sized hospitals. You mentioned a number of large hospitals. I represent a rural riding, so I just wanted to touch on that.

You talked about some bridge strategies. I know we made a commitment to fix the funding formula for small

and medium-sized hospitals. At Campbellford Memorial Hospital in my riding, that was the number one issue that both professionals and the CEO raised. And then at Northumberland Hills, another hospital in my riding, where we invested just under \$4 million to address historical shortfalls, I think it was really welcomed.

Can you talk to that commitment to fixing the funding formula, and the importance of that to address the very issues you presented on today?

Mr. Anthony Dale: Sure. I do—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you. Sorry. I apologize for cutting you off again. That concludes our time. Thank you so much for your presentation.

CHILDREN'S MENTAL HEALTH ONTARIO

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): I will now call on our next witness, Children's Mental Health Ontario. If you could please come forward. Please state your name for the record, and you have seven minutes for your presentation.

Ms. Kim Moran: My name is Kim Moran. I'm the CEO of Children's Mental Health Ontario. With me today is Fizza Abbas, who is the program coordinator for the New Mentality, which raises hundreds of children's voices across the province about demanding change.

Ms. Fizza Abbas: Waiting: Did you know that if a child or youth has a serious mental health problem, they will need to wait up to two years just to access basic services? Because they wait, they sometimes become ill and often suicidal.

Almost 100,000 kids a year are going to the hospital looking for help. You may think it's a great idea, but it isn't. The last place a youth with a mental health issue wants to be is at a hospital, because mental health is not like a broken arm. Treatment takes time. This pattern of waiting, then having to rush to a hospital when in crisis, and then back to waiting, has become almost like a revolving door, and that is not okay.

I ask that you think of a young person in your life who is important to you, maybe your child, a niece or a nephew, or the child of a close friend. Now imagine they were experiencing a mental health crisis and they made the brave and necessary choice to seek help rather than harming themselves, but instead were asked to wait years just to access services, and their only other option was to visit the emergency room. This is the reality of many young people because of the lack of child and youth mental health services.

Thirty-six per cent of Ontario parents have sought help for their child. Of those who did, four in 10 didn't receive the help they needed or, as we currently sit here today, they are still waiting for treatment. This is unacceptable.

We must recognize that the current children and youth mental health system is extremely crisis-oriented. The policy paper you see before you, From Crisis to Quality, was written in 2018 by a passionate group of youth on our Youth Action Committee. Their call to action is to address the gaps, and they have developed recommendations to

help build a child and youth mental health system that is one of quality.

These youth are frustrated; kids across the province are frustrated. Though these youth have heard many praises by senior government officials on their recommendations, they fail to see any action being taken by the government.

Additionally, there are many kids who aren't reaching out for help due to the lack of culturally appropriate services available to them. They have become invisible. As someone who is of South Asian descent, I have never been able to access any mental health services due to the stigma and cultural barriers that my community faces, which is why it is very personal to me that all young people in this province be able to get the help they need.

We have heard many commitments made by the government, most notably a promise of \$3.8 billion in funding for mental health, with a commitment to child and youth mental health as a top priority, yet we fail to see any action being taken. There is a crisis. Kids and families are hurting—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): One minute left.

Ms. Fizza Abbas: —and little is being done to support them.

Youth from across the province are demanding to see change now.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Sorry. You still have four minutes.

Ms. Fizza Abbas: They ask individuals such as yourselves, who hold power and the privilege of representing your communities in government, to take action. The future of this wonderful province lies in the hands of our youth, and we cannot afford to lose them.

0920

Ms. Kim Moran: So I'm here again sounding the alarm on child and youth mental health and addictions. We're running out of time. We have a whole generation of youth at risk now. Since I presented to this committee last year, some children on wait-lists for treatment are still on the same wait-list that they were last year when I spoke. In fact, from the time that you knocked on doors across your constituencies, where you heard that mental health and addictions were critical to families, some of those kids are still waiting.

While the government has worked to transform the health system and Ontario health teams, kids and families still wait. While the government has worked on legislation starting to establish the mental health and addictions centre of excellence, kids and families still wait. While we sit here today, kids and families wait, and some are going to die because they don't get the help they need.

I know first-hand that kids and families can't wait. Many of you know that I do this work because it's important to me. My daughter became ill at 11, and I watched her go from sad to depressed to suicidal in just two and a half months. They can't wait years. Because there's no help available, you have to be in crisis to get help, and then you still wait.

This was almost a decade ago. My daughter is almost 20, but things haven't changed in that period. Successive

governments haven't changed that. While they wait for treatment, too many kids end up in hospital. Over 90,000 kids are in hospital, creating pressures in hospitals for services they don't need to have in hospital.

The child and youth mental health sector has been incredibly innovative with few resources. There are over 80 walk-in clinics across the province, but they can't keep up with rising demand. We can't innovate ourselves out of this problem. The prevalence of depression and anxiety in children has risen by 50%. Because of declining stigma, three times more kids are looking for help, and that's a good thing, but funding for child and youth mental health centres over the same period has decreased by 50%. It doesn't make any sense.

Wait times are two years long in many places: in Thunder Bay, over two years; in Ottawa, more than a year. Where you live and who you are should not be barriers to sometimes life-saving child and youth mental health care.

The clock is ticking. You will be door-knocking again soon, and you will have to face families who are still waiting. Long wait times and poor navigation have to be addressed immediately.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): One minute left.

Ms. Kim Moran: Increased annualized investment in community child and youth mental health centres of \$150 million is needed now. The solutions aren't complicated. You can help 30,000 more families by hiring front-line mental health professionals. There's a pledged commitment on the table of \$3.8 billion. You have the money. You will be hard-pressed to find a better case for investment for early intervention with children. You can invest \$150 million and see savings of approximately \$260 million annually in hospitals, and you can add back half a billion dollars a year in lost productivity to the economy for parents missing work to care for their children; help 30,000 more families; and bring wait times for counselling and therapy down to 30 days.

I don't want to be here again next year sounding the alarm bell. You don't want to be knocking on doors and saying that no progress has been made for families. Let's get going now.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you so much. I apologize to cut you off.

We'll start with the government side this time for four minutes of questioning. MPP Roberts?

Mr. Jeremy Roberts: Thank you, Fizza and Kim, for coming to present today, for speaking about this really critical topic and for speaking so passionately. One of the things that we know in Ontario is that 70% of mental health issues begin in childhood, and we know that one in five students in grades 7 to 12 are dealing with mental health issues.

In terms of the education piece—I'm curious here. How important do you guys think the ongoing work to include that mental health, that social and emotional learning, in our curriculum is—if you can comment on that curriculum piece and how critical that will be going forward.

Ms. Kim Moran: Absolutely. Changes have to be made across the continuum. Investments a number of

years ago that trained teachers to include in the curriculum mental health information, as well as to early identify children who are struggling, are critically important.

The problem is that there's a huge bottleneck. Teachers identify kids who are struggling, and then there's nowhere to turn to. Those kids wait, and so, while they wait, they're disruptive in classrooms or they're not going to school. While that is important, there haven't been investments made across the continuum so it makes any sense. Now teachers just say to me that they don't bother anymore because the system doesn't work properly for them.

Mr. Jeremy Roberts: We know that an investment has been made in 2019-20 to hire 180 new front-line mental health workers across the education system. How important are those workers going to be in starting to address that issue that you're talking about?

Ms. Kim Moran: I think that certainly the investment was welcomed, and getting workers on the ground is important, but the need is so much greater than that. We estimate that about 1,400 mental health workers are necessary. To be honest, it's not going to address the wait time issue whatsoever.

Mr. Jeremy Roberts: Sure. One last question before I turn it over to my colleague: Going a bit local, one of the projects I've been working on advocating for back home in Ottawa is our children's hospital 1doorforcare project, which we provided the first stage of funding for in our last budget. How important are projects like this, that are going to help to centralize services, to make that navigation piece easier for families?

Ms. Kim Moran: It's critical. I think that it is absolutely critical that those types of one-door projects or ease-of-access projects are there. But you have to have the mental health workers behind those doors or else it's really not going to do anything. Even though we instituted some wonderful things in Ottawa that service providers have done a marvellous job with, wait times are still over a year, and that reflects that we just don't have the right mental health workers on the ground.

Mr. Jeremy Roberts: I appreciate that, Kim. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): MPP Skelly.

Ms. Donna Skelly: Thank you for your presentation. My question is more about what is triggering this tsunami. We know that it is unsustainable and that we're seeing this incredible growth in the number of young people who—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Fifty-five seconds.

Ms. Donna Skelly: —mental health. What happened?

Ms. Kim Moran: I think that the research is still not entirely clear. The fact that we have an increase in prevalence in depression and anxiety actually just came out in the most recent research. A 50% increase is quite startling. The researchers are busy now trying to figure out exactly why that prevalence is increasing. There are all kinds of ideas about why that might happen, but it's not going to become clear for a little while until the research is all in and, unfortunately, until we figure that out, we're going to have to make sure that we have the treatment capacity in place in order to help kids.

Ms. Donna Skelly: I just wanted to draw on your experience quickly—a hunch. What do you think it is? Is it social media? Is it technology? Is it—

Ms. Kim Moran: I think it's probably all of the above. I think that what we're seeing is that pressures on children have increased over the last decade, and we're seeing this increase in prevalence, so I think it's multiple different factors.

Ms. Donna Skelly: Has technology—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you. I apologize. We have to move to the opposition side now. MPP Mamakwa.

Mr. Sol Mamakwa: Thank you for your presentation. Children's mental health is very near and dear to my heart just because, over the holidays—because I come from northwestern Ontario and a riding where we have fly-in communities—there was a significant number of children, youth, who took their own lives. Since November 27, there have been eight people who have died by suicide.

Sometimes I've asked questions in the House with respect to how the province, how this government, can respond, and sometimes I'm referred to—because we live on-reserve as First Nations—that that's a federal responsibility. To me, I think lives, especially of children, should be a non-partisan issue; not only that, but also a non-jurisdictional issue. We are talking about human lives. I'm just wondering: We're pretty much in a crisis state in our communities. How can this government, do you feel, can help, especially with the Far North, where the provision of mental health services is minimal at best, and sometimes they're non-existent at worst?

Ms. Kim Moran: Absolutely, and I'm so sorry for the losses in your community. It's unacceptable. At a very fundamental level, it's not a complicated solution: We need to hire more mental health professionals. In Thunder Bay, you wait almost a year for help. In Kenora, it's longer than that. These are kids who can't wait. I talked about how my daughter went from sad to depressed to suicidal in two and a half months. How could you wait a year? That doesn't make sense.

0930

We lose too many kids when we wait. I think that's behind the passion of what Fizza was saying, how youth are so frustrated to think that every time they have the courage to turn for help, that they're just relegated to the back of these long wait-lists. For kids in the north, it should be quick. We should never have to make kids wait that long.

So I think the solutions are very simple: You hire more mental health professionals. Certainly, we have to improve how we deliver service through technology, but most of the kids would say to us directly that you can't really replace face-to-face help for kids who are very seriously ill.

Mr. Sol Mamakwa: Last year, the government had said that they increased mental health by \$174 million. Are you aware of whether any of these increases were allocated towards children and youth mental health?

Ms. Kim Moran: Absolutely. There was some directed, and MPP Piccini talked about that. The problem is

that we're so, so far under in meeting demands, that's almost like a drop in the bucket in some ways. The investment was extremely well received, but we have so much more to go. We need 1,400 more workers, so that is substantial. There really needs to be a big investment. That's why this platform commitment was so well received, but we need to see that money flow and make sure that kids can get the help they need just as soon as they need it.

Mr. Sol Mamakwa: Thank you.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): That concludes our time. Thank you so much for your presentation.

ONTARIO HEALTH COALITION

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): I would now like to call upon the next witness, from the Ontario Health Coalition, if you can please come forward. Please state your name for the record. You have seven minutes for your presentation.

Ms. Natalie Mehra: My name is Natalie Mehra. I'm the executive director of the Ontario Health Coalition. I'd like to introduce you to Hisham Shokr. He is our director of campaigns and research. Thank you very much for hearing from us today. I will be echoing some of the things that previous speakers have spoken about today, but perhaps bringing a bit of a different perspective to them.

The Ontario Health Coalition hears from tens of thousands of people every year about their experiences trying to access health care and with the health care system once they're in it. For four decades now, Ontario has experienced relentless health restructuring, and that restructuring has been centred around the downsizing of Ontario's hospitals, it has featured rationing of access to long-term-care homes, and it has often included mergers and amalgamations of existing care providers and entities and the off-loading and privatization of formerly publicly covered health care services.

Under the Canada Health Act, medically necessary hospital and physician services are to be provided to all Canadians based on need and not on their ability to pay, on equitable terms and conditions, without financial barriers. The provinces are expected to uphold the Canada Health Act, which was passed unanimously in the House of Commons, but to do so, the fundamental job of the provinces is to measure and plan to meet population need for care.

The last measure of hospital capacity that was done in Ontario was in 1995. There has been no measure and plan to meet population need for care since the 1990s. The last expansion of long-term care occurred from 1997 to 2000, with a hangover of some beds being built through to 2003. The wait-lists for long-term care continue to escalate dramatically. As of July of this year, there were more than 36,200 Ontarians on wait-lists for long-term care, up from 34,000 a year before.

Ontario, by every measure, is at the bottom of the country, or very close to dead last in Canada, in terms of hospital and long-term-care capacity. It is beyond time that

we turn the corner on fiscal restraint and cuts to cornerstone health care services. In this year's provincial budget, overall health care funding was set at less than the rate of inflation and population growth and did not account at all for aging pressures. Hospital funding alone was set at less than the rate of inflation. Long-term-care funding was set at less than the rate of inflation and yet, despite the huge wait-lists and the fact that we have the second-fewest long-term-care beds of any province in Canada and the fewest hospital beds of any province in Canada—and we look at all hospital beds.

The Ontario Hospital Association reported to only and focused on acute-care beds, but hospitals in Ontario and all across Canada provide a whole array of care, including complex continuing care—that's chronic care; they provide palliative care, convalescent care, rehabilitation, an array of services that they should rightfully provide and are necessary for the population. By measuring all hospital beds, we are dead last in Canada. The only countries in the entire OECD that have fewer beds than Ontario are Mexico and Chile.

The OHA talked about the crisis that the Red Cross—the Red Cross had declared a humanitarian crisis in the UK in their hospital system based on the same things that we see every day in Ontario: serious ambulance off-load delays, patients waiting on stretchers in hallways for care, compromised health, even death, as a result of waiting too long for care. Those things happen in Ontario and are happening in Ontario all the time. And the UK, I should say, has more hospital beds per capita than does Ontario.

By every measure, we are now at the bottom of the country. We fund our hospitals at the lowest rate in Canada. We have the least amount of nursing care per weighted case—that's per average patient—of anywhere in the country. The Ontario Hospital Association, as managers, talks about length of stay from a patient's point of view. What it means is that patients are pushed out of hospitals faster in Ontario than anywhere else in Canada. We have the lowest hospitalization rate from a patient's point of view. What that means is that it's harder to get into a hospital than anywhere else in Canada.

They talk about ALC patients—alternate level of care patients. It's the new word for what used to be termed bed blockers. Those patients are still today treated as though they're in the way. They're subject to coercive measures to move them out of hospital. In the last two to three years, they've been subject to movement into facilities that are not health care facilities, often private, for-profit, unregulated retirement homes and other entities that have no regulation, no patient safety. In so doing, the government is throwing away decades of growth of regulatory regimes, legislation and protections for humanitarian, compassionate care, access to care without financial barrier, and safety. We ask you to take seriously the fact that moving people into private, unregulated levels of care because we are not—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): One minute.

Ms. Natalie Mehra:—providing sufficient care in our hospitals or our long-term-care homes is unacceptable, as

is the use of sunrooms, hallways, closets and bathrooms to put patients because there is no space.

Our recommendations centre around improving funding and improving the care levels in long-term care and in hospitals from the perspective of patients and hands-on care providers. You can see all of the charts in our written submission, but what we're asking you fundamentally to do is rethink. This is driven by fiscal policy, so rethink the fiscal policy that has prioritized tax cuts that benefit the wealthy over health care that benefits all Ontarians and is desperately needed.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you. We'll start with the opposition side this time. MPP Shaw.

Ms. Sandy Shaw: Thank you very much for your presentation. There's so much here to talk about. We know that Ontario is basically at the bottom of the pack in Canada when it comes to funding hospitals, but you talked a lot about long-term care. We were in a terrible situation with the previous government, but things are not getting any better. We're really going from bad to worse as far as making sure that people have access to the care that's appropriate for them, but I want to focus on long-term care.

It's my understanding that under the terms of this government we haven't really opened any beds. I think 21 new beds have actually been opened. We talk about beds, but what we don't talk about are the long-term-care workers who look after people who are in these beds and in these homes. Can you talk a little bit about the levels of care that are being provided to patients or people that are in long-term care by the workers in that sector?

0940

Ms. Natalie Mehra: Yes. Thank you for the question. In terms of the access issue that you were describing, right now there are more than 36,200 people on wait-lists for long-term care. We applaud this government—and all parties, actually—for promising to expand the sector, but even if you take the 15,000 new beds that are supposed to be built within five years, which are late now, when those are built, according to the fiscal accountability office of Ontario, there will be 37,000 people on the wait-list. There is no plan to meet population need for long-term care. That is a fundamental problem. What we're asking for is a plan to actually meet population need, to build capacity to meet population need for long-term care and for hospital care, because that's where we're seeing enormous suffering at this point, and there is no plan whatsoever.

In terms of the levels of care, we provided a chart in our submission on page 17. The actual hands-on care has declined even while the acuity, by every measure—that's the complexity and the heaviness of the care needs of the residents—has gone up. Patients that are now discharged from hospitals are dramatically more complex than a decade ago or a decade before that or a decade before that. People that are now in long-term-care homes are the psychogeriatric patients of 10 or 15 years ago, the chronic care or complex continuing care patients of 10 years ago. That's why we have a really fundamental problem with this ALC notion, because those people, many of them, are

complex continuing care patients. They are people waiting for mental health beds and so on. This notion that they can all be moved out when, currently, long-term-care-home staff and administrators are complaining that the complexity of the residents they have is far too high for care levels is extremely serious, because the homicide rate in Ontario's long-term-care homes is higher than that of the largest urban centres of the province. It's unacceptable. It's not safe. The care levels are far too low.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): One minute.
MPP Arthur.

Mr. Ian Arthur: Very quickly: All three of the first presentations have talked about chronic underfunding in health care and that it has gone on for decades. Everyone has the right to have their tax dollars spent well; no one is going to argue that. But do you think that we're approaching a point where we have to decide what we actually value as citizens of Ontario and what we're willing to actually pay for to create the kind of province we want to be in?

Ms. Natalie Mehra: Well, I think the people of Ontario did speak. In the last election, the promise was to end hallway medicine. The fact is that actually, by significant markers, things are worse now than they were a year and a half ago. In terms of long-term care, things are measurably worse now than they were a year and a half ago. So we're not actually going in the right direction at all. Any improvement in funding will matter. A 5.3% increase in hospital funding will make a big difference. Those beds have to come online as fast as possible in long-term care—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you. I apologize to cut you off. We have to move to the government side now.

MPP Skelly.

Ms. Donna Skelly: It's so nice to see—you have done this for so many years.

Ms. Natalie Mehra: Yes. Twenty years.

Ms. Donna Skelly: I remember interviewing you many, many years ago, when I worked at CHCH. So kudos to you for your passion.

I wanted to talk about the Ontario health teams because anybody that I have spoken to who is within the sector has really supported the concept of this massive transformation in the delivery of health care, recognizing that there are so many pressures on our health care dollars. As you mentioned, long-term care is certainly one of them. Our government is committed to increasing the number of long-term-care beds to the tune of thousands. Having to do that, to actually roll them out, isn't as easy as one might think. It takes years to go from getting a licence to getting a bed and a person in the bed. It's not as quick as we would hope. But I wanted you to speak to your perception of the changes that we've introduced through the Ontario health teams.

Ms. Natalie Mehra: So the premise of your question or part of your—

Ms. Donna Skelly: How do you feel about the direction the government is taking, working with local experts in the

field right across Ontario, with developing these Ontario health teams and rolling them out?

Ms. Natalie Mehra: Part of the thing about the building of the long-term-care beds that you spoke about—the truth is that we don't have to use this capital-development model. The beds could be built publicly. We don't need to use the system that's being used now that does take an incredibly long time. I just wanted to put that out there. There are other options.

Ms. Donna Skelly: Can you share some of the options?

Ms. Natalie Mehra: Yes. We'll put them together and bring them to you, for sure.

Ms. Donna Skelly: Oh, okay. Thank you.

Ms. Natalie Mehra: Thank you.

On the OHTs, the Ontario health teams, the problem is—at this point, not much has happened. It has been a year and a half, and really, nothing is happening. There are teams; they are very large. They're talking amongst themselves. They are providers only. There is no governance of them, so there are no public meetings. There is no democracy in them. There is no oversight. And it's not clear what the goal is. There is no written plan for them that is publicly available that says what the end goal is.

When the minister announced them, she talked about taking—I think it was 1,200 health care providers across Ontario and bringing them down to 30 to 40. If we're talking about an end goal of major mergers and amalgamations, I would say, respectfully, that you should look at the history of mergers and amalgamations in Ontario. Hospital restructuring cost \$3.9 billion—

Ms. Donna Skelly: That was more—I think you were talking about the administration. But it's interesting, because from the physicians to the nurses to the health care providers—patients and even administrators are saying that this approach to the delivery of health care is really transformative and it's necessary, because we have—

Ms. Natalie Mehra: From a patient's point of view, though, if I may, nothing has happened. There's no difference. And providers, many of them, have a vested interest in expanding, so—

Ms. Donna Skelly: We just announced them, though.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): One minute.

Ms. Donna Skelly: I think MPP Piccini wanted to speak to that.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): MPP Piccini.

Mr. David Piccini: Yes, thank you very much. Thank you for your presentation today.

From someone in rural Ontario, where we've launched our OHT, I just had to interject. A number of the things you said are categorically incorrect. We have 24 online right now. Say that to the 13 local providers, grassroots, who have designed them, one of which had two patient advisers on the board. You say there's no oversight—categorically incorrect. We have 13 community members on OHT Northumberland. You said that nothing has been done—no goals. We have four goals: community paramedicine, which we're rolling out; we've got rural health hubs in Colborne popping up.

When you say that it doesn't have an impact on the patient, what do you have to say to rural residents in Colborne who are now, under this government, for the first time ever, going to have a health care facility in Colborne?

Ms. Natalie Mehra: I'm sorry, but an OHT has not built a health care facility. It has nothing to do with building a health care facility—

Mr. David Piccini: They've designed it.

Ms. Natalie Mehra: But nothing has happened yet. There is no new health care—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you. I apologize to cut you off.

That concludes our time. Thank you so much for your presentation.

TOURISM INDUSTRY ASSOCIATION OF ONTARIO

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): I would now like to call upon the next witness, from the Tourism Industry Association of Ontario, if you can please come forward. Please state your name for the record. You have seven minutes for your presentation.

Ms. Beth Potter: Good morning. My name is Beth Potter. I'm the president and CEO of the Tourism Industry Association of Ontario. It's my pleasure to be here this morning with all of you.

Tourism matters in Ontario, and here's why: Our industry represents more than \$34 billion in annual receipts and 4.3% of the provincial GDP. We contribute more than \$5 billion in tax revenue to the province and close to \$1.3 billion to municipalities. This makes our industry a larger economic contributor than agriculture, forestry and mining combined.

We contribute to the province's economy and quality of life by creating jobs, promoting pride of place and celebrating the diverse communities across the province. We employ close to 400,000 people in more than 189,000 businesses located in every riding, welcoming 141 million visitors every year.

When visitors spend money, it drives jobs. For every \$1 million spent, we create 13 new jobs and more than \$600,000 in wages and salaries. We are also the largest employer of young people in the province, employing 23% of those aged 15 to 24. But we can do more. We can contribute more. We can employ more.

In 2018, international overnight arrivals to Canada reached a new height of 21.13 million visitors, a 1% increase over 2017. However, the United Nations World Tourism Organization reports that globally, tourism arrivals increased by 6% in the same year. How has Ontario fared? In the last two years, tourist arrivals have grown by less than 2%. We are leaving money on the table.

Our members recognize that the provincial government is determined to protect what matters most in Ontario. We are proud to emphasize that tourism tax dollars help support health care and education. But with strategic investments, partnerships and policy adaptations, we can

leverage the province's power to grow tourism's already impressive economic contribution to the province.

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We anticipate the release of a new provincial plan by the Minister of Heritage, Sport Tourism and Culture Industries soon. We know that in this fiscal budget, the government will be tackling key challenges such as funding infrastructure investments, labour, housing supply, taxation and the environment.

Keep in mind that tourism is a powerful force. Tourism in Ontario has a well-documented history of a high return on investment. We know that with strategic investment, this will continue.

We hope to see continued support for the valuable work that Destination Ontario undertakes in international marketing by establishing a three-year rolling funding model for the agency; restoring the annual funding envelope for Ontario's regional tourism organizations; committing \$2 million per year to Indigenous tourism marketing and product development to grow the number of market-ready Indigenous tourism businesses; and maintaining investments in programs such as Celebrate Ontario, the Ontario Cultural Attractions Fund and the Tourism Development Fund. These investments will allow for continued and expanded reach into key domestic and international markets, workforce development to shore up the labour gap, and product development that will grow both the leisure and meetings and conventions business.

In 2017, the previous government gave municipalities the authority to implement a municipal accommodation tax. The intent was to give the tourism industry and municipalities access to additional revenues to invest in the industry infrastructure and marketing at the local level, both leading to economic growth. The MAT has been implemented across many regions of the province; however, the regulatory framework requires amendments to ensure that the funds are used as originally intended and that there are no unnecessary delays in accessing these funds.

We have directly consulted with more than 85 destinations across the province and, as such, have a series of recommendations, which are outlined in our submission.

On the labour front, like other industries, tourism businesses are plagued by the province's acute labour shortage. By 2035, we estimate that more than 91,000 tourism jobs in Ontario will go unfilled due to a lack of workforce supply. As an industry, we have been working on solutions to try to fill the gap. One such initiative is Tourism SkillsNet Ontario. This program is working at the local level with tourism and employment organizations to close the growing skills gap by aligning recruitment and training models with the skills required by the businesses. We would recommend continued investment in this strategic partnership.

Housing is another factor that continues to foster unfilled jobs. I've shared that tourism is the largest employer of young people in the province, thus positioning our industry as one of the largest employers of renters. As such, we would recommend that the Ministry of Municipal

Affairs and Housing repeal the imposed limits to the inclusionary zone, allowing municipalities to determine where inclusionary housing will be located, and that the Ontario government create a mandate to have a percentage of new housing developments be purpose-built rentals, as opposed to condos, as they provide a key source of affordable housing.

Finally, I'd like to address infrastructure investment. As climate change and sustainable tourism rise to the top of the priority list for travellers and businesses alike, we support investments and action plans that lead to a greener Ontario. We applaud the 2019 budget announcement that allocated \$315 million over the next five years for broadband and cellular expansion. In a digital world, for tourism businesses to be successful, there must be broadband and cellular services in every community. We ask that this funding be renewed and the investment be continued until all rural, northern and Indigenous communities are connected.

We would also encourage continued support for the Ministry of the Environment, Conservation and Parks Made-in-Ontario Environment Plan which recommends a commitment of \$5 billion for more subways and relief lines, thereby reducing carbon emissions and making it easier for employees and visitors to access the GTHA.

We also ask for support for the development of a transportation hub at Toronto's Pearson that would provide connections beyond the airport and for rail investment projects through the creation of grants that would support travellers accessing the province beyond the GTA.

There is no one-size-fits-all solution for building a stronger economy. There are many cogs in the wheel, and tourism is but one. But it is a large one, and it can drive the momentum of economic growth. By providing long-term and strategic investments to the tourism industry, you will ensure the continued sustainable growth of the province's economy.

On behalf of the businesses and employees in our industry, I thank you today for your time and for your consideration of our recommendations.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): We will move to the government side at this time for questioning. MPP Sheref?

Mr. Sheref Sabawy: Thank you very much for your submission. I'm really proud to see an advocate like you giving this submission.

Our government, through the Ministry of Heritage, Sport, Tourism and Culture Industries, has been committed to investing in tourism and growing the industry, specifically in the cultural tourism part, in our provincial announcements such as increasing access to attractions like the Art Gallery of Ontario, the Royal Ontario Museum and multiple historical parks and other government tourist attractions, as well as the building blocks like adding the tax credits for some parts of the industry, to promote and enhance the ability of providers to grow their business, as well as the continuous enhancement and drive to attract more tourism to Ontario, either through the movie industry or standard tourism.

How do you see our plan in putting those building blocks together, to add more to the industry GDP in Ontario?

Ms. Beth Potter: Thank you for the question. I think that the investments that are being made and the commitments that are being made are very positive. We constantly need to be evolving our product offering, and these investments certainly help with that.

I do believe that the inclusion—we talk about culture and heritage and film as separate industries from the tourism industry, but tourists come to see those things, so it's all part and parcel of the same effort.

I think that if we continue to evolve and augment our product offering, that gives us a better story to sell when we are out marketing, when Destination Ontario and other destinations across the province are out marketing to international visitors to come to Ontario.

Mr. Sheref Sabawy: So you agree that we are going in the right direction in putting these, I would say, building blocks to help you do that marketing piece or to help the international providers to attract to Ontario.

Ms. Beth Potter: I do.

Mr. Sheref Sabawy: Perfect.

Ms. Beth Potter: I also would just like to say that you can't do one without the other.

Mr. Sheref Sabawy: Of course.

Ms. Beth Potter: The building blocks are an important part—the investment in them—and the marketing and the workforce are also an important part.

Mr. Sheref Sabawy: Okay. I will turn to—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): MPP Piccini.

Mr. David Piccini: Thank you very much for being here. It's great to see you again. I had a quick question. Coming from Port Hope, Ontario, proud home to It Chapter Two and One, I can certainly say that you're spot-on when you say the economic impact and all the things that that brings.

I know that Minister MacLeod was in Los Angeles recently, where she met with Universal Studios and Apple TV, just to name a few.

I always lamented, working internationally prior, the lack of times I would see Canadians really flexing their muscles on the international stage. Talk to the importance of travelling and talking about Ontario, promoting our province as a destination, and what other recommendations you would have for our government globally to attract continued investment into Ontario.

Ms. Beth Potter: Absolutely. I think it's a real matter of: You don't know what you don't know. If we don't get out there and tell our story, industries won't understand what we have to offer. I think that the minister's trip to Los Angeles was a very effective one, and we will see, and we have already seen, a positive outcome from that.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you. That concludes our time for the government side. We'll move to the opposition side now for questioning. MPP Arthur.

Mr. Ian Arthur: Thank you so much for coming in today, and thank you for your presentation. I was struck by the scope of your presentation in pulling the other

things in and talking about how tourism needs to be viewed as part of a larger puzzle. You talked about housing and purpose-built rentals and the need for that, and the implications that climate change is going to have. Can you elaborate a little bit on what the tourism industry actually sees those implications as being? What are the effects, and how is it hurting?

I come from Kingston. We've had to deal with remarkable flooding. Wolfe Island is in my riding, and they rely heavily on tourism in the summertime. They earn almost all of the income over the summer months. With the floods, it was basically non-existent last year.

How is the industry preparing for that, and what kind of supports do you actually need?

Ms. Beth Potter: I'll speak to housing first. If there's nowhere for workers to live, then how do we employ them? This is particularly true when you get out into rural and northern Ontario, that the lack of affordable housing is prominent. That's why we speak to that, because if we want our employees to have a good home to come home to at the end of the day, we want them to be well looked after.

1000

When it comes to the environment, it's a number of things. One of the great things that we sell about Ontario is our outdoors, and if we're not taking steps to protect it now then we are not going to have something to attract visitors to the economy in the future. The effects of the high water this year and two years ago impacted not just access to Wolfe Island but it also impacted marinas across the province. It impacted restaurants and events that were on low-lying land. It's a rolling effect, and you don't necessarily think about the impacts. You see the news coverage, and you see sandbagging along a main street in small-town Ontario because they're trying to protect their businesses. They're trying to protect the livelihoods of the people who live in those rural communities. A lot of those businesses are in the tourism industry.

Mr. Ian Arthur: Absolutely, and I can think of one restaurant where they have a waterfront patio that was actually underwater for most of the summer this year, and we're projected at eight inches higher for Lake Ontario levels in this coming summer. I don't know how, year after year, these businesses are going to be able to cope with that. If that is the new normal, there has to be a serious shift in support for them and figuring out ways where they can still operate and be successful and keep those jobs.

In terms of the affordability piece, would you talk about wages, because—I used to be a chef. I come from—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): One minute.

Mr. Ian Arthur: It has a reputation for having low wages, for not having guaranteed work. Would you talk about that a little bit and what you see in terms of coming at the affordability from the other end, about needing to pay people a living wage, potentially, and to have benefits and have those kinds of supports that keep them in jobs?

Ms. Beth Potter: When you think about tourism jobs, a lot of people just think about the front-line staff that they see. They don't think about the people in the back of the

house: the accountants and the lawyers and the marketing people and the chefs. We have high-skilled jobs that are well-paid jobs, that are year-round jobs. Some 65% of the jobs in our industry in Ontario are full-time, year-round. A lot of the hourly staff are seasonal staff that—like I said, we employ the largest number of youth. We're giving the youth their first job. We're giving them their first on-the-job experience, on-the-job training, and so—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you. I apologize to cut you off. That concludes our time. Thank you so much for your presentation.

Ms. Beth Potter: Great. Thank you very much.

UNIFOR

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): I will now call upon the next witness, from Unifor. If you can please come forward. Please state your name for the record. You have seven minutes for your presentation.

Ms. Naureen Rizvi: Thank you. Good morning. My name is Naureen Rizvi. I am the Ontario regional director for Unifor, elected to represent the interests of 160,000 members across this province. Accompanying me today is Mike Yam. My colleague is a researcher for Unifor, specifically in health care, education, social services and telecommunications.

Unifor is Canada's largest private sector union. We represent over 315,000 members working in all major sectors of the economy, but that also includes members working in a range of public services.

This budget is tabled at a time when Ontarians have lost confidence in this government. We have seen an aggressive agenda of funding cuts and legislative attacks on vulnerable and working people across the province, and the people of Ontario have expressed their outrage over and over again.

First, to get the record straight on the province's fiscal picture, we have had confirmation that the deficit was less than half of what this government originally claimed it was. The mischaracterization of the province's finances, combined with all of the subsequent cuts, has also eroded the trust that Ontarians have had with this government.

Let's be clear. The attack on Ontario's most vulnerable people in this province is nothing short of a disgrace. The cancellation of the \$15 minimum wage, rolling back sick days, eliminating equal pay for equal work, cuts to Ontario legal aid, eliminating the Basic Income Pilot project, reducing planned increases to social assistance rates, cuts to the Ontario Student Assistance Program—and let's not forget how Ontario families and their children living with autism have been treated.

Ontarians did not vote for cuts to important public and social services like health care, like education and child care.

The laundry list of health care cuts begins with cuts to hospital funding, mental health funding, OHIP+ and funding to municipalities for public health initiatives. We've also seen no real action to address the crisis in long-term care, the inadequate funding to support proper levels

of care and the dire shortage of personal support workers in this sector—and I think we just heard from my friend Natalie Mehra on that, as well. This is in addition to the complete overhaul of the health care system that the government has undertaken, which has been done without meaningful public consultation and has opened the door to for-profit health care services, created regional health structures without clear accountability mechanisms—as well as the reduction of ambulance services and public health units across the province.

In education, we've seen this government attack school board workers, students and teachers through cuts to student support programs, mandatory e-learning, and increased class sizes. Why has this government created this chaos for school boards that has led to widespread class cancellations and teacher layoffs? We need to ask.

In the private sector, the government continues to neglect manufacturing workers. In recent months, this government has stood by while approximately 2,300 highly skilled assembly line workers and 1,200 independent parts-supplier workers have lost their jobs in the Durham region. In Windsor, Nampak announced it would violate the collective agreement for workers at the Windsor aluminum plant. They're moving operations to Mexico, despite having received \$1.5 million from the Southwestern Ontario Development Fund.

Our communities are being decimated by the huge loss of manufacturing jobs. If GM was able to cease production of vehicles in Oshawa, which community will be hit next? Other jurisdictions have invested significantly in electric vehicle technology and manufacturing, yet Ontario has lagged behind in supporting the next generation of vehicles in the global market.

On public procurement: Ontario still has a skilled manufacturing workforce that should be supported by all levels of government. For example, Unifor has sounded the alarm bell on the Bombardier facility in Thunder Bay, which produces bi-level commuter cars and light-rail cars largely for projects funded through Metrolinx and the Toronto Transit Commission. This facility has not secured contracts beyond 2020. Without a strong local procurement strategy, facilities like this that provide \$184 million in labour compensation annually and millions more in direct GDP and tax revenue are at risk. It is time for a strong commitment to a buy-Ontario strategy that will put workers first and grow the province's manufacturing sector into the future.

Finally, on this government's environmental record: The loss of billions of dollars of revenue from cancelling the cap-and-trade program, the \$230-million bill for cancelling hundreds of green energy projects, and the wasted taxpayer dollars campaigning against the federal tax have been financially irresponsible—in addition to negative impacts these actions have had on the fight against climate change.

The broken promises on transportation infrastructure, including the Hamilton light-rail project, and the renegeing of the previous promise to double the city of Toronto's share of the gas tax that would have been used for transit

are both environmentally irresponsible and a lost opportunity for these communities to benefit from better transit infrastructure.

To conclude, I would like to thank you for your interest in our views and refer you to our written submission for more detail regarding our recommendations.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you. We'll move to the opposition side for questioning. MPP Arthur.

Mr. Ian Arthur: Good morning. Thank you so much for your presentation.

I want to talk a little bit more about the manufacturing side of things and what you were discussing with automotive—the transition to electric vehicles and those sorts of things. Frankly, it began 20 years ago—same with renewable energy. If we had wanted to be at the forefront of that, entering the market 20 years ago would have been the right time to do that, to build the skills to retrain people in those facilities.

At this point, with what we are working with right now, where should we go? What should we be looking to? What should we be protecting? What jobs that are the future jobs do we need to be going after to make sure that they are in Ontario?

Ms. Naureen Rizvi: Thank you for that question. It's a very important question for us. We're the union that represents the most auto workers. I think not just in this community but across Canada we've seen what has happened with GM out in Oshawa. They were one of the largest employers there.

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There are a few things. First, we need to have an auto strategy. We need a national auto strategy, one that includes an emphasis and focus on buying in Ontario. Our campaign slogan I think says it best: If you want to sell here, you need to build here.

When we have companies like GM who have benefited from taxpayers' dollars at times when they needed it, what the government needs to do is put together a strategy that says, "If we are going to provide funding and support so that you remain here, there needs to be a plan that you continue to build here and to employ here. We're not giving you taxpayers' dollars so that you can ship to Mexico and use our money that way." There hasn't been anything that ties them down to Canada except for the funding that they need to sort of stay afloat. But we actually need something that says, "If we do this, there needs to be a reciprocal agreement that you have a responsibility to continue to employ in the community that you're in and where taxpayers have helped fund."

Mr. Ian Arthur: And the current government House leader, MPP Paul Calandra, was actually integral in that no-strings-attached gift to GM.

Ms. Naureen Rizvi: That's right, yes.

Mr. Ian Arthur: I think my colleague MPP Shaw has a question.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): MPP Shaw.

Ms. Sandy Shaw: Thank you for your presentation. I really do appreciate that you're focusing on climate

change and carbon emissions. I think that that is an important voice that you're bringing to this issue. I notice that you also are commenting on public transportation. We're so far behind on accessible public transportation. As you have rightly commented, it was a broken promise when this government rolled back or cut the LRT funding that had been promised to Hamilton during the campaign. Many of the things of the LRT that were promising to do were—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): One minute.

Ms. Sandy Shaw: According to the chamber of commerce, it was an economic uplift. There were good jobs that were going to be part of that, an increase to improving our infrastructure. But it was about public transportation—not more cars, not expanding highways.

Can you comment a little bit on how you see public transportation impacting our climate?

Ms. Naureen Rizvi: I think that there is a lot of good literature out there, and I would suggest that we move away from denying climate change to begin with. I think that is the first thing. The science proves that that is actually the case. We have to make responsible changes, moving towards where we're actually protecting our earth.

Having that many vehicles come in to Toronto from different areas of the GTA, from Hamilton and going across to Brampton—if we actually have a transit system that is built in such a way—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you. Sorry to cut you off. We have to move to the government side now. MPP Skelly.

Ms. Donna Skelly: Thank you for your presentation. I want to expand a bit on my colleague MPP Sandy Shaw's comments about the LRT, which you mentioned earlier. I'm from Hamilton. I'm very familiar with the LRT. I'd like to perhaps correct you on some of the comments that you made. The LRT funding remains. The billion dollars for transit initiatives remains in Hamilton. It's unprecedented.

Hamilton now has an incredible opportunity to do what MPP Shaw is hoping it could do, and that is to build perhaps the greenest environmentally friendly transit system anywhere in North America, with a billion dollars. So that money remains; a task force is being set up in Hamilton to provide the government with guidance on how that money should be spent.

I'm a former local city councillor. I spend an awful lot of time talking to businesses in Hamilton. The economic uplift that was supposed to be linked to the LRT is continuing, if you will—I'm not so sure it was actually linked to an LRT. I have met with many investors in the last couple of weeks who are continuing to invest hundreds of millions of dollars in the downtown core despite the fact that the LRT is gone.

I just wanted to correct on the record that the LRT funding remains in Hamilton, and it will—it's a billion dollars that can be used for a project that the task force recommends to the province. That is just something that I wanted to assure you, that our government is committed to green transit.

Also, my other role is in economic development. I've travelled across Ontario and have met with thousands of companies who are looking for workers in the skilled trades. Since getting elected—so, in a little over a year and a half—we have led the country in job creation. Part of the reason we're leading the country in job creation is that we're focusing on an area that you represent. You have a number of union representatives in the skilled trades. We are focusing on encouraging young people to get into the trades, because they're good-paying jobs.

The issue in Ontario right now isn't that these people can't find work. We can't find workers for the trades, and part of the reason is that the economy is booming. I just wanted you to speak to that.

Ms. Naureen Rizvi: The job creation piece—I think a lot of that is as a result of the previous government's policies, quite honestly. I don't think that that has come from this government, especially when you have a five-month summer break and all of that. So—

Ms. Donna Skelly: I would have to stop you there and suggest, if I may, that the previous government, and again, having travelled across Ontario—small business and large business are breathing a sigh of relief, because they now have a Conservative government at the helm. They are embracing the changes that we have introduced. I think that to argue differently—when you see it in the job creation numbers, we are leading Canada. Last year, when other provinces saw job losses, we created 25,000 jobs. We are pushing 300,000 new jobs in Ontario since June 2018. That is a direct result of the initiatives and the environment that we have created in this province.

Ms. Naureen Rizvi: I'm going to disagree with you on that, as I think that you did with the LRT piece. Yes, there's a demand on the skilled trades workers. The job creation, again, is as a result of the last government's policies, not this government's, because—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you. I apologize to cut you off. That concludes our time. Thank you so much for your presentation.

CHIEFS OF ONTARIO

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): I will now call upon the next witness, from Chiefs of Ontario. If you can please come forward. Please state your name for the record. You have seven minutes for your presentation.

Chief RoseAnne Archibald: Good morning, committee members.

Remarks in Oji-Cree.

I am RoseAnne Archibald, and I am Ontario Regional Chief.

On behalf of the Chiefs of Ontario, I'm here to present First Nations interests and priorities to this committee to consider during the pre-budget consultation process. This presentation serves as our second submission to this committee.

I would like to thank you for taking our advice in determining how First Nations interests were factored into the 2019 budget. I want to acknowledge that two key

programs were maintained: the Family Well-Being Program and the New Relationship Fund. These initiatives are helping communities to build health, well-being and economic prosperity.

I hope that you can see that your government's investments from the last budget in the areas of health, education, safety, social services, environment and economic development for First Nations have benefited all of Ontario. Supporting First Nations as key players in your initiative—building Ontario together—will ensure success for us all.

With that said, I must acknowledge that funding cuts to support the Indigenous Culture Fund—without this fund, the First Nation communities lost their capacity to establish programs to assist in transmitting traditional knowledge, language and land-based activities, all of which are vital to healing for First Nations people. These programs and funds were essential in our ongoing health and our ongoing healing from intergenerational trauma.

In determining the budget for 2020, we ask this committee to uphold the nation-to-nation relationship between First Nations and the crown by continuing to invest in First Nation communities. The next phase, however, for this government is to broaden your investment streams to include (1) a strategic process, (2) continued investments into mental health and social programs, and (3) increased investments into the Indigenous economic fund.

First Nations in Ontario and the provincial government are bound together through the treaty relationship. Together we must nurture, maintain and care for this relationship so we can continue to grow and attain our mutual aspirations.

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The Chiefs of Ontario have continually expressed our desire to develop and implement a new relationship with this government based on the original spirit of peace and friendship and respectful recognition of inherent and treaty-protected rights. We are your partners. And as partners, we are also the catalyst for this government to ensure that you have the certainty you need to achieve your goals on economic prosperity, wealth and job creation—goals that we, as First Nation people, share with you.

To achieve these goals, I am proposing that we establish a strategic mechanism called the prosperity table, a mechanism that will allow us to discuss our shared priorities and will assist this government to move forward with your strong agenda on economic growth. I ask this committee to work co-operatively and collaboratively with First Nations and to make modest investments to establish this table, which will provide greater returns and economic certainty for all Ontarians. Wealth creation and economic prosperity is one of our many shared aims. Specifically, we are asking this government to continue and to enhance investments into the Indigenous economic fund.

As a former chief of my own community of Taykwa Tagamou Nation, or TTN, I can tell you that one investment into a First Nation community can lead to great

success. When I was elected in 1999 as chief, our unemployment rate was at 85%; poverty and health and welfare issues abounded; and many in the community felt untethered. But in 2000, everything began to change for the better. We received a government investment of \$250,000 to negotiate with industry partners, which led to the generation of half a billion dollars in forestry agreements. That is a return rate of 1,000%. TTN is now forward-looking. We have diversified into hydro development and other sectors. Our unemployment rate is close to the national average and seasonally it can be 0%. Our wealth goes back into the community in the form of programs and services that assist our members and families to heal. TTN is now an integral part of the northeastern Ontario economy.

This kind of success story is possible for all First Nations with your partnership. One of the key aspects to building a thriving economy is to create space for a healthy workforce. This is where we can work together to build the optimal conditions for health and well-being for First Nations in Ontario. One of the biggest mental health issues facing our peoples is intergenerational trauma. While the overall colonization process has created this trauma, the biggest culprit is residential schools. Sometimes 13 generations of a family attended these institutions. Anishinabekwe scholar Dr. Pam Toulouse states that 100% of First Nations people suffer from intergenerational trauma—100%. As regional chief, I see this playing out in our communities.

First Nations people need—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): One minute.

Chief RoseAnne Archibald: —to heal and they need the culturally appropriate programs and services to do so. Investing in First Nations people requires a holistic approach. A person who is happy and healthy can go to work every day and can contribute to the economy, from which prosperity for the community is derived.

What I ask from this committee is to fund three interconnected initiatives: (1) just over \$900,000 to fund the prosperity table; (2) continued investment in programs and services that contribute to healing from intergenerational trauma, with a specific mental health initiative for First Nations; and (3) increase the Indigenous economic fund by a minimum amount of \$150 million, which would fund First Nations-specific initiatives. If we use my earlier analogy of a 1,000% return on that investment, that could mean a \$150-billion growth for the Ontario economy.

I want to conclude by saying that your government's investments will save lives. It will—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you. Sorry to cut you off.

Chief RoseAnne Archibald: —build lives and it will build futures. This is a legacy you can be proud of.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): We'll start with the government side for questioning. MPP Sabawy.

Mr. Sheref Sabawy: Thank you very much, Chief, for your submission and for presenting to us today. I'm glad to hear that you think that the projects we partnered with

Indigenous communities on have been fruitful and meaningful to the community, improving the socio-economic conditions.

I also want to mention Premier Ford and Minister Rickford's announcement about funding the Matawa broadband project, which will help to develop the economic, educational and social aspects of Indigenous communities. Also, I would like to touch base on the priority for promoting economic development opportunities like this project we announced this year, with the \$27.5 million in community-led projects and how that will impact the economic development of Indigenous communities.

On top of that, I would like to hear your opinion on the increase of the partnership between the government and Indigenous community projects which can help in developing the economy, as well as the mental health and living conditions of Indigenous communities.

Chief RoseAnne Archibald: Thank you for that. I do want to say that I do acknowledge those comments about other investments that have been made, and the partnership is absolutely essential. I, as the regional chief, have actually worked very diligently to build that relationship with the Premier directly, as well as with Minister Greg Rickford. What we need to do is to expand that relationship to include our chiefs and councils and to have that partnership broaden, because the more partnership you have, the more we can do together and the more we can build the economy together.

Mr. Sheref Sabawy: So you agree with me that you see improvement in this piece of the partnership? There is improvement from our government to grow this partnership and build projects together?

Chief RoseAnne Archibald: I can't comment on whether I see that yet.

Mr. Sheref Sabawy: Okay. I'll move to MPP Piccini.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): MPP Piccini?

Mr. David Piccini: Thank you, Chief, for being here today and for that excellent presentation; very well done. I really appreciated it. With two Indigenous communities in my riding, Hiawatha First Nation and Alderville First Nation, I appreciate those three priorities—duly noted—I took them down here.

The Indigenous Economic Development Fund: I just recently made an announcement in Hiawatha with Chief Carr to start an economic development corporation, and I note the important work in the last year, signing an agreement with Otonabee-South Monaghan, and the importance of collaborating with local municipalities and provincial government.

With Indigenous youth being the highest-growing youth in Ontario—talk to me about the importance of partnering in economic development to harness the potential of that next generation.

Chief RoseAnne Archibald: I think that youth definitely can be the future workforce, but I think there are actually two sectors that really need to be focused on: youth and women. Women who start businesses have greater success after five years, and so more investment

into economic development with women would also be something that would be helpful, in addition to youth.

Mr. David Piccini: And when we talk about economic development and these sorts of investments, I know—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you. Sorry to cut you off. We have to go to the opposition side now. MPP Mamakwa?

Mr. Sol Mamakwa: Meegwetch for your presentation. Certainly I know that moving forward, when I'm asking questions to the government in the House with respect to some of the provision of services on-reserve, one of the things that I am confronted with or answered with is that it's federal jurisdiction, especially when we're dealing with the lives and the health of our people.

I don't think Ontario as a province—an example is Treaty 9; Ontario is a signatory to the treaty, and sometimes we are treated as stakeholders, not as partners. To bring forward a mechanism to move forward in that direction, I think, is something that they need to start looking at.

Also, I think it was unfair, the question from Mr. Sabawy regarding the changes you expected to be in a year and a half. We have to understand that these are colonial systems that have been in place for generations and decades and decades.

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What do you suggest in moving forward? Maybe explain some of what treaties mean to our people.

Chief RoseAnne Archibald: We're all treaty people, number one. It's not just us who are treaty people. You're treaty people. The various treaties across Ontario—we have pre-Confederation treaties and post-Confederation treaties. All of those treaties are the basis of Ontario's wealth. So, every dollar that comes into this provincial coffer, or even federally, comes as a result of those treaties. All of this is treaty land in Ontario, and that's the basis of the economy.

What we're saying is, we're your partners. The treaties are not the ceding of land in perpetuity. They are about a relationship in perpetuity, that we will build this prosperity and share it together.

Mr. Sol Mamakwa: Also, another thing that you spoke about within your presentation was the provision of health care, mental health. I know there was a group earlier that made a presentation with regard to children's mental health. I know that one of the things that we face is youth and children's suicide, or a lack of mental health services for children and adolescents. Do you have any ideas on how we can move forward in addressing the mental health crisis, the suicide crisis in our communities, in First Nations communities, and not only that but also for the fly-in communities?

Chief RoseAnne Archibald: Well—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): One minute.

Chief RoseAnne Archibald: Sol Mamakwa, I follow you on Twitter, and I agree with you. Ontario is a signatory to Treaty 9. This issue around youth suicide has to be non-jurisdictional, non-partisan, and we need to save our youth. I agree with you.

First Nations are within the boundaries of Ontario, so Ontario must respond. The humane and right thing to do is to fund an initiative for First Nations that are deeply impacted by this tragedy. As I said earlier, we all are; 100% of us are.

Mr. Sol Mamakwa: Thank you for that response. Again, from me as a First Nations person sitting on this side, sometime it's really difficult to have this colonial system respond to the needs of the people that are under the jurisdictional—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): I apologize to cut you off. That concludes our time. Thank you so much for your presentation.

Chief RoseAnne Archibald: Thank you.

ONTARIO ENGLISH CATHOLIC TEACHERS' ASSOCIATION

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): I will now call upon the next witness, from the Ontario English Catholic Teachers' Association. If you can please come forward. Please state your name for the record. You have seven minutes for your presentation.

Ms. Liz Stuart: Thank you. My name is Liz Stuart. I'm the president of the Ontario English Catholic Teachers' Association, representing 45,000 professionals who teach kindergarten to grade 12 in Ontario's publicly funded English-language Catholic schools. With me today is David Church, our general secretary. I'm here today to offer comments on behalf of Ontario's Catholic teachers as the government prepares its budget for 2020.

Budgets are not just economic documents; they are also political documents. They are statements about the government's values and priorities. Sadly, over the past year, it has become abundantly clear that the government's agenda is guided by ideology rather than evidence. Time and again, the government has made policy decisions with little thought, foresight or genuine consultation with Ontarians. In most cases, the only discernible motivation for government actions is to cut spending. The consequences for Ontarians, particularly the most vulnerable, have already been tremendous. If the government continues on this course, things will undoubtedly get worse.

It is profoundly disappointing, not to mention highly disrespectful, to teachers and education workers that this government continues to portray our publicly funded education system as failing. By almost any national or international measure, Ontario students and graduates continue to be world leaders. The five-year graduation rate is now at 87.1%, almost 20 percentage points higher than in 2003-04.

Along with other Canadian provinces, we have been recognized for our commitment to equity and inclusivity, with low gaps in performance and expectations between high- and low-income students and foreign- and Canadian-born students. We should celebrate this success and build upon it.

Unfortunately, the government is making dramatic changes to Ontario's world-renowned publicly funded

education system, including increasing class sizes, imposing mandatory e-learning, and eliminating programs and supports for vulnerable students. This regressive education agenda is taking us backward. To make matters worse, the government has not offered even a shred of evidence that any of these proposals would improve student learning in the slightest.

The government's reckless cost-cutting measures are having devastating consequences on the learning environment. We cannot allow students in publicly funded schools to be reduced to lines on a spreadsheet. Publicly funded education is an investment, not an expense.

I would like to discuss the well-being of students and teachers. There is a broad consensus among education stakeholders that significant investments are needed in mental health supports. The Minister of Education has signalled that student mental health is a priority. However, the government's fiscal reality has not matched its rhetoric. Compared to the previous government, this government is allocating less funding annually for mental health and has committed to hiring fewer than half the number of mental health workers. Funding directives that required school boards to hire guidance counsellors trained to identify student mental health issues have also been lifted. We must develop a comprehensive, adequately resourced approach to mental health which strikes an appropriate balance between prevention and intervention. We must also address the persistent issues of bullying and violence, including violence against teachers and education workers.

During these consultations, I'm sure you will hear from many other individuals and organizations who will speak about the importance of measures to fight poverty and inequality. Catholic teachers are also incredibly concerned about these issues. One in five children in this province, and one in seven families with children, lives in poverty. Teachers see the consequences in our classrooms every day. Our students arrive tired, hungry and anxious. I urge the government in the strongest possible terms to listen carefully to what you hear about the need for fair wages and working conditions, a robust health care system, access to affordable housing and more.

The final issue I would like to highlight today is this government's approach to policy-making. The government has been trying to justify its devastating cuts by claiming Ontario's finances are in crisis. However, it has been revealed that from the beginning, the government has been misleading Ontarians by wildly inflating the provincial deficit.

The same holds true in education. The government likes to tout its historic investment of \$700 million beyond what the previous government spent, but as the independent Financial Accountability Officer made clear, this increase conceals deep cuts to classroom funding. In reality, core per pupil funding is down \$630 million. In addition, funding for programs for vulnerable students is down \$230 million. The increase to the overall education budget is entirely the result of the short-term attrition fund, as well as the boutique child care tax credit, which has absolutely

no bearing on classroom funding. These account for \$1.1 billion in spending. We also know from the government's own projections that the plan is to essentially freeze education spending over the next four years.

It would be better for everyone if the government stopped trying to mislead the public about the nature of their cuts. It would also help if the government held genuine consultations with teacher unions and other education stakeholders to help guide decisions about education policy in a way that would minimize disruption for students and ensure positive outcomes over the long run.

In the end, it's a matter of respect. A government that chooses to legislate and regulate rather than negotiate does not respect the constitutional rights of citizens. A government that ignores the expertise of stakeholders—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): One minute.

Ms. Liz Stuart: —does not respect the front-line workers who have dedicated their lives to public service. And a government that prizes cuts above all else does not respect or appreciate the role publicly funded education plays in our society and economy.

I'd like to wrap up my comments today by reminding the government that this budget is an opportunity to finally do the right thing. Government spending not only serves to spur the broader economy, create jobs and fund vital public services; it is directly correlated with government income through increased tax revenues. As I and others have said many times before, this government does not have a spending problem; it has a revenue problem. It is not possible to make drastic cuts without negatively affecting front-line services.

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There is still time to abandon the reckless cuts and help build a province that works for everyone. We strongly urge the government to seize this opportunity.

Thank you. I'd be happy to take questions.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you. We'll move to the opposition side for questioning. MPP Shaw.

Ms. Sandy Shaw: Thank you very much for your presentation. On behalf of my members here and honestly the people of Ontario, we want to thank you for what you're doing to stand up for public education, for our quality education system. In Hamilton, we had rotating strikes, and honestly, on the picket line, parents were nothing but supportive, people were honking, because they understand what's at stake.

You talked a lot about the government's approach to policy-making—which boggles my mind, how they come up with this; it's not evidence-based—and you talked a lot about funding. I think the reason that there's such strong support for what your members are doing is because people don't trust this government. They don't trust their numbers. They see how they're having fun with numbers to try and conceal, as you said, what are actually cuts. So thank you again for doing that.

I guess my question very specifically is that this is a government that had promised that not one education worker in the province would lose their job. Can you speak

to really what actually is happening with your members? Because when we go into the House and say, "We've heard from boards that these are people who are being laid off, these are caring adults who are being taken out of the classrooms," the government denies this. So can you, from your perspective, talk about how these cuts are impacting education workers in our kids' classrooms?

Ms. Liz Stuart: Certainly. Certainly, within our system, I am aware that we have members who were in permanent positions who are now no longer in a permanent position. They have been placed into a temporary vacancy, a position that might be filling in for someone who's on leave, so they're now no longer permanent. The long-term occasional teachers who would usually have had access to that work no longer have access to that work. They are now having to work as daily occasional teachers. Those teachers we had who did daily occasional work are not working. So in a very real way, we have members who are no longer able to pay their bills and put food on the table and no longer have access to work.

Ms. Sandy Shaw: And, really, nobody in the province asked for online e-learning and nobody asked for increased class sizes, so this government's approach is not sitting well with teachers, with education workers or parents at all. Again, I think that you've got the support of the province when it comes to these burgeoning class sizes.

I'm going to cede the floor to my colleague—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): MPP Arthur.

Mr. Ian Arthur: Thank you for your presentation. You talked about classroom violence. In the lead-up to the last election and the campaign, this was a chronic problem already: not enough supports in the classroom in terms of support workers. Even physical resources in the classroom were inadequate. This was already a problem that had been building for years. If these increases to class sizes go ahead—and we all hope that they do not; on this side at least—what is the learning outcome for those kids? You have classrooms that already were inadequately supported. What is the learning outcome going to be for the children of Ontario?

Ms. Liz Stuart: The reality is, when a student acts out violently, they're in crisis. And the reality is, we don't have the resources—we didn't before, we certainly don't now and, if this continues, we will not in the future—to support those students. That has devastating impacts not just on them but on the other students who are within those classrooms as well, because the services just are not there in order to assist these students.

Mr. Ian Arthur: So rather than an increase in class sizes, we actually need more investment and more supports, even just if we maintain the current class size?

Ms. Liz Stuart: As noted in my presentation, we desperately need mental health supports within the schools, and we need—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you. I apologize to cut you off. We have to move to the government side for questioning. MPP Piccini.

Mr. David Piccini: Thank you for being here, Ms. Stuart. I appreciate your presentation today.

Ms. Stuart, I have a question for you regarding the Catholic system as a whole. As you are aware, Minister Lecce has come out in support of our publicly funded Catholic education system, which is constitutionally protected. As you know, a Liberal leadership candidate recently came out calling for the amalgamation of the two boards. I was curious: Do you support that position coming from the Liberal Party of Ontario?

Ms. Liz Stuart: Obviously not. We would support the current systems that we have in place here in Ontario. We think that we have and we have had a world-class publicly funded education system. We have grave concerns around some of the cuts and changes that have been brought forward and proposed because of the impacts they have within the learning environment. But we would absolutely, quite obviously, support the continuation of publicly funded Catholic schools.

Mr. David Piccini: I know it's an issue that the Catholic boards in my riding have brought up.

On that note, just one final question on that before you move on: You referenced, in your opening, statements of values and priorities, which I certainly appreciated and took note of. Your education sector union partner Harvey Bischof has historically called for the amalgamation of the two boards, thereby effectively destroying publicly funded Catholic education in this province. These statements show, I think, that he neither values or prioritizes publicly funded Catholic education. Is Harvey Bischof right?

Ms. Liz Stuart: I will not speak for my colleagues. I understand that different associations have different policies. I can only speak from OECTA's perspective.

From our perspective, we believe that we're a highly successful piece in the puzzle that is Ontario's publicly funded education system. I think we've had a system that has worked outstandingly, and I believe that we need to all, hopefully, share the common goal that we want our students to succeed and we want the best possible outcomes for them. In doing that, unfortunately, it means that we have to recognize that education is an investment. And in order for it to be an investment, we need to make sure that those conditions are correct for those students in classrooms.

Mr. David Piccini: Certainly, with those investments, I know that at KPR we've seen an increase in a number of important strategic priorities for our public board.

But again, working in partnership for those priorities, your union partner at OSSTF has called for the amalgamation of the boards, thereby effectively destroying that system. Do you support those priorities? Because he does not prioritize Catholic education. Do you support them in that?

Ms. Liz Stuart: That is a policy that another association has within its books.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): One minute.

Ms. Liz Stuart: I have no control, and no, I would not support that.

But what I do support is that students need to be invested in. We need to make sure they have the supports in classrooms. We need to make sure we have reasonable class sizes so that every student can succeed no matter what success looks like for them, and it's different for every student. That's why we're here today, because we believe education in Ontario is an investment, and we're asking that the government continue to invest and reinvest in our classrooms and in our future, and those students we serve every day.

Mr. David Piccini: Thank you very much.

Ms. Liz Stuart: Thank you.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you. That concludes our time for the presentation.

FIX OUR SCHOOLS

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): I would now like to call upon the next witness: Fix Our Schools. If you can please come forward. Please state your name for the record. You have seven minutes for your presentation.

Ms. Krista Wylie: Wonderful. My name is Krista Wylie. I'm one of the co-founders of Fix Our Schools, a non-partisan, parent-led, Ontario-wide campaign that was started in 2014. Our focus has always been on eliminating what has recently been unearthed as a gobsmaacking \$16.3 billion of disrepair that exists in Ontario's publicly funded school buildings, and on ensuring that every school in this province is a safe and well-maintained, healthy building that provides an environment conducive to both learning and to working.

I'll begin with a quick overview of our asks, and refer all the members of this committee to please follow along on the one-page handout that was just given to you.

(1) Please ensure that the guiding principles outlined in the Rozanski report are followed in this government's approach to funding public education.

(2) Please develop a standard of good repair for all of Ontario's publicly funded schools that includes not only disrepair but also items such as classroom temperatures, lead in drinking water, asbestos and air quality.

(3) Invest an additional \$1.6 billion per year in school infrastructure to eliminate the \$16.3-billion repair backlog within about seven to eight years, is our estimate with this level of investment. Specifically, we're asking for increased funding via school condition improvement, otherwise known as SCI funding; school renewal allocation, otherwise known as SRA funding; funding for new school builds, which have been on hold since this government came to office; and funding for operational maintenance.

(4) Continue to collect school disrepair data, and to please resume the practice that was adopted by the previous Liberal government of publicly releasing that data and updating it annually.

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We'll go in to a little bit more detail now.

(1) The Rozanski report from 2002 was actually commissioned by the previous Conservative government before this existing government, under Mike Harris, and

remains highly relevant today. It outlines guiding principles that simply must be followed for any education funding model to be effective.

We draw your attention firstly to the principle of adequacy. Simply put, given that the province is the sole funder of education, funding to school boards must be sufficient and adequate for them to realistically meet objectives. To give you an example of how this has simply not happened, when Fix Our Schools began almost six years ago, provincial funding for school repairs was only \$150 million per year, when industry standards suggested a minimum of \$1.4 billion was needed. Yes, the province at that time was only providing one tenth of the funding required—grossly inadequate and, in our view, the root cause of why we have such poor school conditions across the province today.

Stability: To be able to forward-plan to conduct school repairs and maintenance in an effective, efficient manner, school boards need to be able to count on stable, predictable funding. However, the reality is that each and every year, school boards wait with bated breath to find out annual provincial funding, and also frequently deal with mid-year changes. This is absolutely unacceptable if school boards are to be able to operate effectively and efficiently. The Ford government has recently been touting a \$13-billion investment over 10 years. The previous Liberal government committed \$16 billion over 10 years, and even with that level of funding, we saw disrepair grow in our school buildings. So it's a mystery to us how this new level of investment is going to be enough to dig ourselves out of a pit of disrepair in these buildings.

(2) We desperately need a clearly defined, commonly understood metric for what school conditions are acceptable in this province. This standard needs to consider not only the disrepair data that's already being collected, but other key aspects of schools which impact learning and working conditions—things like cold classrooms that we hear about during the winter, hot classrooms in spring and fall, poor air quality, lead in drinking water, and mould and rodents in portables. It's important to note that the \$16.3 billion of disrepair does not reflect any disrepair in portables. That is not logged.

Issues like these aren't even reflected in the \$16.3 billion of repair, so, clearly, we need a standard and a metric in place.

(3) This is a biggie. Despite a significant increase in provincial funding since Fix Our Schools began, the current \$1.4 billion per year for school renewal is simply not enough to make up for 20-plus years when provincial funding was so grossly inadequate. We've continued to see disrepair in schools get worse, not better. We believe that with an additional investment of \$1.6 billion per year, within seven to eight years we could eliminate the backlog. Details of how this funding breaks down are outlined in the one-pager that was distributed.

We know that an additional \$1.6 billion per year is a huge investment. We also believe it's financially irresponsible of this government to allow public assets to fall further into disrepair, and it's irresponsible to allow the

vast majority of school repairs to continue to be done reactively instead of proactively—which is what happens today—when we know that reactive repairs can cost up to three times more.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): One minute.

Ms. Krista Wylie: It's also morally reprehensible, quite frankly, to continue to allow the public assets we call schools to fall further into a state of disrepair when the safety of two million Ontario children is at stake.

Given the 20-year history of inadequate funding for school infrastructure, we have grave concerns about the safety of Ontario's schools. So we urge you to leverage all funding tools at your disposal. Debentures: Interest rates can remain low. Corporate taxes: Bank profits in particular remain very, very high and growing. Education development charges: Developers remain very profitable and yet contribute virtually nothing to the school infrastructure in the communities from which they profit.

(4) The previous Liberal government adopted a practice of transparency and began publicly releasing school disrepair data annually. The current government has yet to follow suit on this practice of transparency, and the data presently available is from 2017. It's over two years old. The dated—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you. I apologize to cut you off. We'll have to move to the opposition side for questioning.

Ms. Krista Wylie: Yes, I'm happy to.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): MPP Arthur.

Mr. Ian Arthur: Would you just like to finish that thought there?

Ms. Krista Wylie: We would expect this government to be transparent. If you collect that data with our taxpayer dollars, we deserve access to it. Thanks.

Mr. Ian Arthur: You spoke a little bit about funding and the need for more money. Would you expand a little bit on what you see as some of the potential funding solutions?

Ms. Krista Wylie: I'm happy to, because I think for so many years the only funding solutions, quote, unquote, that have been in the public realm have been finding efficiencies. We're not finding enough efficiencies to fix our schools or to provide, quite frankly, adequate funding writ large to public education. I think that the conversation needs to shift to explore other funding solutions.

I mentioned developers. EDCs just for one school board among 72—if we look at where the majority of development is happening, it's happening in Toronto, in our city. One of the school boards in our city, the TDSB, because of the antiquated legislation that's over 20 years old, is unable to collect one penny from developers to contribute to the school infrastructure in those neighbourhoods. That's ridiculous. There's an estimate that about \$400 million is being left on the table, in the coming years, that could be used to fix schools.

I realize that's only one school board. Many school boards are impacted negatively—even the Toronto Catholic board, which is eligible to collect; their hands are tied as to how they can use that money. We need a revisit of that legislation.

Mr. Ian Arthur: So there are two pieces of legislation; one board can actually access funding and another board can't?

Ms. Krista Wylie: Correct. It seems ridiculous, right? EDCs alone would be a whole-day conversation, so I won't go into the nitty-gritty. But suffice to say, it's section 10 of regulation 20/98. It doesn't serve the purpose of either the Education Act or the original purpose of EDC funding, which was meant for new developments to fund new school sites. Without the restrictions found in that section, certain school boards, such as the TDSB, would qualify for EDCs, which would help us meet growth-related infrastructure needs.

That's certainly not the entire solution, but that's just an example of a simple, quick regulation change. My understanding is that those can happen even when the House isn't sitting. That's an easy, low-hanging fruit in terms of funding solutions. Bigger would be taxes. That's a nasty word, I know; it's been a nasty word for decades now. But the reality is that we've never been in a situation where personal taxes are paying more into our public budget than they are today, in terms of percentage.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): One minute.

Ms. Krista Wylie: For every dollar that corporations pay to the Canadian government in income tax—I realize that this is federal—people pay \$3.50. That same analogy can be brought down to the provincial level. I think we need to start looking at all sides of this equation, and that corporate taxes are a real opportunity.

Mr. Ian Arthur: I don't know if you will be able to answer this quickly. From a jurisdictional point and the kind of games that go on, it's my understanding that if there are repairs to be done to a school, the school board covers 70% of the cost and the province provides 30%. But if it's a new school that is being funded, that's actually inverted. Is that accurate? Do you know anything about that?

Ms. Krista Wylie: All money comes from the province, and the school—

Mr. Ian Arthur: It does, but how it flows through the infrastructure funding versus—

Ms. Krista Wylie: Yes, and how it flows down—I'm not familiar with what you're speaking about. I'm sorry, MPP Arthur.

Mr. Ian Arthur: Okay, that's fine. No worries.

Ms. Krista Wylie: But I think, suffice to say, a good wrap-up is that school boards rely exclusively—they go cap in hand every year to the province, and they rely on that funding.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you. I'm sorry to cut you off. We have to move to the government side for questioning now. MPP Piccini.

Mr. David Piccini: Thank you very much for your presentation today. It's good to see you again. Thank you for the work you're doing to advocate for school repairs across this province.

I know we spoke, when you and I last met, about the AG report that called for capital investment. Historically, under the previous Liberal government, we were looking

at about 1.4% investment per year into asset needs, which has increased under this government this year to about 2.5%, thereby following the AG's recommendation. I know there is a lot to do; I'm from rural Ontario, and I've been in the schools.

Do you think that's an important step in the right direction to addressing the capital needs?

Ms. Krista Wylie: I think that this current government sustained the level of funding that the Liberals put in place. So when you say—I just want to—

Mr. David Piccini: It was at 1.4 in 2016-17, I believe, for capital investment needs.

Ms. Krista Wylie: That's exactly right. What has your government done to increase that?

Mr. David Piccini: It's 2.5% per year.

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Ms. Krista Wylie: You're mixing dollars and percentages. What's the investment in dollars right now?

Mr. David Piccini: It's a \$1.4-billion investment, which represents 2.5% of the capital asset needs, the entire asset needs, per year, which is what the AG recommended, which is a net increase from the previous—

Ms. Krista Wylie: Did you guys get rid of a bunch of schools to increase the percentage? I'm confused by the math.

Mr. David Piccini: That was Mitzie Hunter who got rid of the previous schools.

Ms. Krista Wylie: Then, the Liberals were actually doing 2.5% for the last couple of years of their—yes, they were.

Mr. David Piccini: That's incorrect. I'll share the report with you after.

Ms. Krista Wylie: No, let's figure it out now, because the math isn't making sense.

Mr. David Piccini: In her report, the AG highlighted the fact that per year investment into overall capital assets—the Liberals were addressing it at about 1.5%—

Ms. Krista Wylie: That was her report in about 2015. In 2016, the Liberals increased it to \$1.4 billion, which would have brought it to 2.5%. So I'm just confused where you're proposing that it's—

Mr. David Piccini: Yes. It doesn't happen overnight. I'll move on, because I think over the last 15 years, we've seen a dramatic—it has led to where we are today.

Ms. Krista Wylie: You're right. But it's two governments that have done that. You are suggesting that it was the Ford government that brought this in. The Ford government has sustained it, for which we're grateful—

Mr. David Piccini: It's an important investment of \$1.4 billion.

On the one-size-fits-all approach to new schools and capital repair: In my area, a number of schools were slated for closure. That was pretty devastating for a number of folks in my riding in rural Ontario. The \$13.5-billion investment into new schools and repairs that the government has committed to—as we look to the schools of tomorrow, what the technology requirements are going to be, what the learning requirements are going to be—I was wondering if you could tell me (a) what those new schools

would look like, what the technology requirements would be; and (b) has your organization put thought into what the criteria would be for addressing new school expansion or brand new schools?

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): One minute.

Ms. Krista Wylie: I'm stuck on, you just said a \$13.5-billion investment over 10 years—

Mr. David Piccini: Actually, the really important thing I'm trying to get you to feed into our pre-budget here is, has your organization thought about the criteria for what new schools would look like and the technology—

Ms. Krista Wylie: I don't mean to be argumentative, but the real priority for me is to talk about numbers, given that this is a pre-budget meeting. If you're suggesting that—

Mr. David Piccini: Sorry; this is our time to ask you the question, quickly.

Just because it's important to invest that money—what's the criteria? Give me some sort of guidance on what the criteria for a new school would look like.

Ms. Krista Wylie: My second ask was actually around a standard of good repair. Before we can move to pie-in-the-sky ideals, I think our kids should have classroom temperatures where they're not sweating in the summer and passing out, and not having to wear their winter coats. I think we need to worry about basics first—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): I'm sorry to cut you off. That concludes our time. Thank you for your presentation.

CANADIAN FEDERATION OF INDEPENDENT BUSINESS

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): I would now like to call upon the next presenter, from the Canadian Federation of Independent Business. Please state your name for the record. You have seven minutes for your presentation.

Mr. Plamen Petkov: Good morning, everyone. My name is Plamen Petkov. I am the Ontario vice-president at the Canadian Federation of Independent Business, or CFIB. I am here with my colleague Julie Kwiecinski, who is the Ontario director of provincial affairs. Thank you for the opportunity to address you today. We are here to present the small business recommendations for the 2020 Ontario budget.

Before I get into the presentation—we've prepared a short presentation for you, and it's being circulated to you—I just wanted to give you a brief overview of CFIB and who we are. We are a non-partisan, not-for-profit organization. We represent small and medium-sized businesses across Canada. We have 110,000 members nationwide. Of those, 42,000 are here in the province of Ontario, and collectively, they employ over half a million employees.

We are very much a grassroots organization. We stay connected directly to our members. In fact, it is our members who determine our position on every single policy issue that we take on. We are entirely funded

through membership fees. We don't take any money from any level of government.

The next slide will give you a good illustration of the diversity of our profile in the province—as I said, 42,000 members in virtually every sector of the economy.

I also wanted to take a moment to recognize some of the positive actions that the province has taken over the last year and a half to support small business, starting with the most recent one: the small business tax rate reduction from 3.5% to 3.2%. It is a modest reduction but certainly a welcome step in providing tax relief for Ontario job creators. It is also good to see that for a second year in a row, Ontario businesses will see a WSIB premium reduction, on average, of 17% this year. We are also pleased to recognize some of the progress the province has made on red tape reduction. In fact, next week is our 11th annual Red Tape Awareness Week. We are looking forward to engaging with both the government and the opposition to discuss important issues about regulatory reform in Ontario.

It is also good to see that the province is staying the course on reducing the deficit and eliminating the deficit within the next four years. That was the number one ask from our membership before the last election.

We are encouraged to see an increased focus on skilled trades and apprenticeship training. We're very much looking forward to participating in that conversation. The reason for that interest is that today we bring in front of you the biggest challenge that we are hearing from our members across the country, and that is shortage of labour, both shortage of skilled labour and also shortage of general labour. This is something that we are hearing from every corner of the province. It is more pronounced in some of the remote areas—northern Ontario, for example—but it certainly transcends every economic sector. In fact, about 80% of our members have indicated that they have experienced difficulties in finding the right employees over the last year or so.

Now, we do understand that there isn't a silver bullet solution to this. We have actually developed a series of recommendations on this, which are at the end of the presentation, for you to review. We also will be sending in a full submission next week, where I will provide more details. But I think it's fair to say that, in terms of what to expect going forward, the positions that are going to be of highest demand in the small business community are positions that require skilled-trades training and also general labour positions.

With that, I'll turn it over to Julie to cover a couple of other important areas.

Ms. Julie Kwiecinski: Thank you, Plamen, and thank you for having us before committee today.

I am going to cover next time-of-use pricing, which is very punitive on the electricity front for small businesses. To illustrate, a common example we use is, if I'm a business owner, what I do is driven by what my customers want, so if a customer wants a pizza at noon, I'm not going to fire up the pizza oven at 3 a.m. to save electricity and then serve my customer a nine-hour-old pizza—not going to happen.

You see on slide number 8, we asked our businesses in a survey, and we got great response: close to 3,000 responses. We said, “Can you change your electricity consumption from on-peak to either mid-peak or off-peak hours throughout the year to manage electricity costs?” Eighty-six per cent said no. That’s huge. That’s huge. I’ll leave that for now—time-of-use pricing.

I’m going to move on to another issue. You may not have heard a lot about this, but we have launched a national campaign on this. It’s about construction and potential construction mitigation efforts to assist businesses, especially small businesses, dealing with major construction projects. I’m not talking about filling in a few potholes; what we’re talking about is something like the Eglinton LRT, where it is a significant project, impacts a significant number of businesses and has significant consistent delays. So we did a survey. We did this nationally, but I’m presenting you provincial results. We asked small businesses if they’ve been disrupted by local construction projects during the last five years: 44% said yes.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): One minute.

Ms. Julie Kwiecinski: That’s huge. On the next slide, we talk about how businesses were impacted. You’ll see things like a 45% decrease in sales. That’s huge.

So what we’re saying here is we’re asking the Ontario government, “Please, please, please, when you’re doing the Ontario Line, learn from the examples, like the Eglinton LRT; listen to small businesses.” We have some recommendations in the package; I don’t have time to get to them. But please look at our recommendations to make sure history doesn’t repeat itself, because this is a huge issue for our small businesses.

We’re doing a fulsome presentation in writing next week that is more detailed. We’ll make sure everybody gets it. We also encourage you to participate in Red Tape Awareness Week next week.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you. We’ll move to the government side for questioning. MPP Skelly?

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Ms. Donna Skelly: Thank you both for your presentation. I wanted to talk about something that has been raised already this morning. We’re only into the first morning of our first day of these committee hearings, and the ask is already a \$2.75-billion increase to our annual budget. We hear from so many of our stakeholders that they want that increase covered by you—by you, small business, by Ontario’s business community. Can you do it? Can you increase your taxes and cover the additional billions of dollars that we’re hearing that a lot of these stakeholders are asking for?

Mr. Plamen Petkov: I can tell you that if we were to poll our 42,000 members right now, this minute, the answer will be, “Absolutely not.”

Ms. Donna Skelly: Why not?

Mr. Plamen Petkov: The reason for that is that it is not just one specific tax increase. It is not just one level of government. They are dealing with three levels of

government. They are dealing with all these arm’s-length regulatory agencies that are imposing additional burden on them.

As a small business owner, you have a business to run. You have to meet payroll. You have a limited budget. When we talk to our members, for example, about the Ontario budget and about deficit and the importance of eliminating the deficit, a small business owner gets it, because they know that you have to find a way to live within your own means. If a small business owner cannot find a way to do that, their employees are going to be on the street and their customers are not going to get the services and the products that they need.

It is very important, from a small business owner perspective, to be reasonable in terms of understanding what a small business owner can take on more, and less. They’ll be happy to take on more initiatives to expand the economy, to grow the economy, to create jobs. That’s what they’re good at; that’s what they want to do. That’s what we are hearing from our surveying. Again, we meet with our members face to face at least once a year. That’s why I said that we are very much a grassroots organization.

It’s very clear that what businesses need right now is help in finding the right person for the right job. The opportunities are out there—

Ms. Donna Skelly: I understand. Trust me; I understand that. We have such a critical shortage of skilled and unskilled workers in Ontario.

Mr. Plamen Petkov: Absolutely.

Ms. Donna Skelly: It is a huge problem. But I want to go back to the pressures that businesses face. Again, I think that people are unaware of the fact that it’s not as simple as, “We need more money for health care. We need more money for education. Simply go after business. They’re not being taxed enough. They’re fat cats. They’re not giving us enough.” The bottom line: What do you contribute to all levels of government in terms of taxation?

Mr. Plamen Petkov: Every small business owner is a taxpayer, right? And every small business owner doesn’t get the same type of services that a resident gets. In many cases, for example, property taxes—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): One minute.

Mr. Plamen Petkov: Commercial and industrial businesses pay many times more property taxes on the same-value property, simply because they are subsidizing the residential class. When it comes to the actual services, the business itself does not get those services that the resident gets.

There has to be a balance, where we as a society can come forward and say, “What are those pockets of additional revenue, and where do they come from?” I can tell you, that’s not going to be the small business community. You can try and go after big business and the multinational companies and those who are able to generate that type of wealth, but that is certainly not the businesses that we represent.

Ms. Donna Skelly: I know we’ve only got a few seconds left. Julie—if I may call you Julie?

Ms. Julie Kwiecinski: Certainly.

Ms. Donna Skelly: You mentioned that you were coming up with a strategy to perhaps compensate business owners along the Eglinton LRT. How devastating was that construction to those businesses?

Ms. Julie Kwiecinski: Very devastating. As a matter of fact, a glowing example is a business that took out an ad—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you. Sorry to cut you off. We have to move to the opposition side for questioning. MPP Arthur.

Mr. Ian Arthur: Good morning, and thank you so much for your presentation.

Just a point of clarification: I did not hear SMEs mentioned in terms of raising taxes, at any point today. There was talk about the corporate tax rate, but at no point were small businesses mentioned by the previous deputants. I just think, in all fairness to them, they did not actually say that. So, I'll clear that up.

Mr. Plamen Petkov: Thank you.

Mr. Ian Arthur: How far do we have to go? Even if we put money into the skilled trades, how many years out are we until we have enough skilled labour? How do we change the attitude so that children in school want to go into those trades again?

Mr. Plamen Petkov: It's a super-important question. Again, you touch on the fact that there isn't one specific measure or one specific initiative that we should be working on. Eliminating the stigma among young people is the starting point, right? Right now, the perception is that I only go into the skilled trades if I cannot make it to university. That has to change. That is the starting point.

Beyond that, we also have to get to opportunities where we actually are able to link employers with potential apprentices so that that relationship gets going.

Even after that relationship has started, the issue we have in the province is completion rates. Our completion rates on apprentice training are very, very low. You almost have that every second apprentice who starts does not finish. What does that mean for the apprentice? It's a lost opportunity. What does that mean to a small business who started the apprenticeship training? It has lost an investment. It's a lose-lose situation, right?

We need to find that medium where we are able to entice young people to understand that a career in the skilled trades is actually a meaningful career, it's a profitable career, and also for small employers to have that motivation, to have that financial incentive to take on more apprentices, right? There are a number of different barriers. Some are financial. Some are societal in nature.

Mr. Ian Arthur: I'm intrinsically familiar with every single thing you brought up. I used to be a chef and a manager of a restaurant. We had about 120 employees, and all of the issues that you are talking about were things that are very clear.

I actually put forward a motion to have time-of-use pricing removed.

Mr. Plamen Petkov: Yes, we supported it.

Mr. Ian Arthur: The government voted it down. They did it with the rationale that it was just one small part of the energy picture, and that that would be addressed later. But then they rolled out their energy plan and there appears to be no mention of removing time-of-use pricing in that, and there's no indication from anyone in government that they're moving in that direction. I know how hard it is for businesses. It was a huge factor in our operating cost.

But I want to talk about the last point, because it was very interesting that you brought that up. Kingston had what we called the "Big Dig." We had the oldest working sewer system in Ontario. It went down Princess Street. It has now been upgraded a section at a time, and it was incredibly hard on the businesses.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): One minute.

Mr. Ian Arthur: Wolfe Island is about to get new ferry docks. It relies entirely on tourist revenue for almost every business on that island, and there isn't a lot of recourse for them. What can the government do to help those businesses that are basically going to experience three years of slim to no sales?

Ms. Julie Kwiecinski: I think, as a start, and you'll see it in our recommendations, but one of the things—and we have had meetings with several ministers on this topic. What we found is that some municipalities have been telling us that they don't have the legislative tools in place right now to compensate small businesses, so our ask has been to make sure those tools are in place to allow municipalities to do that, especially—and the key one, Mr. Arthur, is this: A lot of these projects are delayed over and over again. There is no penalty whatsoever. There has to be a penalty built right into the contracts. That's a key ask.

Mr. Plamen Petkov: And also—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you. I apologize to cut you off. That concludes our time. Thank you so much for your presentation.

Ms. Julie Kwiecinski: Thank you for having us.

YWCA TORONTO

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Now I'd like to call upon the next presenter, from YWCA Toronto. Please come forward. Please state your name for the record, and you have seven minutes for your presentation.

Ms. Jasmine Ramze Rezaee: Jasmine Ramze Rezaee.

Ms. Tsering Tsomo: Tsering Tsomo.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): You may begin.

Ms. Jasmine Ramze Rezaee: Good morning, Mr. Chair and honourable members of the committee. My name is Jasmine Ramze Rezaee. I'm the manager of advocacy at YWCA Toronto. Joining me this morning is Tsering Tsomo, our director of employment and training. Thank you for the opportunity to address the committee today about the various issues that are of critical importance to women in our province.

YWCA Toronto is a leading women's organization. Each year, we serve over 13,000 girls, women and gender-diverse individuals in more than 30 programs across the

city, from Scarborough to Etobicoke. Our wraparound services range from housing and shelter for women and their families to employment and training programs, including settlement services for newcomers, girl-specific programs, a child care centre and programs geared towards the well-being of women who have experienced violence.

My apologies. It's actually this version.

We are also part of a broader YWCA Ontario coalition representing 12 member associations in the province, from Hamilton to Sudbury. We have over 100 years of experience serving and responding to the needs of women, women-led families and girls. We are a subject-matter expert on gender, and we are a key service provider in the communities we work in.

We can say with absolute certainty that every social, political and economic issue in our province is a women's issue. A gender equity lens can be applied to all of these things. Women are impacted by the labour market, the housing market, the rising cost of living, by the rise of working poverty and precarious employment, but they're experiencing these challenges in distinct and nuanced ways.

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For example, the lack of affordable housing for women is a safety issue. Gender-based violence is a primary driver of women's homelessness. The growing cost of child care in our province disproportionately impacts women because women tend to be the primary caregivers. Access to child care is critical to ensuring women's labour market participation. Black, Indigenous and immigrant women face a gender and racial wage gap. The rate of sexual violence in our province is actually increasing and harming so many lives. These issues, and many more, are closely connected and require substantial government action.

YWCA Toronto has a long and proud history of partnership with the province of Ontario in working toward full equality for women and girls. Many of our programs, like our violence against women shelters and our employment programs for women, are either partially or fully funded by the province; some of our programs, like our Girls' Centre, one of only a few in Canada, should be, but are not, funded by any level of government.

We are witnessing two trends that have caused us a great deal of concern: the rising poverty and inequality in our province along gender and racial lines and the lack of awareness about the gendered impacts of such inequities. Our province is increasingly unaffordable, with an estimated 450,000 women living on low incomes. Women are disproportionately over-represented in single-parent families and in precarious employment. It is the poverty of women that is behind the poverty of so many children in our province.

As I am sure many others will mention today and tomorrow, social assistance rates are not high enough to make ends meet. There are many people on OW and ODSP who suffer in silence and who will never reach their potential because of the sheer poverty levels perpetuated by our social welfare system. We strongly believe that

social assistance rates should be increased and that the system should undergo progressive reforms.

We also believe that employment offers a path out of poverty. Good jobs—that is, skilled jobs that enable women to earn high incomes so they can save money and plan for the future—are the kinds of jobs that lift families out of poverty. This is precisely why YWCA Toronto offers specific employment and training programs that support women to gain entry into the skilled trades.

The Toronto Star recently featured one of our skilled trades programs for women that is funded by the province. I spoke to the manager of that program, and she, Dolores, shared how, of the 15 women who graduated last year, 11 had job offers before the program even ended. She also said that despite the success, funding agreements are allotted on a year-by-year basis. Because of funding uncertainty, it is hard to retain staff, to properly respond to future needs, to plan, to offer continuity of service and really solidify relationships with employers. It is also hard to scale up programs that offer evidence-based solutions to labour market challenges when core funding is not available. Due to these short-term project-based funding agreements, we struggle to recruit and retain talent because we are forced to offer contract, part-time and casual work to women. Ideally, we should be offering permanent, full-time, salaried positions, but this is simply not feasible for some of our programs given current funding models.

In addressing poverty, we must not forget the impact on children and youth. We operate a Girls' Centre in Scarborough that is not funded by any level of government. The girls that access our programs navigate issues related to food security, gender-based violence, community violence, racism and sexism. Girl-only spaces are essential because they provide a safe space for girls to voice their concerns and express themselves. By being exposed to peers who are confident, capable and in other leadership roles, girls are inspired to look at their own capacities in a positive light.

We pride ourselves in building such anti-oppressive, inclusive, safe and girl-positive spaces. However, it has been a struggle to keep our doors open due to the lack of government funding. The province should seriously consider the challenges facing girls and the unique position of women-centred organizations in supporting them.

Women and girls are drivers of change. Evidence from around the world confirms that investing in girls and women creates a ripple effect that yields multiple benefits, not only for individual women but for families, communities and regions. When girls and women do well, everyone benefits.

The year 2019 actually proved to be a prosperous year for the province. The economy is growing and wealth is expanding, but, for Black, Indigenous and racialized women, we're falling behind. We urge you to prioritize closing the gender and racial wealth gap and substantially invest in pathways out of poverty for women. When you invest in gender equality, society becomes safer, more livable and more prosperous.

Again, every issue is a women's issue. We hope you will place equity considerations, and especially the needs of women and girls, front and centre when evaluating your priorities for budget 2020.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you. We'll move to the opposition side for questioning. MPP Shaw.

Ms. Sandy Shaw: Thank you very much for your presentation, and thank you for being here. I would say that I understand the valuable work that YWCAs provide across Ontario. In Hamilton, we have a very, very robust YWCA. The executive director, Denise Christopherson, does fantastic work and echoes what you're saying here, that it's really hard to keep the doors open on solely project funding. She always says that women are not projects; why are we not funding this work adequately?

I would like to say also that as this government has unrolled some of their legislation and their policies, we see that this is impacting women more harshly than it is the general population. For example, when they cut back the minimum wage increase—the vast majority of women are minimum and part-time wage workers. When they took away two paid sick days, that impacts women who aren't able to stay home and look after themselves. And when there's no child care—all the things that you've said impact women more directly. Even the most recent, which is going to perhaps be challenged as unconstitutional, the wage freeze, the 1% cap on the broader public sector—the vast majority of the people who are working in those sectors are women.

This is something that we can't underscore enough, to say that perhaps if the government did look at their policies through a gender lens, they might reconsider some of the policies and some of the consequences, unintended or otherwise. I'm essentially repeating what you said, but I want you to know that on our side of the House, we understand how these policies are impacting women directly.

The part of your presentation I want to focus on is the whole idea of empowering women around economic development. I know with the YWCA—I actually worked in partnership with the YWCA. We created a microlending program targeted at women, and it spoke to the evidence you were just saying, that if you invest in women, if women have education and have jobs, it's not just investment in one person; the entire family will benefit. Can you just speak a little bit about your research and your understanding that if we invest in women, if we invest in getting women back to work or get them adequate work, this will impact families and the broader community—that the return is so much greater?

Ms. Jasmine Ramze Rezaee: We absolutely agree with what you've said. Because women tend to be the primary caregivers and because women tend to be concentrated in lower-income positions, when women are economically empowered, their families do better. There's a lot of research—and we're going to provide a more comprehensive submission next week—to support this line of reasoning, but intuitively, it makes sense, right? Because women are pillars of their community and they are pillars of their families.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): One minute.

Ms. Jasmine Ramze Rezaee: So yes, by supporting women to gain entry into the skilled trades, by empowering women economically, our economy grows. But actually, families and communities and neighbourhoods are supported as well.

Ms. Sandy Shaw: Absolutely. We've been hearing a lot this morning about a labour shortage—a skilled trades shortage, for example. I think it's not a one-size-fits-all approach to making sure that we have trained workers in the province of Ontario to support economic prosperity.

Do you see your organization, with the breadth of experience you have, playing a role in helping this government with any strategies that they come up with to develop training specifically to make sure that women aren't left behind in these prosperous new jobs that we're talking about?

Ms. Jasmine Ramze Rezaee: Absolutely. We are partners of every government. We want to push every government to meet the needs of women. This is a non-partisan issue. Gender equity—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): I apologize to cut you off. We'll have to move to the government side for questioning. MPP Skelly.

Ms. Donna Skelly: I'm actually going to continue along the line of MPP Shaw's line of questioning.

MPP Shaw and I both come from Hamilton, and we have a very strong presence—YWCA has a very strong presence and incredible leadership at the Y. Recently, Minister Dunlop and I met with the CEO, Denise, and we were talking specifically about the skilled trades. I'm absolutely encouraged that you raised that this morning because I think this is one of the keys to raising women out of poverty.

Having said that, we hear it time and again, and we just heard it from the last presenter: There's a shortage of skilled and unskilled workers in this province. This is such an opportunity. I recognize, and that was raised when we met with Denise, that you need this continued commitment to funding. Has the Y looked at working directly with industry? For example, in Hamilton, Mohawk College works directly with the aerospace industry, and their students are trained on-site. Has the Y looked at partnering with the private sector?

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Ms. Tsering Tsomo: Yes, we have looked at it and, in fact, the Y has received pre-apprenticeship funding for a number of different sectors, particularly in the construction field. We have actually had some challenges working with unionized organizations. For example, we had a pre-apprenticeship for women for electrician programs, and the biggest barrier for us was actually working with union organizations.

Again, I think—

Ms. Donna Skelly: Which unions, may I ask, so we can raise it?

Ms. Tsering Tsomo: I'm just trying to remember the name of the union. They were based in Scarborough, and I can't—

Ms. Donna Skelly: Can you get back to me on that?

Ms. Tsering Tsomo: Sure. I will certainly give you the name of that.

I think unions play a very important role here, especially in Toronto, as we work with our participants. That's one of the key pieces. But we also have been working with different colleges and training institutes, and their relationships. It is a gradual process.

I must also add that when we're working with pre-apprenticeship for women, we need to look at the kinds of jobs that would be suitable for them. For example, our painter-decorator pre-apprenticeship program is really doing very well, in terms of not only the training but also in terms of finding jobs.

Ms. Donna Skelly: Did you say "painter"?

Ms. Tsering Tsomo: Painter-decorator.

Ms. Donna Skelly: Just for everybody's information, women are the most reliable painters you can hire. I know that for a fact.

Ms. Tsering Tsomo: That's a really successful program for us, for example. This year, again thanks to the province, we will be receiving funding for our tile, terrazzo and marble pre-apprenticeship program—again, very specific, very gendered. The kinds of skills that women bring are really useful for these.

Again, I think we need to keep an account—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): One minute.

Ms. Tsering Tsomo: When women are given certain kinds of funding, I think we need to account for the skills and the kind of gendered role that they play in this.

Ms. Donna Skelly: I promise you, I will work with the YW. I think this is a key—I'm hoping, anyway—to this challenge that we're facing.

I know that my colleague has a question.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): MPP Anand.

Mr. Deepak Anand: Thank you so much, Jasmine. It is really good, what you guys are doing. I'm a big proponent of women empowerment. Empowered women—I'm getting the benefit already.

My quick question to you, because we don't have enough time: I have the opposite problem. People are looking for labour. We actually have high unemployment in my riding of Mississauga–Malton—about 24% for the youth, and 11% for the others overall. With a large immigrant population, what type of support is required to help them fully integrate into the workforce? What is your suggestion, and how can your organization help us in our ridings?

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): I apologize to cut you off. That concludes our time. Thank you so much for your presentation.

ONTARIO FEDERATION
OF AGRICULTURE

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): I would now like to call upon the next witness, from the Ontario Federation of Agriculture. Please come forward. Please state your

name for the record. You have seven minutes for your presentation.

Mr. Keith Currie: Thank you very much, to the committee, for hearings this morning. My name is Keith Currie. I'm the president of the Ontario Federation of Agriculture. Along with me today is our director of policy research, Jason Bent, and our general manager, Cathy Lennon.

For those of you who don't know, the Ontario Federation of Agriculture represents 38,000 farm families right across this province. More importantly, we are part of an agri-food system that is one of the strongest economic drivers not only in the province but in the country. Some 840,000 jobs in this province are related to the industry, along with an annual GDP of \$48 billion, so it's a terrific contributor to the economics of this province. All we are looking for, going forward, with the government's blessing, is enabling us to do more for this economy in Ontario.

For some of you, you may not be aware, but three years ago we launched our Producing Prosperity in Ontario campaign. The basis of that campaign is around economic development, with three main pillars to it, the first one, of course, being strategic infrastructure investment. We know that key investment in infrastructure across this province that's going to benefit rural and farm families is going to be key to driving that economy even further up the chain. Also part of that campaign is environmental sustainability and food security.

Certainly, what we're looking for, through this committee and through the budgeting process going forward, is those key investments in infrastructure. We know that transportation is a huge issue, public transit in particular, for many urban areas. But for those of us who live in rural and remote areas, roads and bridges are our public transit system. We do not have access to buses, subways, LRTs etc., so having those key infrastructure spendings on things like bridges and roads to make sure that our goods and services get into our businesses, and our products get out to the further value adding that's required of the products that we produce.

We do want to ask the government to make sure that they continue to work with municipalities because every region is unique in their infrastructure needs, so working with the municipalities closely to align with what their needs are and how to properly, effectively and efficiently spend monies to achieve those roads and bridges services that are desperately needed is something that we are asking the government to do their part in.

For probably seven to eight years now, we've been pushing very strongly to the province of Ontario to expand natural gas. We do commend the current government and their initiatives to this point. They've done some key not only investments but regulatory changes to make sure that we can begin that process of expanding natural gas. Just to highlight how important that is to us, we know that a \$75-million-per-year investment over 20 years will return an economic return to the government of \$1 billion per year—just in economic returns, not only in job creation

during the construction, but in the expansion of business and services and savings that will get returned back into the economy by the use of a lower-cost fuel source, that being natural gas, throughout Ontario.

Certainly, it's no secret to everyone right across the country that broadband is a key essential service. I can't emphasize how important it is to our businesses. Those of us in agriculture work in a world market. We cannot consume all the products that we produce; we are an export country. Broadband is a key way for us to market. Not only is it a key way for us to market, but even for our youth in our communities—we have to send our children to McDonald's and Tim Hortons at night to gain access to their WiFi services to do their homework and to do projects. That's a disparaging injustice that we have in rural Ontario, that we do not have access to broadband. So that is key, not only for social reasons but also for key business services. Much of the equipment we run requires connectivity, whether it be 5G or high-speed Internet access. We will continue to work with the government and the opposition to make sure that we have the effective programs in place to increase what's already going on in the broadband field.

Schools and health care are certainly big priorities for us in rural Ontario. With the declining population, we see continued school closures. That harms our children, not having access to the proper school services, not only from an education standpoint, but in our case in rural Ontario, schools are a community and social hub. Extracurricular activities often don't happen when children have to travel further on buses after school; they can't participate in extracurricular activities. Also, these schools are community hubs for a lot of our areas. Extracurricular clubs outside of school are happening in these centres. Community events go on, and closures of these schools certainly provide a detriment, again, to the citizens of rural Ontario.

Affordable housing is something that's on everybody's mind. Certainly, if you live in urban areas, you find that it's almost impossible to buy a starter home. We want to encourage the government to combine all the infrastructure investments I talked about, along with encouraging people to bring their skill level to Ontario to not only retain businesses that we have in rural Ontario—to service our farming members—but also to increase the business services there. Along with that, people can bring their skilled trades and unskilled means out to rural Ontario to be part of a community where they can actually have affordable housing—our housing costs are much less—and be part of the social fabric of rural Ontario, and that will also lead to improving things like keeping schools open and attracting businesses that will warrant further infrastructure spending, like broadband and natural gas.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): One minute.

Mr. Keith Currie: I want to compliment the government on continuing the RMP program. It's a very important insurance program for our farmers. The \$50-million increase commitment is certainly very much appreciated.

I also want to highlight that we certainly are reliant on weather, very much positively and negatively, in our businesses. Therefore we would ask that the government

continue to set aside funding for things like agri-recovery in the BRM programming. That's a 40% cost-share along with the federal government. We want to make sure that those monies are kept aside.

We also are seeing a decrease in our extension services in our rural, remote and northern areas of Ontario. We would like the government to reconsider the de-escalation of those services. They're very important to our members. The OMAFRA staff are very much needed for our remote and rural areas, and we would like to see the ministry continue to fund those.

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One last note: Mental health is on all of our minds. You will not see it in your submission, but it's something that we would like to work with the government on how we look at—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you; I apologize to cut you off. We'll have to move to the government side for questioning. MPP Piccini.

Mr. David Piccini: Thank you very much, Mr. Currie, for being here today. We really appreciate your advocacy and the work that all of you have done sticking up for farmers and advocating for them. In areas like mine, Northumberland–Peterborough South, ag is the number one employer and vital to our local economy.

I have a number of questions. I'm going to lead with the education and awareness piece. You mentioned rural school closures. I know that was an area that was big in the election, and we've seen, under the previous government, a number of closures in my riding. But I think awareness is a key piece. I've been to a number of our schools, and even in rural Ontario, the Netflix culture and I would say that some of the effect that that's having on our next generation and their perception of agriculture.

We've taken measures on the trespassing act, but can you speak to just what more we can do from an education perspective? Because it's so critical to be aware of the surroundings in which you live.

Mr. Keith Currie: We have an organization in Ontario called AgScape, which is agriculture in the classroom. A key focus for them in the secondary stream is about awareness of career opportunities in agriculture. When you ask people what they think of agriculture and careers, they think about working on the farm and, certainly, we do need skilled and unskilled labour on the farm, but we need a lot of business support that supports our businesses.

We're a very technologically advanced industry, so AI and technological advancements are important. I can run all kinds of robots and machinery that require software, but I can't fix it and I can't write the software. So we need those kinds of industries.

There's a big financial aspect to our business. We need accountants, we need financial advisers and we need bankers in rural areas.

We need all the social services that we have to travel miles and hours to—nurses and doctors, for examples. Clinics for mental health and other health services are leaving and have left our rural areas, and those are very vital. Those are career opportunities as well.

There's a whole myriad of things that we do. Not only do we produce food; we produce fuel, we produce fibre and we produce energy and pharmaceuticals. There's a myriad of career streams that are available that aren't direct on-farm, but are vital to our farm businesses in the rural parts.

Mr. David Piccini: That's important, the spinoffs; I appreciate you highlighting that.

Literally, as you were speaking, I just got a text from Mark DeJong, one of the farmers in my riding, about natural gas. I'm going to take it straight from the constituent straight to you. Talk to me about natural gas, the importance of that investment, but if you could, for the benefit of everyone—I know the environment is on all of our minds, as well—talk about the benefit to the environment of supporting expansion onto our farms.

Mr. Keith Currie: Natural gas: At the crux of it is economics. I'm not going to beat around the bush on that. It's a third of the cost of hydro right now. There are also areas in this province where running a natural gas line doesn't make sense, so on top of natural gas, we also want to revisit the idea of a farm-industrial rate for hydro as well. That's very important.

But natural gas is a third of the cost. For heating livestock barns, for operating businesses—that money does not stay in our pocket. One of our board members actually saved \$60,000 a year by going to natural gas. That money he turns back into the economy through capital investment and spending in their local communities. So it's very important from an economic standpoint.

Mr. David Piccini: Perfect; thank you. Risk management: Anything more on that?

Mr. Keith Currie: If you can get more than \$15 million, we would be happy. But we appreciate the commitment to maintain it and to increase it by \$15 million this year.

Mr. David Piccini: Thank you very much.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you. We'll move to the opposition side for questioning. MPP Arthur.

Mr. Ian Arthur: Good morning, and thank you so much for your presentation. It's lovely to see all of you. Just as a bit of an aside, you learn a lot as a new MPP very rapidly, but the effectiveness of your organization in lobbying all three parties—I guess there are four that are here—is quite remarkable, actually. For other organizations looking to influence policy, it's a bit of a model.

I want to talk a little bit about the farm forestry exemption. Climate change is on everyone's mind. It's top of mind. It was the number one issue in the last federal campaign. It promises to be an issue in every single election going forward. Farmers are poised to be some of the most affected by the climate crisis and the changes in weather patterns: The amount of farming that's going on in places like Essex and the trouble that they are having in terms of losing land with erosion, to hail in July that is ruining entire crops. What do we need to do to prepare farmers for the outcomes of the climate crisis?

Mr. Keith Currie: Well, much like the economic development piece that I talked about, we are in a position

to help you. We can help you—"you" as in the government. The more that we can be enabled to do more projects—we're currently going further on our soil health strategy that was done a couple of years ago, and there's a soil working group now that is looking at the health of soil. But it goes beyond just the health of soil, because everything that we do to make healthy soil has whole environmental benefits, whether that's phosphorus retention or nutrient retention in general to keep it out of our water systems; whether that's to absorb severe rain incidents—the soil is much healthier, so it can absorb those severe weather changes.

Planting trees around sensitive areas like rivers, streams, lakes and wetlands is certainly important, and not only planting trees, but soil health and increasing organic matter means more carbon sequestration. Those are key initiatives.

Environmental goods and services programming: We have proven for the last 30 years, during environmental farm plan programs, that we, our farmers, our members, will invest if we get some seed money to help us. We financially can't do it just on our backs, but with some money for programming like environmental goods and services, our members have proven that they will do their part as well. The more we get, the more we can do.

Mr. Ian Arthur: Just quickly: You talked about planting trees and then you moved into other carbon sequestration. I don't think there's a lot of public awareness yet about what the potential is for carbon sequestration from farming. When you're talking about grasslands, when you're talking about the sort of crops that you do routinely—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): One minute.

Mr. Ian Arthur: —because they have such a quick growth cycle, they're able to pull tremendous amounts of carbon out of the atmosphere when it's done well. So thank you for bringing that up.

Just very quickly, in the last minute: How do we get the next generation of farmers on land?

Mr. Keith Currie: Well, farming actually is becoming sexy again. I think a lot of that is because of the technology advancements—

Laughter.

Mr. Keith Currie: It is, and our youth aren't running as fast as possible. Much like affordable housing, it's big money to get into it, so the succession planning part of it is a really important step that we need to make sure that we have all the right tools in place for, to allow those transitions to happen with a big financial impact.

Certainly things like mental health awareness are very important, to make sure that there's support there when we have a climate issue going on like severe rain, or we get two and a half inches of rain in the middle of January. How do we deal with that as farmers and as ranchers?

For the government to recognize the opportunities that we have out there—when you talk about carbon sequestration, we can do it; we just need to be recognized, and—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you. I apologize to cut you off. That concludes our time. Thank you so much for your presentation.

ONTARIO ASSOCIATION OF INTERVAL
AND TRANSITION HOUSES

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): I would now like to call upon the next witness, from the Ontario Association of Interval and Transition Houses. Please come forward. Please state your name for the record. You have seven minutes for your presentation.

Ms. Marlene Ham: My name is Marlene Ham. I am honoured to be here today in my capacity as executive director of the Ontario Association of Interval and Transition Houses. OAITH is a 76-member association made up of violence-against-women shelters, transitional housing and community-based organizations. Since we appeared at the committee hearings last year, we have continued to be engaged by government as a whole, including ministers and official opposition critics. We value the relationships we're building and the tremendous support all MPPs have shown for OAITH's *Wrapped in Courage* campaign.

Over the last five years, OAITH has engaged our members and government to address the long-standing funding crisis of violence-against-women shelters. We were pleased with the fiscal enhancement received in the 2018 and 2019 provincial budgets. We appreciate that funding to the sector has been maintained, and we know that these investments will better serve our members when it is included in their core operating budgets.

I often have to tell the story of funding inadequacy at VAW shelters, and today will be no different. To gain perspective, I would like to bring your attention to the fact that one in four women in Canada will experience gender-based violence, with children being directly exposed to that violence suffering from long-term impacts. When we consider Ontario's population at 14.5 million, including six million women and 2.3 million children, this equates to over two million women and children who will experience and be exposed to gender-based violence. However, MCCSS only receives \$166 million annually to address this problem.

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How does this compare with other sectors?

We know that one in five Canadians will experience a mental health issue, with Ontario committing \$3.8 billion over the next three years.

To understand funding inadequacy: Over the next three years, approximately, MCCSS will receive just under \$500 million to respond to an issue that's affecting over two million women and children.

We certainly acknowledge that addressing gender-based violence is far more complex than responding to the issue with shelter beds. On the surface, the system has been constructed so that women leave and go to a shelter to access the supports they need to then live a life free of violence. This requires enough empty beds to respond to the demand, or enough movement within that system where women are getting access to affordable housing in a timely way so that women can then move out of the shelter.

In 2020, the 50th anniversary of the Commission on the Status of Women, women are dying to get in, with no way to get out. The impact is that many of our shelters are

running either at or beyond capacity. The longer women stay in a shelter because they literally have nowhere to go leads to a domino effect for the next woman and child not being able to access a shelter bed. Shelters will often run over capacity by using unfunded beds. When women are in danger and they can't get access to a bed, this can be equated to a 911 operator saying, "We don't have an ambulance to come and save your life."

We have valid reasons to be concerned. On a snapshot day in 2019, Women's Shelters Canada reported that 78.8% of women trying to access beds from more than 250 shelters were turned away because they were full, leaving shelters to either pull out a cot, find a shelter in another community, if it exists, or offer other interim services until a bed is available.

We need a system that can respond when women are actually ready to leave. Ensuring that we always have a VAW space available is of critical importance. In the words of Maureen Davis, who has been engaged with OAITH's work over the last few years, "I stayed because he said he'd kill me if I left ... I left when I knew he'd kill me if I stayed." This is a pivotal moment that far too many women in this province have to endure, like standing at the intersection of courage and sacrifice.

OAITH's work on femicide tells an indisputable fact: Gender-based violence is killing women in this province. In fact, in 2019, 37 women and children were killed in Ontario because of gender-based violence. All of those charged in these crimes are men who are their male partners, fathers, sons and other men closely known to them.

VAW shelters must be able to respond to their community crisis and not the crisis in their bank accounts. They are falling behind. A national study of Women's Shelters Canada highlights this point. Some 48% of our workforce is precariously employed with casual and part-time positions, 55% identified turnover and burnout as a major issue, and 61% identified low pay and benefits as a major challenge.

Here in Ontario, pay equity remains an issue, with one of our members reporting, "Our pay equity plan has us closing the gap in 17 years. An annualized increase would allow us to revisit our current plan and reduce that time frame."

Good fiscal health requires planning and vision for them to achieve their goals. Incremental fiscal enhancement models are posing some challenges by creating uncertainty and instability. We do trust, however, that over the past two years, VAW shelters in Ontario have demonstrated to this government that these investments would be better served with a plan to annualize them so that they can do the work they need to do to improve outcomes for women and children in the province.

We do have some recommendations:

- annualize all fiscal enhancement investments to VAW-funded agencies that were received via MCCSS in the 2019 budget;

- include mental health and addiction counselling and support services in VAW shelters as part of their core programming through the mental health and addictions strategy;

—increase investments for MAG-funded violence-against-women services, including the Family Court Support Worker Program;

—move forward with a comprehensive action plan attached to investments to prevent, effectively respond and improve outcomes;

—invest in decent, accessible and affordable housing;

—invest in community-based primary prevention programs; and

—address income support programs, employment/education opportunities and access to affordable child care that are actually designed specifically to support survivors of violence.

Thank you very much.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you. We'll move to the opposition side for four minutes of questioning. MPP Shaw.

Ms. Sandy Shaw: Thank you very much for your presentation. It's disheartening to hear that this never seems to get any better. It doesn't get the kind of funding commensurate with the work that you're doing to keep women and children safe. I commend you and all the people who work in the sector for doing what you're doing under unbelievably difficult circumstances.

There's so much in your presentation that I could focus on, but I was wondering if we could start with the comments that you made about investing in community-based primary prevention programs. I know that you're downstream and what you're doing is addressing a crisis, but I know you're also involved in trying to prevent women and children from falling into crisis. Can you talk a little bit more about the work that you're doing there and how you would see the government supporting more of the prevention program?

Ms. Marlene Ham: We certainly have early intervention with shelters, a range of different organizations—some are our members, and some may be other violence-against-women organizations—provide public education and do different services that way. We really need to consider what it would look like to prevent violence from happening in the first place. We've been responding to an issue for decades. However, if we don't consider what this could possibly look like by engaging men and boys and starting that very early on, it's going to be very difficult for us to change things on the other side. At the end of the day, we can provide shelter, we can have all of these programs in place to support women, which we obviously need to continue to do, but it's not changing the behaviour of men. We need to figure out: How do we actually change that behaviour so that they're not doing this? We can bring a woman into shelter, we can provide her with all of the supports, we can provide her safety in that time that she is there, and we can provide affordable housing so that she's housed, when affordable housing is available. However, she has to move through a myriad of other systems—family court, child welfare, criminal court—and the abuse continues, the harassment continues as women move through these systems. We need to start having that conversation around changing men's behaviour so that this doesn't start to begin with.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): One minute.

Ms. Sandy Shaw: I'm going to cede to MPP Arthur.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): MPP Arthur.

Mr. Ian Arthur: Just very quickly, and not directly to do with your presentation, but on the mental health and addictions side of it: There's a fascinating pilot project in Kingston called the Portage program. It's a mother-child program for mothers with addiction issues, where they go through treatment. It's the only program in Ontario where their children aren't removed. It's a proven model in Quebec. It's run by a local doctor named Adam Newman. They're trying very hard to get provincial funding to expand this into an actual permanent facility that would allow for that. Is that something your organization would have any interest in trying to support and move forward on? It's a bit of an aside and more to raise as something that's happening in my community, rather than the finance committee presentation.

Ms. Marlene Ham: Certainly. Within shelter, what we're experiencing is, just over 70% of women are coming in experiencing trauma and substance use—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you. I apologize to cut you off. We have to move to the government side.

MPP Roberts.

Mr. Jeremy Roberts: Marlene, thank you so much for joining us today. It was wonderful to have the chance to meet in late November and attend the reception and then have a chance to meet with Minister Dunlop.

First of all, I'm thrilled to hear that the investment in budget 2019 was put to good use. I've seen first-hand the value for money that we get out of our interval houses. I've had the chance, in my own riding, to tour Nelson House, which is just around the corner—I can actually see it from my office.

Can you talk a bit about the value for money that organizations under your umbrella bring to the province, and talk a bit about how that investment in 2019 was paid out in dividends in terms of our outcomes, because that's certainly going to help bolster that case as you recommend in here, talking about annualizing that funding.

Ms. Marlene Ham: Okay. Sometimes what I like to say is if you give a shelter a loonie, they'll turn it into a toonie. They've always had to operate in this way because the needs are certainly so great. But when we look at value for money around community-based services and funding community-based services, we know that the more we put in there and the more access women have to community-based supports, the less they may need to access other services, whether that be police, emergency services, the health care system—some of these other systems that we know are more costly than community-based services.

Community-based services are holistic, right? So a woman who comes into shelter is not just getting a bed; she's getting access to legal support, possibly through a Family Court support worker. She's getting access to 24-hour crisis lines. She's getting access to different programs that might be community-based programs such as drop-in centres, access to violence-against-women counselling,

and access to services for her children. It's certainly more than just a bed. So a woman comes through and she has access to all of that in one place. When we talk about value for money, certainly we have to understand that funding shelter is much more than just a roof over her head, clothes on her back and a bed to sleep on.

Mr. Jeremy Roberts: We appreciate that.

My next question: We're starting off our pre-budget consultations here in Toronto, but Sunday we're flying up to the riding of my colleague, MPP Mamakwa. We're going to be visiting Sioux Lookout and Thunder Bay. Obviously the challenges facing some of the northern communities—and the interval and transition houses are different in the north. I know that when we spoke last time you spoke a bit about the difficulty fundraising up there as being one of those challenges. Can you expand a little bit on some of the unique challenges facing our northern communities? I'm sure we'll hear a little bit when we're up there ourselves, but I would love to get a taste test from you here today in terms of what some of those challenges look like.

Ms. Marlene Ham: Yes, certainly. What we hear from our members in the north is that one of the big challenges is transportation costs. They're working with women who—we're not talking about a taxi cab and paying for a taxi, right? We're talking about paying for a flight from fly-in communities and—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you. I apologize to cut you off. That concludes our time. Thank you so much for your presentation.

Ms. Marlene Ham: Thank you so much.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Looking at the time on the clock, this committee stands in recess until 1 p.m., when we'll continue the public hearings. Thank you.

The committee recessed from 1203 to 1300.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Good afternoon, everyone. Welcome back to the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs. We'll resume the public hearings on pre-budget consultations.

For a reminder, each witness will receive up to seven minutes for his or her presentation, followed by eight minutes of questioning from the committee, divided equally amongst the recognized parties.

Are there any questions before we begin?

HEART AND STROKE FOUNDATION

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Seeing none, I would now like to call upon the first witness, Heart and Stroke Foundation of Ontario. Please come forward. Please state your name for the record. You have seven minutes for your presentation.

Ms. Liz Scanlon: My name is Liz Scanlon. I am the senior manager at Heart and Stroke, for public affairs. I'm very appreciative of the opportunity to speak to you all this afternoon.

There are four recommendations in the written submission that we've provided, and I just wanted to touch on each of those four briefly for you.

The first one has to do with the impact of stroke on the health care system in Ontario. I'm sure many of you know someone and have experienced stroke first-hand in your circle. It is, as you probably know, the first-leading cause of severe disability in Ontario and the third-leading cause of death. It is certainly a significant burden on the health care system, of course—the resources, the dollars spent, and as well, on the economy as a whole.

But here in Ontario, we're fortunate to have one of the best stroke systems in the world. It kicks in as soon as 911 is called, when dispatchers can identify the signs of stroke and let first responders know that a stroke is likely what they will be facing. Then the first responders are able to reach out and notify the regional stroke centre, which has the most cutting-edge treatments available anywhere in the world. Those regional stroke centres then prepare for the imaging and the treatments that will be needed when the patient comes in.

But as you also probably know, stroke is a medical emergency that requires immediate response. With every minute that passes, 1.9 billion brain cells die, so we need to activate this whole system very quickly. It all depends on the individual who is experiencing a stroke, or the people around them, recognizing the signs and responding right away. That's what the whole system depends on.

Heart and Stroke offers, to address this issue, the FAST campaign. It is a three-year campaign that we have had, with the support of the government of Ontario. It is a mnemonic that's internationally recognized. The first three letters remind you of the most common signs of stroke. The T stands for "time" and, again, that imperative to call 911 right away.

The submission I've provided gives several metrics around the success of that campaign that we've seen over the last three years. But the one that I really want to draw your attention to is that, over the last three years, we've managed to increase recognition of the three most common signs of stroke in Ontarians by 117%. Again, the more people know and recognize the signs of stroke, the more quickly they can respond and kick the system into gear.

We call on the government, with this submission, to continue to support this campaign, and continue to allow Ontarians to be able to identify the signs of stroke.

I just wanted to illustrate this point by reading one of the many, many emails, text messages, phone calls and social media outreach that we've received on this campaign.

"On May 7"—I'm reading from an email I received—"my mother, who is 74 years old, sat down to have tea with my dad. Fifteen minutes later, she had a massive stroke. From seeing the commercial on TV, my dad recognized that she was having a stroke and called 911. Tomorrow, she is coming home symptom-free. Because of your ad campaign, my 77-year-old father knew what to do, and it saved my mom's life."

That's a good day at the office, when we receive messages like that. I hope we can count on your support to continue to be able to put the FAST campaign out into market.

Our second recommendation is with regard to youth vaping. I have met with many of you around the table on this issue over the last year. It is of tremendous concern to Heart and Stroke. I know it's of tremendous concern to the Minister of Health. She has commented herself on what a huge issue this is, and the need for the government to respond.

I could use my entire time today to talk about the harms that we're seeing, and the prevalence rates increasing. But I just want to say that no matter what the response looks like for the province in the coming months and years, it will cost the government money. We need enforcement; we need prevention; we need cessation supports.

We're suggesting that we can apply some of the learnings we have, from decades of tobacco control, on the vaping issue and identify that young people are particularly price-sensitive. We know that when prices of tobacco go up, rates of youth smoking go down, and that youth who are already smoking tend to cut back and quit.

Given those learnings, and given the increased costs that we expect this vaping crisis will bring, we encourage the government to consider a value-added tax of 20% to 30% on vaping products in Ontario. This has been considered already and will be committed to by three provinces, including Alberta, BC and PEI. This level of taxation is being identified as hitting that sweet spot between increasing the prices significantly enough to discourage youth use, but still keeping them less expensive than cigarettes and not discouraging adult smokers from making that switch. So that is our second recommendation.

Our third recommendation is around the fact that in the most recent budget estimates for 2019, the government budgeted for \$44 million in tobacco cessation programs. That's not having anything to do with our health costs of tobacco smoking, but the prevention, cessation and enforcement programs that the government provides. Here is where we would like to recommend a new revenue stream for the government on this. A cost-recovery fee directly applied to cigarette manufacturers would reach that \$44-million target. It's similar to the way that we ask polluters to clean up the environment when they have polluted. This is an opportunity for tobacco companies to help clean up the mess that their products are creating in our society, by contributing through this cost-recovery fee.

This is a model that exists federally in the US. It exists federally in Canada for cannabis, as well as in six different provinces for cannabis cost recovery. It was also proposed, for your interest, in the most recent federal election in the Conservative election platform. Should tobacco companies choose to pass this cost on to their customers, the increase would be under 0.1%.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): One minute left.

Ms. Liz Scanlon: This is something that would be supported by, we have learned in January 2018, 83% of Ontarians. There's a lot of public support for this.

Our last recommendation is around the creation of an AED registry. This has gotten support, from a legislative point of view, by all parties—the Liberals, NDP and Conservatives. We are happy to see Robin Martin's bill go

forward to committee. We would just ask that the government consider budgeting for allocating to implement such an AED registry that would allow people to be directed to the nearest AED when experiencing a cardiac arrest.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): We will go to the government side for questioning. MPP Roberts.

Mr. Jeremy Roberts: Liz, thank you so much for your presentation today—a very important presentation dealing with a very important health issue. I recall, in my previous life, when I worked federally, there was a wonderful private member's bill from MP Scott Reid about putting defibrillators into hockey arenas across the country. That was well supported and has saved a lot of lives.

I notice you mention, right at the end, Bill 141, which is the recently-voted-upon bill that our MPP from Eglinton–Lawrence brought forward. Can you speak a little bit to the importance of this bill and what you see as the potential impact it could have? Oftentimes, some private members' bills end up making their way into the budget, so we'd love to hear your thoughts on this bill.

Ms. Liz Scanlon: Absolutely. The first thing I'd like to say is that when the Harper government invested that \$10 million in AED placement, that made a huge impact, as you said, in terms of saving lives. We hear stories all the time about people whose lives were saved through those AEDs.

The difficulty is that we don't actually know where they are and we don't know if they're functioning at the moment. The batteries and the pads need to be replaced on a regular basis, depending on the manufacturer. We've got those all out there and we know where they are, but we also know that there have been a lot of other private companies and other organizations that have invested in their own infrastructure. That's the one piece.

We also know that, right now, out-of-hospital cardiac arrest results in fatalities nine out of 10 times simply because in most cases bystanders are not able to respond.

The benefit of parliamentary assistant Martin's bill is, it will tie all of this investment, which has already happened over the years by placing these AEDs, together and allow 911 dispatchers to direct people immediately to the nearest AED and definitely make a huge difference in that fatality rate.

Mr. Jeremy Roberts: Great. Thank you so much.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): MPP Skelly.

Ms. Donna Skelly: Thank you for your presentation. I'm interested in this proposal that you're—the suggestion to increase the taxes on vaping.

Ms. Liz Scanlon: That's right.

Ms. Donna Skelly: What is in the vape product, (a); and (b) how is it purchased? What is the cost, if it sold as you said?

Ms. Liz Scanlon: So this is interesting—it's hard to give an answer to the cost because we know many of the companies that are manufacturing these products are owned or partially owned by tobacco companies, and they're using many of the same tactics. They will price their products depending on the socioeconomics of the

market that they're in, so they even price by neighbourhood, to a certain extent.

We know that you can get—currently, Juul is the most popular brand among young people, particularly. A Juul starter pack can go as low as 30 bucks, which will give you the device and then five pods. With that, you're well on your way to a nicotine addiction if you're a teenager.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): One minute.
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Ms. Donna Skelly: What is in it?

Ms. Liz Scanlon: The products at the moment are unregulated, so we don't know. Propylene glycol is in it. There are flavourings. The content is heated by a metal coil, which also gives out fine metal particles. Formaldehyde—there are lots of chemicals in these products.

Ms. Donna Skelly: So it's difficult to say. If you said to increase it by 30%—you do believe that the tax of 30% would be enough to act as a deterrent?

Ms. Liz Scanlon: University of Waterloo economist Professor Sen gave a presentation at a conference that I saw recently, and that was his advice to hit that sweet spot.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): We'll move to the opposition side for questioning. MPP Shaw.

Ms. Sandy Shaw: Thanks very much for your presentation.

I want to focus on the vaping aspect and, specifically, on the consequences for children. They're under the legal age, but kids are accessing these products. Our MPP France Gélinas urged the government to regulate or disallow any kind of marketing to children, and I know that one of the first things this government did was to cancel some of the regulations that would have prevented marketing these products to children. Can you talk to me about where we are in terms of the understanding and the regulations to prevent marketing to kids?

Ms. Liz Scanlon: Absolutely. There are lots of opportunities, from a policy perspective, to look at that.

We know, as of January 1, that the retail marketing that we were asking to come out of gas stations and convenience stores is now out. That's the first step. What's the next step?

I think there are lots of opportunities around restrictions around flavours. We have talked about moving flavours into specialty shops that are not accessible to anyone under legal age. We think that would be one way to go about it. Of course, right now all of those sweet, dessert, fruit flavours are very enticing to kids, and they're available everywhere.

Another opportunity for us that we're putting forward, from a policy perspective, is increasing the minimum age of sale to 21 for both vaping and tobacco products. We know from the tobacco world where it's happening in the US—and vaping increases also in the US—that that age gap prevents social sharing down to younger kids in a way that 19 doesn't quite do.

Some opportunities, federally, around nicotine concentrations, around plain packaging, health warnings—all of those things.

So there are lots of levers and lots of learnings from tobacco that we can apply.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): MPP Arthur.

Mr. Ian Arthur: Thank you so much for your presentation.

For curiosity's sake, your idea about the cost recovery fee—I just want to understand that a little more. Those costs are going to be passed on to consumers, if we have a cost recovery fee. Why pursue that avenue versus an increase in actual taxation when the end outcome—what's the rationale? I just want to understand a little bit better why that is the road to go down versus an increase in the tax.

Ms. Liz Scanlon: We certainly wouldn't oppose an increase in tax either. But we know that tobacco companies talk a lot about the concern about unregulated tobacco and the concern that taxes drive that. That is a question that there are many sides to.

The cost recovery fee is on the manufacturers by their market shares, so it targets the biggest producers. They may indeed pass that cost on, but it allows us to target the \$44 million that we're currently spending on tobacco cessation programs and hitting that mark and saying that this is what we're aiming to do, and spreading that cost out among the manufacturers.

Mr. Ian Arthur: But is there a rationale for why a cost recovery program would be better than a tax increase?

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): One minute.

Mr. Ian Arthur: I'm just curious, because it will require a separate administrative system to do that. We don't necessarily have the mechanisms in place to do that right away. It may very well be the better answer; I don't know. I really am just trying to understand this.

Ms. Liz Scanlon: I think that there could be a consideration of a tax increase, and we would support that if that were to happen as well.

Mr. Ian Arthur: So a different way of wording it might be more publicly palatable?

Ms. Liz Scanlon: Correct.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Any further comments? MPP Mamakwa.

Mr. Sol Mamakwa: Just very quickly, on Heart and Stroke Foundation, with relation to First Nations and Indigenous people: What type of working relationship do you have with them?

Ms. Liz Scanlon: We are very much supporters of health reconciliation. We are very much supporters of Nothing About Us, Without Us. We are working in partnership, for example, with the AFN and with the Chiefs of Ontario. For example, in our FAST campaign, we have worked with local First Nations—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): I apologize to cut you off. That concludes our time. Thank you so much for your presentation.

RYERSON UNIVERSITY

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Now I would like to call upon the next witness, from Ryerson University.

Please come forward. Please state your name for the record. You have seven minutes for your presentation.

Dr. Steven Liss: Good afternoon. Thank you, Mr. Chair and members of the committee. I'm Dr. Steven Liss. I'm the vice-president of research and innovation at Ryerson University.

Innovation is the engine of economic growth and social mobility. At Ryerson, innovation underpins all aspects of our mission. We harness current knowledge and best practices, draw new insights from evidence-based research and imagine what the future can be.

Since the beginning of its mandate, the government of Ontario has been clear that it will restore sustainability to the province by carefully managing the balance between finding efficiencies and making strategic investments to stimulate economic success and competitiveness.

I will use my time this afternoon to share with you how Ryerson University develops talent, uses its infrastructure to support the economy and drives innovation and entrepreneurship. It is in these three respective areas where strategic investments by the government of Ontario can amplify the impact that Ryerson and the entire post-secondary education sector can have in creating a resilient workforce, accelerating innovation and building a competitive economy.

I will first discuss developing talent for a resilient workforce. The pace of change has never been so rapid, and it will continue to accelerate and to reshape labour market demand for generations to come. Where once a worker may have had a career at one, maybe two or three organizations, today's graduates will likely have more than a dozen different jobs and career trajectories.

Ryerson has considerable experience with career-oriented and experiential learning. We provide one of the widest ranges of experiential learning opportunities, from co-op placements, practicums and fieldwork to contributing to innovative business start-ups and engaging with government. Embedded in these experiences and programs are the power skills—sometimes referred to as “soft skills,” but they are power skills: communications, teamwork and critical thinking—that are in high demand by employers and are critical to career adaptability and resilience. We also have significant experience supporting the upskilling and reskilling of mid-career individuals transitioning to new jobs and as a result of business disruption.

The recommendation: The experiential learning opportunities that provide students with the adaptability and resilience they need for a changing economy were not envisioned when the student funding model was first developed, nor is the cost reflected in the current model. Yet these are opportunities that build skills for the world of work, skills that will drive the province's businesses and organizations to be more innovative. We recommend that the government of Ontario create opportunities through a competitive grant that supports initiatives that enable experiential learning opportunities; short-term courses to enhance career upskilling; and online technology to enhance greater access.

The second item that I'd like to address is the need for state-of-the-art infrastructure to support the economy of the future. Building an adaptable and resilient workforce requires different types of classrooms, labs and library spaces that are more collaborative and technically advanced—not the types of spaces of my generation or generations prior, for which the infrastructure still serves as the platform for the students of today.

Ryerson is a leader in creating purpose-built spaces that leverage technology to provide opportunities for learning and skills development, such as our new Daphne Cockwell Health Sciences Complex, funded by the government, private donors and Ryerson, and officially opened by Minister Romano. The building includes three large 15-bed wards and individual hospital rooms with patient simulation mannequins that talk, listen and move. The space can accommodate several different settings, including, a hospital, a community setting or home, in order to give students a state-of-the-art experience for the future of work in different health care environments.

Ryerson also demonstrates innovative out-of-the-box thinking in the way we manage our limited physical footprint: for example, our partnership with Cineplex that allows lectures to be held in the theatres at Yonge and Dundas on weekday mornings, and other partnerships that provide us with teaching, research and administrative space in adjacent developments. While we are proud of what we have achieved, space remains the number one concern for the university. We have one of the highest space-utilization rates in the sector, and limited access to affordable land challenges us to be creative about securing what we need to grow and improve. Top of the list for Ryerson is a new science building to support our growing science research and education programs, and particularly in the area of cyber sciences and cybersecurity.

The recommendation: A comprehensive capital program is needed to assist the post-secondary sector to maintain and transform its current building stock. We recommend that the government of Ontario establish a multi-year infrastructure fund to address campus renewal and develop modern, technology-enabled classrooms, research labs and testing facilities that would include retrofitting existing spaces to create the sustainable infrastructure to support our student learning and experiential experiences on our campuses.

Finally, innovation and entrepreneurship to drive the economy: I'd like to discuss how Ryerson and post-secondary institutions can accelerate innovation and help build a competitive economy for Ontario. Ontario has been leading the country in job creation and entrepreneurship, and with support from universities like Ryerson, the government can help to ensure that trend continues.

Ryerson's innovation ecosystem has a direct impact on the economy by creating jobs, attracting capital, fuelling international partnerships. We are home to the DMZ, a world-leading accelerator for tech start-ups in Canada. We also have nine other innovation zones across our campus in sectors such as biomedical, clean energy, law and fashion. Ryerson's zone network fosters entrepreneurship

skills that lead to new business creation and increased capacity for intrapreneurship for those looking to apply an innovation mindset to an existing business.

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The university is at the precipice, looking beyond the horizon. The Rogers Cybersecure Catalyst, established in Brampton last year, provides training to address the global shortage of skilled labour in this area. It conducts research and fosters new product and business creation to address cyber problems and to help reduce the high cost to the economy of cyber crime, which is estimated globally to rise to US\$6 trillion annually by 2021. The Catalyst looks forward to continued discussion on how it can support the government of Ontario's new cyber security centre of excellence that was announced in the fall economic statement.

The recommendation: Encouraging innovative activities, developing talent—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): One minute.

Dr. Steven Liss: —and fostering new knowledge through research all have important contributions to the economy. A uniquely Ontarian innovation strategy would help to amplify these impacts. We recommend providing matching funds to federal research equipment and infrastructure, maximizing commercialization opportunities through support for incubation activities, and providing additional funded spaces to increase enrolment in areas of emerging need and demand.

In conclusion, the provincial government's fall economic statement emphasized the notion of building Ontario together. With the complexity of problems that exist, it is indeed important to work together for solutions and impact. At Ryerson, we're committed to working with our partners in government, business and the community to do just that.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you. We'll move to the opposition side this time. MPP Shaw.

Ms. Sandy Shaw: Thank you very much for your presentation. I'd also like to thank you for calling soft skills "power skills." I'm a proud liberal-arts grad, and so I always thought those skills were power skills. Thank you for putting a name to that.

There's so much in your presentation that I want to talk about, but we have limited time. I want to focus particularly on the capital program that you're talking about, because in my riding of Hamilton, we have McMaster University and Mohawk College. They have significant building infrastructure that they need to maintain and build, and there's a multitude of challenges there. I'm wondering if you could just expand a little bit on the scope of the problem, the scope of the need and the resolution that you're proposing here.

Dr. Steven Liss: Thank you for the question. Certainly, it's the one topic that keeps most of us at Ryerson up at night, thinking about the major challenges for the university.

We sit on a postage-stamp-size campus, a great setting—and very committed to that setting in the core of the urban centre in Toronto. As I said, just the technological advances and the types of learning spaces that are

required today are very different than the ones we have had and we currently have, and so we have to look at ways to evolve those in a sustainable way.

The second part is just our campus expansion over the last number of years. We're a student population of 45,000 students, with 3,000 faculty and staff. That has been a remarkable growth, with an equal, parallel growth commensurate in space and infrastructure with that growth alone—and the inability to also seize on the opportunities that are ahead of us.

Notwithstanding the science complex, the vast demand for the space that we will require is tremendous. So it's deferred infrastructure, it's accommodating growth and it's also to drive the type of innovative infrastructure we need for the programs of the future.

Ms. Sandy Shaw: If MPP Arthur doesn't have a question, I'm wondering also if you—I feel like you touched on the idea of new builds and the whole idea of climate change and sustainable buildings. In Hamilton, Mohawk College built a net-zero building. They incorporated the building of that into the curriculum. Do you have anything that would be similar to that, or looking at buildings in terms of sustainability of them as far as climate change?

Dr. Steven Liss: Certainly, at the core of Ryerson's academic interest in building science, in architecture, in engineering, at the City Building Institute and our Centre for Urban Innovation—these are part of some of the significant challenges but also opportunities in discussion with government and our partners, looking at ways to create not only for our institutions but for our urban centres, for our communities and for the type of infrastructure, whether it's housing or for industry, that is sustainable. It's net-zero. It adapts and it meets the needs of the intended purpose but also provides the important experiences that provide great quality of life and opportunity. That's very much at the core of our area and very much the focus of our institution's emphasis.

Ms. Sandy Shaw: Thank you very much.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): We'll move to the government side for four minutes of questioning. MPP Piccini.

Mr. David Piccini: Thank you very much for being here this morning. I appreciate your remarks this morning and the important role that you play. Especially, I'd like to emphasize the work you do with partners. I think you do an excellent job linking our next generation with the skill sets and competencies and experiential learning opportunities that they need.

First and foremost, you mentioned the word "resilience," I think, about five, six or maybe even seven times in your remarks, and talked about the changing nature of the workforce of tomorrow.

Can you talk a bit about—I remember from my time at Ryerson—the importance of technology, and exposing our youth and our next generation to technology at a young age, for those realities of tomorrow?

Dr. Steven Liss: Thank you. We at Ryerson extend, through a wide variety of our programs—through the innovation zones, through efforts at Cybersecure Catalyst

more recently, and historically through continuing education and other programs—in reaching out to youth, whether it's hacking competitions or capture-the-flag types of activities, and increasing interest in STEM as well by looking at the intersection of STEM and social innovation and technological innovation that affects the quality of lives, and in communities as well. That's very much part of the ethos of Ryerson, and an extensive reach into our primary and secondary schools with respect to those experiences.

More importantly, too, it's influencing even the direction of some of our new programming, such as our new law school and the orientation to technology and the type of legal professionals who will be in the next generation, and meeting the needs of society now and into the future.

Look at our work at the Legal Innovation Zone or the law practitioners' program, but also look at interfaculty relationships in creative technologies, for example, and the importance of that in advancing Ontario's position as a leader in creative technologies. It's a very important part of the economy as well.

At all phases of our work, we have that exposure and interest and connection historically, whether it's in the cybersciences or extending to even the philosophical and the social impact of that technology change in society.

Mr. David Piccini: On that creative technology piece, just a quick question on that before I move on to SMAs: Do you think online learning plays an important role in that?

Dr. Steven Liss: Oh, absolutely. First of all, it's part of the aspects of learning that students and others seek. It's also a way of capturing, for Ryerson, opportunities for those who wish to have access to some of the wonderful programming and access to scholars, researchers and teachers—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): One minute.

Dr. Steven Liss: —that platform.

Mr. David Piccini: Thank you. SMA3s, just on outcomes—I know Ryerson has strong outcomes. Again, to tie it in to experiential learning, can you talk to us about the importance of outcomes, and what your thoughts are on that process of an SMA3 cycle?

Dr. Steven Liss: Absolutely. Whether it's with respect to experiential learning, the employability of our students upon graduation, the contributions that we make in advancing economic prosperity and advancing the quality of lives in Ontario—these are the measures that are most important to us, so those are the types of metrics that are captured in our SMA and our focus.

I would say that every one of our programs is deeply connected to a strong sector or organization or community-based receptor capacity for those graduating students, so we really are present in the needs not only of today but in the needs of tomorrow as well.

Mr. David Piccini: Excellent. Thank you very much. I appreciate that.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you. That concludes our time. Thank you so much for your presentation.

ONTARIO COALITION FOR BETTER CHILD CARE

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Now I would like to call upon the next witness, from Ontario Coalition for Better Child Care. Please come forward. If you can please state your name for the record, and you have seven minutes for your presentation.

Ms. Carolyn Ferns: Thank you. My name is Carolyn Ferns, and I'm the policy coordinator for the Ontario Coalition for Better Child Care.

The Ontario Coalition for Better Child Care is the central advocacy group for a universal, affordable, child care system for Ontario's families. We're a member-based organization comprising non-profit child care programs, local and provincial groups, and members from right across Ontario who are early childhood educators. They're parents and they're concerned citizens who care about child care.

I want to summarize what we're asking for in this year's budget. What I really want to highlight is that licensed child care is facing over \$48 million in cuts to child care funding this year. We're asking that those cuts be reversed and that operating funding be increased to keep pace with capital expansion of child care.

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If you've all got my printed report, I've attached a table which shows exactly how much money is being lost in each municipality across Ontario because of provincial cuts to child care funding. For example, for the city of Hamilton, they're looking at \$2.9 million in cuts to child care funding this year; the city of Ottawa, \$3.1 million; Kingston, \$400,000; and the region of Peel is set to lose \$4.2 million in child care funding this year. These are cuts that will have real impacts on children and families and child care programs right across this province. There are over 460,000 Ontario children and their families that use licensed child care every day, yet there are only spaces for about a third of the children who need them.

Child care cuts must be reversed and funding must be increased to ensure that these programs frankly do not close and that subsidies for low-income families are not frozen, that families who need to access child care can access that space, and that early childhood educators' wages are able to rise, maybe even to match inflation.

The other point on child care operating funding is that this funding must be increased to keep pace with expansion. The government currently has a plan to create 30,000 new child care spaces over the next five years. Just as I was coming over here, I saw a Google news alert saying there's \$2.1 million to Windsor to open a new child care centre, which is excellent. The problem is that that creates the bricks and mortar, but if municipalities are facing cuts to operating funding for child care, that makes it very difficult to run those programs and it makes it even more difficult for low-income families to access those programs, because subsidies could be frozen. I think it's really important to think about the big picture when we talk about child care funding, and if the government wants

to increase spaces, they have to have a plan to make that affordable for families.

We're also calling on the continuation of the \$2-per-hour wage enhancement grant. We are very happy to see that money has been allocated for that grant to continue in 2020. It's an important support for early childhood educators. We're asking that that grant be expanded to include early childhood educators who work in EarlyON child and family programs who currently do not have access to that grant, despite their important work and having similar wages to those in licensed child care.

Finally, that is to address the immediate concerns facing licensed child care in this province, but we're really calling for a transition to a universal, high-quality child care system which would do so much to truly support Ontario's working families, to support the amazing work of early childhood educators and to reap significant social and economic benefits.

We think that there needs to be action simultaneously on three big ideas for child care.

The first one is affordable fees so that every family is paying low fees or no fees for child care.

Decent work and pay for educators: We have an Ontario early years and child care workforce strategy in this province. We haven't heard from the government any plan on its pivotal action, which is a provincial wage scale for early childhood educators. So we would like to see that moved forward.

Finally, we think that expansion of child care spaces should be focused on the public and non-profit sectors to ensure that public funds are used efficiently and there's public accountability for that expansion.

Thank you very much. I'm happy to take any questions.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you so much. We'll move to the government side this time for four minutes of questioning. MPP Anand?

Mr. Deepak Anand: Thank you, Carolyn. One of the big challenges whenever we talk about the child care spaces is the spaces themselves: that there are not enough spaces. On one hand, we are struggling for the spaces; on the other hand, talking about my riding itself, talking about Mississauga, there were two Catholic schools which were closed, and to date, they are still closed. They're being used as abandoned buildings or for storage of product. There's a better way of using it for the child care. You are reducing the cost and you're putting the building to a better use. Have you approached these school boards to accommodate for that?

Ms. Carolyn Ferns: Absolutely, I think that expanding in school spaces and places where schools are being closed—I think that's an excellent place to be. Looking at child care services—I know that here in the city of Toronto, closed schools are always offered first to the other school boards, and we've always called for those also to be put forward to the community for child care programs. I think that's important.

To your point about one of the most expensive parts being the bricks and mortar, with the expanding child care programs: That's true, but the other main challenge in

expanding child care programs is actually recruiting and retaining staff. There is a real crisis in the recruitment and retention of early childhood educators. To this point, that has only really been addressed through the idea of recruiting more, of having more training programs, of bringing more staff on. But the real problem is keeping staff in those programs. That's because the wages are just not high enough to keep staff. They could earn more by working at the local Costco. So if we really want to see child care programs expand, we need the bricks and mortar, but we also need the early childhood educators.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): MPP Piccini.

Mr. David Piccini: Thank you very much for your presentation.

I had the opportunity to visit North Shore in Keene, in my riding, probably one of the most rural and remote areas, and see the remarkable work being done by ECEs, and we had a nice round table—I know that was before I spoke to the minister and stayed true to the planned increase—and the important role that they do. It's vital, especially in rural Ontario. So thank you for bringing that to the forefront.

I want to talk about predictability in planning. Again, in rural Ontario, the relationship we have with our municipalities—we just launched our EarlyON in Grafton. I think one of the pieces of feedback we had from our ongoing relationship with the municipalities is the importance of predictability, which is why we gave the allocation in the fall as opposed to the spring and have worked with them on reducing red tape. Do you think that's an important first step? I know they've certainly said it, in terms of getting these spots online.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Fifty seconds.

Ms. Carolyn Ferns: It is good that those allocations were there in the fall, because the year before it was really chaos trying to figure out what the state of funding was. So I think the predictability is important, but it's also important to be able to plan for what's really needed.

I think that it's important to know that non-profit child care programs operate right at the line of being able to keep their doors open. If municipalities face a shortfall and have to do something like freeze subsidies, that can create vacancies in child care programs despite great need, and that makes programs really unstable, which is what I'm concerned about.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): We'll move to the opposition side now. MPP Arthur.

Mr. Ian Arthur: Good afternoon. Thank you so much for your presentation.

I'd like to talk about some of the impacts of affordable child care, in particular the economic impacts, and the model in a neighbouring province which, frankly, the rest of the world has modelled child care off of. But we can't seem to learn the lessons of Quebec and bring them to Ontario. Can you elaborate? We have a skilled trades shortage which the government loves talking about. There is consistent messaging about needing to get more women interested in the trades and into the workforce in many forms. Why not with affordable child care?

Ms. Carolyn Ferns: The economic impacts of affordable child care really can't be overstated. I was talking to a mother the other day who was saying that child care should be seen along the same lines as transit or roads: "It's my route to work." That's what she said. "I couldn't get to work if it wasn't for child care." I think that's really important. The experience in Quebec has shown exactly that. By investing in child care, by making it affordable for families and truly expanding spaces to meet the need, the government has actually seen their revenues increase, simply because of the increased workforce participation of mothers. So it's really an economic win to invest in child care. My report is mostly about the economic benefits—quoting the OECD and the International Monetary Fund, and their recommendations that Canada and the provinces increase their funding to child care.

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Mr. Ian Arthur: I really hope that the members on the government side are listening to this testimony on this area. I think it's incredibly, incredibly important. It's an economic driver a couple of times over, and that provides large increases in tax revenue for the government, which can go back into actually paying for that child care, no?

Ms. Carolyn Ferns: That's right. That's right.

Mr. Ian Arthur: You have businesses that can hire more people and do more in terms of their own operations. You have personal income tax coming off those new revenue sources for families.

What's the impact on child poverty?

Ms. Carolyn Ferns: The impact on child poverty is huge, to have actual affordable child care that parents can access. It means a parent being able to go back to work. When it's done well, a universal child care system benefits several groups at the same time. It is a huge support for low-income families, but it also, as you said, puts the money directly into the community, because you're creating new jobs, local jobs, in communities—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): One minute.

Ms. Carolyn Ferns: —as well as helping parents get back to work. Really, there's a strong economic case for investing in child care, as well as simply the benefits for young children, which are immense when child care is high-quality.

I thank you very much for your question specifically focusing on the economic case for child care.

Mr. Ian Arthur: Just following along that theme, because I think it's really, really important to get it on the record, we heard a minister, several times, stand up in the Legislature and say that the best social program is a job, which we did not agree with, on our side. How can they even access that avenue if they're stuck caring for children—particularly single mothers?

Ms. Carolyn Ferns: Yes, that's right. That's what is really concerning about cuts to child care that are happening, because \$48 million in cuts to child care means that those parents can't access child care. It means that child care subsidies could be frozen, so that low-income families that qualify for support for child care won't get it.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you. I apologize to cut you off.

Mr. Ian Arthur: Thank you so much for your presentation.

Ms. Carolyn Ferns: Thank you so much.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): That concludes our time for the presentation.

ONTARIO FEDERATION OF LABOUR

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Now I would like to call upon the next witness, from Ontario Federation of Labour. Please come forward. Please state your name for the record. You have seven minutes for your presentation.

Ms. Patty Coates: Thank you for the opportunity to speak today. My name is Patty Coates and I'm the president of the Ontario Federation of Labour. With me is Thevaki Thevaratnam, our director of research and education.

The OFL represents 54 unions and one million workers. We champion the rights of all workers, whether they are in a union or not.

Conservative government policies have underfunded Ontario's high-quality public services, undermined working conditions, failed to be inclusive of equity-seeking workers, and endangered the health and safety of our workplaces and our communities. The 2020 budget provides an important opportunity to the Conservatives to change course. We need a government that governs for the many, not for the few. Ontario needs public services for all.

Ontario already has the lowest program spending per person of any province in Canada. According to the Financial Accountability Office, the Conservative government plans to reduce spending per person each year by \$1,070 over the next five years. Demand for public services, on the other hand, will exceed the government's planned program spending by about \$5 billion by 2022.

This fiscal plan will not provide enough resources to meet the need for key public services. Instead of generating more revenue for public services, this government will reduce revenues by \$4.2 billion this fiscal year, and by an average of \$3.4 billion each year until 2024.

In Canada, corporate income taxes accounted for an average of just 1.75%. Increasing corporate tax rates by two percentage points would generate \$2.4 billion in revenue this year, growing to \$2.8 billion by 2022. Big corporations and the wealthy must contribute their fair share of taxes, to increase revenues to fully fund public services for everyone.

When it comes to health care, the Ford government has laid the groundwork for undoing our universal health care system through underfunding, dissolving specialized and regional providers, and setting the stage for privatization.

This government is also undermining the quality of our public education system by decreasing student funding, increasing class sizes and moving to mandatory e-learning.

Post-secondary education is out of reach for many. They have turned grants for low-income students into

loans, and cancelled the six-month, interest-free period for student loans, forcing students to end or pause their education goals.

Child care in Canada is the most expensive in the country. Instead of creating child care spaces that are affordable, high quality and publicly delivered, this government relaxed restrictions for home child care providers. It is important to understand that these restrictions were introduced years ago after several infant deaths in Ontario's private child care sector.

Social assistance and community services are also under attack. The government cut the scheduled 3% increase to social assistance in half, then cut 50% of the Poverty Reduction Strategy funding.

The government must change course to invest in and strengthen access to publicly delivered universal services and programs for all Ontarians; stop the privatization of our public services and assets; ensure that provincial funding models for publicly delivered services only provide public monies to public and licensed institutions; and guarantee professional-level wages for all public sector workers.

To make Ontario a better place to work and live, everyone must have decent working conditions. On the heels of cancelling the scheduled increase to the \$15 minimum wage and the many needed changes to the Employment Standards Act and the Labour Relations Act, the Ontario government passed Bill 124, which infringes on the charter right of all workers to free and collective bargaining, and limits total compensation increases to 1% a year for three years, a rate well below the cost of living. Meanwhile, they have gifted compensation increases to their own deputy ministers, provincial police and doctors at rates well above what they are mandating in the broader public sector.

This government must ensure higher employment standards for everyone, ensure everyone who wants access to a union can have it, and respect and uphold the right to free and fair collective bargaining.

Everyone must be treated fairly. The growing divide between the richest 1% and the rest of Ontarians disproportionately impacts women, Indigenous and racialized peoples, immigrants, 2SLGBTQI+ people, young people and people living with disabilities. In their 2019 budget, the Ford government targeted immigrants and refugees, eliminating two thirds of funding for their cases, forcing layoffs at Legal Aid Ontario, delaying justice through the courts and discouraging vulnerable people from seeking help. The government must ensure access to justice for every Ontarian and examine all policies through an intersectional equity lens to eliminate systematic discrimination in all of its forms.

We all deserve access to safe, healthy and sustainable communities and workplaces. WSIB statistics show that in 2018, 228 people died from a work-related injury or illness in Ontario, and lost-time injuries increased by 33% since 2015.

The importance of health and safety extends beyond our workplaces, into our communities and our environment.

The United Nations declared that we are less than 10 years away from irreversible damage to our planet. Nonetheless, the Conservative government's first move was to eliminate the cap-and-trade program and cancel 758 green energy contracts.

The government must ensure safe and healthy workplaces and communities for all, and they need to guarantee universal workers' compensation for every worker in Ontario, properly fund workplace disability prevention initiatives, jail negligent employers for killing workers, secure clean air, water and sustainable environments for everyone and achieve net-zero greenhouse—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you. I apologize to cut you off. We have to move to the opposition side for questioning. MPP Shaw.

Ms. Sandy Shaw: If you would like to finish your deputation—

Ms. Patty Coates: Thank you, Sandy—achieve net-zero greenhouse gas emissions through a fair and just transition for all communities and workers.

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In conclusion, the Ontario Federation of Labour strongly hopes that the preceding recommendations and those that are included in our submission inform the development of the 2020 budget as well as the upcoming legislative agenda. It's time to build an Ontario for all.

Thank you for that extra time.

Ms. Sandy Shaw: Yes, absolutely.

I agree, really, with everything you've said here. I would like to maybe get a little bit more specific on some of this, because it's about pre-budget, and we're really asking about where the government is going to allocate dollars and resources—which is a reflection of their priorities, we can agree.

Maybe I'll leave it to you, if there's anything very specific you wanted to talk about, for this government to put money back that they've withdrawn from certain sectors or to enhance funding. If you had a wish list, if you had a top one where you would say, "Restore this funding," or "Keep up the funding in health care and education"—I mean, there's just so much to look at it in this presentation. But if there's one big ask for this government, what would that be?

Ms. Patty Coates: I think the big ask is more general. It's to ensure that we have a budget that does not leave anybody behind, that we have legislation that does not leave anyone behind. Over the past year and a half, there have been so many people who have been left behind. That's what I ask, that's why we're here, and that's why in conclusion I said that we need to make sure we develop a budget and they look at their legislative agenda for the next year and a half to two years—because we can't leave people behind. It's the most vulnerable who have been hit. It's those who are most at risk who have been hit.

I can name so many things. I named a few here, but we've got children with autism whose parents are struggling. We have low-income workers who are struggling. We have those who are on social assistance, who thought they were going to get 3% and they're getting 1%. I know

there's going to be a presentation later to discuss this further, but it doesn't even amount to enough money to pay rent. I can go on and on.

We have workers who live in their communities. We also need to ensure that we have a budget so that municipalities have enough money to be able to do what they need to do. I will tell you that as a past public sector worker who has gone through Conservative governments and governments where they say they need to be fiscally responsible, the problem is, if you're not reaching the salary increases that are part of the cost of living—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): One minute.

Ms. Patty Coates: —then you are behind, because municipalities are now looking at their budgets and they're increasing their taxes. They're increasing other service costs. So that puts us further and further behind.

Ms. Sandy Shaw: It's a downward spiral, and they're either going to pass on the costs to the taxpayers or they're going to cut service levels for important services. That's what we're seeing.

Ms. Patty Coates: Exactly.

Ms. Sandy Shaw: Is there anything that you would like to add to that?

Ms. Thevaki Thevaratnam: Sure. I absolutely agree with what Patty has said. I think that if you're going to apply an overall framework, it's this idea that we need to increase revenues as opposed to cutting program spending. Patty touched on how we could do that, increasing corporate tax rates, but also there are things that the government can do—reverse some of their short-sighted actions. For example, they cancelled the cap-and-trade program, which is forgoing \$3 billion in lost revenue over the next four years. They cancelled the minimum wage and instead instituted the LIFT tax credit, which in actuality is costing us \$1.9 billion—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you. I apologize to cut you off. I will have to move to the government side for questioning. MPP Roberts.

Mr. Jeremy Roberts: Thank you so much for your presentation and for putting together a thorough document with a lot of different recommendations.

Since being elected, I think our government has attempted to address four priorities and attempted to balance those four priorities, those four priorities being (1) making life more affordable for Canadian families and businesses; (2) protecting our critical public services; (3) creating jobs; and (4) getting our finances in order. All of our decisions in government up to this point have been about balancing those four different priorities.

On that last priority, getting our finances in order, I'm curious if you guys would be able to provide—again, I mentioned there are a lot of recommendations in here. I'm wondering what the total fiscal cost of all of these proposals would be in fiscal year 2020-21.

Ms. Thevaki Thevaratnam: Sure. I think what it's important to understand is—you've just outlined your priorities and how you're balancing them. I don't think—and I can say that quite strongly—that we feel that those priorities are being met, nor are those the correct priorities for this province.

I think government always has a responsibility to its constituents, regardless of if they voted for them or not, to ensure that society as a whole is lifted up. I can safely say that when you're talking about people and their well-being, the fact that jobs in this province are not as decent as they should be, because legislative standards have been sunk so low—what folks were expecting this year was a \$15 minimum wage, and that's just to ensure that people are outside of poverty.

Mr. Jeremy Roberts: I'm just wondering again—a specific number on all of these proposals for fiscal year 2020. Can I get a particular number?

Ms. Thevaki Thevaratnam: I mean, as you can see, some of them are legislated, and some of them are fiscal, so we've attached numbers where they are.

Mr. Jeremy Roberts: Of course. I'm talking about the ones where you're requesting new funding. All of those bundled together—what would be the cost on those, even a ballpark figure?

Ms. Thevaki Thevaratnam: You have to understand that, again, budgets are not short-sighted. They're both short- and long-term, and so the phasing in which you bring them in is quite different. I think that's a responsibility for government to determine. If we had a longer consultation period, perhaps then we could attach specific numbers. But again, that's not our job. I think that's the job of your government.

Mr. Jeremy Roberts: Of course, our finance minister's job is to look at the books and make sure that we're in a healthy perspective.

A follow-up question to that, in terms of that priority of getting our finances in order: Do you think that our timeline of five years to balance the budget is reasonable, or would you do that faster, or would you take longer to do that? What's your feeling on that priority?

Ms. Patty Coates: My concern is that by balancing the books in such a quick manner, you're balancing it on the backs of those most vulnerable.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): One minute.

Ms. Patty Coates: You're balancing it on the backs of students. You're balancing it on the backs of children who are in child care.

A government's responsibility, as I said before, is to ensure that every single one of their constituents, everyone in Ontario, is lifted and lifted up.

Mr. Jeremy Roberts: So how long would you recommend that we take to balance the budget? How many years? What forecast?

Ms. Thevaki Thevaratnam: Can I just say, though, that we also have to think about the opportunity cost of not addressing issues. What's the cost of not addressing climate change? What's the cost of not ensuring that every child has a child care space? What's the cost of the fact that there is a homelessness crisis on the streets of every single city in this province? What is the cost—

Mr. Jeremy Roberts: So you have no figure.

Ms. Thevaki Thevaratnam: No, no, no—of not having prescription drugs or dental care? What are these costs, and where are your numbers?

Mr. Jeremy Roberts: There's no figure for total amount of costs—

Ms. Thevaki Thevaratnam: Is there a cost for not addressing these issues?

Mr. Jeremy Roberts:—and you don't have a sense on the timeline for balancing the budget. Any sense on independent analysis on impact on jobs?

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you. I apologize to cut you off. That concludes our time. Thank you so much for your presentation.

CANADIAN MANUFACTURERS AND EXPORTERS

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): I would now like to call upon the next witness, from Canadian Manufacturers and Exporters. Please come forward. Please state your name for the record, and you have seven minutes for your presentation.

Mr. Alex Greco: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Alex Greco, director of manufacturing policy with Canadian Manufacturers and Exporters.

Good afternoon. Thank you for inviting me here to represent our 2,500 direct members and the broader manufacturing and exporting community in Ontario. I'm Alex Greco, Canadian Manufacturers and Exporters, director of manufacturing policy.

My comments today focus on the need to help manufacturers grow and create wealth and prosperity for all Ontarians. Manufacturing serves Ontario's economic activity, wealth generation and overall prosperity. This sector directly accounts for over 12% of the province's GDP, with nearly \$300 billion in annual shipments, \$200 billion in exports and 778,000 jobs. To an extent, these numbers tell a story of the potential of our manufacturing sector. They also tell the story of a sector that continues to stagnate. The result has been a decline in the strength and competitiveness of Ontario's manufacturing sector.

Consider the following: Our record on capital investment over the last five years is the fifth-worst in the entire OECD. Ontario GDP per capita growth is 45th out of the 60 jurisdictions across the US and Canada. US manufacturers invest eight times more than Ontario manufacturers. Productivity growth has been 30 percentage points lower than the US rate. Manufacturing investment in Ontario is about 20% lower today than it was in 2005.

Manufacturing has also continued to go through significant changes. To better understand what changes are taking place in the manufacturing sector, CME conducted a detailed consultation with Ontario's manufacturing community in 2018. Our goal was to develop a plan that would double manufacturing output in the province by 2030.

Throughout our consultations, three core priorities emerged for growth: reduce the cost of doing business; support investment, technology adoption and scale-up; and address the skills shortage. Based on the themes identified during our consultations, we have the following

recommendations for budget 2020 to help create manufacturing jobs and attract investment in our sector.

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The first area this budget should focus on to help reduce business costs is to restore fairness in Ontario's property tax system. We commend the government for taking initial steps to restore fairness in the Ontario property tax system by committing to removing the "highest and best use" provisions and reviewing the MPAC governance process. That said, more must be done.

Unfair and high property tax rates can have devastating effects on manufacturing plants because it is a fixed cost of doing business on capital and investments. They can also have a chilling effect on investment when business owners are considering upgrades of existing plants, expansion or development of new plants. Manufacturers are paying three to four times higher in property taxes compared to other commercial and residential ratepayers.

Worse is that manufacturers are paying high and unfair rates due to the business education tax—a tax unrelated to Ontario's education system—that targets residential and business properties. This tax alone cost Ontario industry \$6 billion in 2017 and has been a barrier to competitiveness and has caused distortion in efficient business location decisions. To that end, the government should begin to take measures to phase out the business education tax and begin to enact additional measures to restore fairness between industrial, commercial and residential property taxes.

To further reduce business costs, we must lower electricity rates. For many years, Ontario's high electricity costs have been a top issue for our members. Ontario manufacturers' electricity rates are up to 75% higher than other US jurisdictions. We understand that there is no single silver bullet to solve this problem, but we need solutions to be implemented soon. Solutions should include introducing a competitive industrial rate; returning the industrial conservation initiative program, a program in which large industrial users of electricity can reduce their costs by lowering their load during Ontario's peak demand hours, to its original design criteria of three megawatts and grandfather in those who wish to stay in it until such a time as they decide to opt out; and reducing global adjustment costs and shifting them to the provincial budget.

The second area this budget must focus on are new support programs and incentives to boost investment in machinery and equipment. Prior to the 2019 fall economic statement, the government renewed the regional economic development programs in eastern and southwestern Ontario. This was a positive development. However, industry needs a stable, transparent and predictable program to support investments in their operations that is accessible for all manufacturers. Given this, we recommend the creation of an investment support program focused on the attraction of new investment and to assist companies looking to reinvest in their existing processes. To help further boost investment, we also recommend the introduction of a "patent box" tax incentive to encourage

commercialization of products locally. This has successfully been adopted in other jurisdictions globally and in other Canadian provinces. Such an incentive would support initial production scale-up by reducing corporate taxes paid on earnings from new products.

The final area that the government must address is the ongoing issue of skills and labour shortages in Ontario. This is a big problem that impacts manufacturers' day-to-day operations. When we recently surveyed our members, we found that 85% of manufacturers struggle to fill vacancies, and Canada's youth are also increasingly unprepared and uninterested in working in the manufacturing sector, despite the stable and high-paying jobs on offer. Among many solutions that the government can implement to address this problem, one solution is of the utmost importance. The government should work with industry and the education system to create regional industry councils. These councils would be populated with local representatives that create ties between industry, marginalized groups and the academic community who can act as the central authority in various communities to address the many challenges manufacturers face, including recruiting, training and helping youth update their skills in order to secure a career in the skilled trades.

In closing, manufacturing in Ontario is the largest single contributor to the wealth and prosperity of the province. We continue to understand that the province is in a difficult financial situation with high budget deficits, but the sector needs a competitive business environment and the support to reverse stagnant trends. Manufacturing should play a critical role in creating prosperity and economic renewal in Ontario.

Thank you for your time today. I look forward to the questions and discussion.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you. We'll go to the government side this time. MPP Skelly.

Ms. Donna Skelly: Thank you once again for your presentation. It's nice to see you again.

I'm not sure if you were here for the previous presentation by the Ontario Federation of Labour. They made a presentation asking for billions of dollars in additional spending, although they couldn't identify what that figure was, nor could they propose any sort of timeline to balance the budget. Regardless, they are asking for this government to spend billions and billions of dollars and are suggesting that that can be recovered by increasing corporate taxes, by asking business to cover the difference. That is a theme that is repeated often when we have groups such as the Ontario Federation of Labour making presentations, asking for increases in expenditures: that you can bear the burden, you can bear the brunt, you can cover that.

What would that mean to your sector?

Mr. Alex Greco: First of all, when we look at overall tax rates, it's not just about low corporate tax rates or high corporate tax rates; it's looking at outcomes-based taxation. If companies are willing to invest, whether it's in jobs or the economy or reducing greenhouse gas emissions, there has to be an outcome tied to a corporate tax rate. I think, though, right now, more and more, we are

seeing that manufacturers are continuing to be burdened by high taxes, high electricity costs and still a high regulatory burden. At the end of the day, if manufacturers don't have capital in their bank accounts, they're not able to invest in machinery, equipment, technology or to modernize their overall operations and manufacturing. If we're not building towards a world-class manufacturing sector and those companies don't have that capital investment, we're not going to see new manufacturing plants in Ontario, and we're not going to see high-tech manufacturing happen.

That's why, I think, for us, looking at restoring fairness for taxation moving forward is going to be very important—not just looking at low tax rates, but them being tied to outcomes. If we tie things to outcomes, we can see innovation, we can see scale-up and we can see growth in this sector moving forward.

Ms. Donna Skelly: We saw 300,000 jobs disappear in the previous government due to out-of-control hydro rates, a very poor green energy policy and a climate that really wasn't business-friendly, and I fear that could happen again if we see these types of measures introduced.

Our government, however, wants to work with the business sector. That's the reason we've seen such job growth.

I do know that my colleague MPP Anand wants to speak as well.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): MPP Anand.

Mr. Deepak Anand: Thank you so much for your presentation. It's very interesting to see that the Canadian Manufacturers and Exporters and the Ontario Federation of Labour are close to each other in their presentations.

I actually met a company that had a global presence, and they have one of their units here in Mississauga. They said, "We want to bring more jobs. We want to bring more prosperity."

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): One minute.

Mr. Deepak Anand: Today, all these global companies are fighting for the same dollar everywhere. They have a choice. They can go to Mexico. They can go to India. They can go anywhere in the world. What can we do to stay competitive?

You both have the same vested interest. The Ontario Federation of Labour wants more jobs, and you want more jobs.

My question to you is, what can we do to stay competitive, as a government?

Mr. Alex Greco: We would probably need more than one minute. First of all, I said at the end of my remarks that we respect budget deficits. We understand that there are still economic challenges in the province. But if we're not investing in looking at things like regional industry councils to address the skills shortages in manufacturing, if we're not looking at investment supports or tax incentives to look at having companies being able to adopt new machinery or equipment—if we're not making investments into the economy, we won't have a sustainable, long-term manufacturing sector. You have to be able to invest in order to grow the economy at the end of the day—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you. I apologize to cut you off. We have to move to the opposition side now.

MPP Arthur.

Mr. Ian Arthur: Thank you, Mr. Greco. It's great to see you again and have you before the committee.

I have a couple of questions for you. You brought up the cost of hydro. In the NDP, we have been incredibly vocal about what we thought about the Liberals' Fair Hydro Plan and the moves they did with hydro at the end and the massive cost that is and how uncompetitive that does make it. We do agree with the government. But we haven't seen any differentiation in this government's policy from that so far.

Do you see an end in sight for the crazy electricity prices for manufacturing in Ontario?

Mr. Alex Greco: At this point, sir, I don't. The reason why I say that is, we've had consultations taking place on industrial electricity pricing for the last several months. In the fall economic statement, the government committed to doing a review of electricity generation contracts with the IESO. The thing is, we have to implement measures now, because the reality is that if you compare Ohio, Michigan and Indiana to Ontario—not only for class B ratepayers, but for small and medium manufacturers—they pay up to 75% more. Even your General Motors or some of your other larger industrials are paying up to 25% more.

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We're at a point right now where companies, especially energy-intensive, trade-exposed sectors, need relief now, whether that's through returning the ICI program, as I mentioned, to its original design criteria or looking at an industrial rate option. What I mean by that is not just a free-for-all electricity rate. You have to invest in the economy and in jobs and you have to commit to climate change in order to get that special electricity rate. But we need solutions now.

Mr. Ian Arthur: And any relief that was there was aimed at residential people, which is important, but they're also the voters.

Mr. Alex Greco: Yes.

Mr. Ian Arthur: And that sort of approach is continuing.

I want to talk a little bit about growing the manufacturing sector again. I want to talk a little bit—use Denmark as an example, because it's an incredibly small country and they produce 38% of the world's supply of wind turbines. They started in the 1970s. That is when they started going into this. How do we look to the future and identify those areas where there is growth potential for value-added products, manufactured products, in Ontario? Because we need to start now for what's going to have a huge market share in 20 years.

Mr. Alex Greco: One of the things we're doing at CME now is we're looking at a net-zero emissions strategy, which is tied into not only addressing climate change but looking at the advanced manufacturing sector to adopt new technologies, like we've seen not only in Denmark but in Germany, as a couple of examples.

One of the things I think we have to look at is, if we create an investment support program that's geared towards helping, particularly, small and medium manufacturers to grow, if they get capital to purchase new machinery and equipment, but also look at ways of how they can reduce their energy costs or look at replacing equipment that is 60 years old and be able to turn that into modern advanced manufacturing—you have to do that. But also, in addressing climate change, we have to look at: How do you, if there is a price on carbon, for example, whether it's at the federal or the provincial level—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): One minute.

Mr. Alex Greco:—take that revenue and return it back to the companies in order to achieve net-zero emissions?

Mr. Ian Arthur: That is exactly why we continue to support the cap-and-trade program over the federal backstop. Sure, it's collecting money and that may shift some attitudes in terms of prices when consumers go to purchase goods, but that's flowing directly back to individuals and not in any sort of sum where you can spend it on that type of transition that you're talking about.

Mr. Alex Greco: It's a double-edged sword, because some of our members did purchase allowances under cap-and-trade but then others, when you chat with some companies, are trying to get into the federal backstop program. The problem is, there is a long application process. Until they get into that voluntary output-based pricing program, they're still not getting any kind of benefits whatsoever, whether it's a federal or provincial program. It goes back to my comment earlier to the government side: If companies don't have that capital or cannot get that revenue returned to them from either carbon pricing or other mechanisms, they're not going to be able to have the capital to build their businesses in the long term and set the foundation.

Mr. Ian Arthur: Thank you so much for your presentation.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): That concludes our time. Thank you so much for your presentation.

ONTARIO NURSES' ASSOCIATION

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): I would now like to call upon the next witness, from the Ontario Nurses' Association. Please come forward. If you can please state your name for the record, and you have seven minutes for your presentation.

Ms. Vicki McKenna: Good afternoon. My name is Vicki McKenna. I'm a registered nurse and the provincial president with the Ontario nurses. With me today is Bev Mathers, who is our CEO at the Ontario nurses, and Lawrence Walter, ONA's manager for government relations.

ONA is the largest nursing union in Canada. We represent over 68,000 registered nurses and health professionals in Ontario, working in every sector of health care—hospitals, long-term care, the community, clinics, public health and industry. We also have over 18,000 nursing student affiliates.

The standing committee has heard and will hear today from many groups and constituencies representing concerns from sectors right across this province.

ONA, the Ontario nurses, is here to deliver a clear message: The status quo in health care cannot continue and is in fact dangerous.

The RN shortage is worsening. Workloads are heavier. Hospital funding, measured against inflation, is decreasing. The worsening overcrowding means more hallway care, not less. Staffing in long-term care and home care is inadequate. Working conditions are unacceptable. Public health funding cuts are looming. Restructuring is causing job insecurity. And as frustration boils over in health care settings, our members face growing rates of violence on the job, with little government intervention.

It's not a pretty picture. More delays, without appropriate resources, will only mean more avoidable hardship and higher and steeper mountains to climb further down the road. But it doesn't have to be this way. So we ask you to listen carefully to the nurses. By working with nurses, by having the courage to invest in what's needed, we can find solutions to challenges in our health care system for our patients, for our communities, for safe staffing.

We come before this committee to demand meaningful and immediate action to correct the worsening conditions in our health care system—not next year, not in five years, but we need to start now. The government cannot continue to expect that our nurses do more with less. Nurses and health care professionals are the caretakers of all we hold dear. We hold the hands of those in pain. We bring patients back from the brink. We care for the lonely. We help transition patients into healthy next stages of life. We're there when you and your loved ones need us. We need a government that will be there for us too.

Instead, as I visit our members in every corner of this province, I hear the same story. They tell me they're being asked to do too much with less. They feel unappreciated and abandoned in a system that doesn't support them, yet every day they rise to the occasion. They put on a smile. They carry on. They tell me how glad they are just to make it to the end of the shift. Courageously, they put on a brave face and return to the patients who need them.

Where is the leadership to do the right thing by front-line health care heroes? Where is the courage to guarantee great care for Ontarians?

You have copies of our pre-budget submission. In it, we go in depth, covering the RN shortage and restructuring issues in all sectors, from public health and long-term care to the communities and the hospitals. We cover the wage gap, violence in health care, creeping profit-making and greed in health care. These are issues that underpin the challenges that face our system. They are dispatches from the front lines of Ontario. We urge you to read it closely.

It's urgently time for the government to address head-on the RN shortage in this province by focusing on retention, hiring and training of registered nurses across all sectors. For the past four years, Ontario has had the lowest RN-to-population ratio in the country. Once again, RN cuts continue to occur across Ontario. How could this be?

We need more than 20,000 registered nurses just to meet the demands of our patients, and that number climbs every year.

Yet as working conditions deteriorate and legislation drags compensation below the rising cost of living, at the same time, workplace violence against our members every day is a reality for us. Infrastructure upgrades lag. Staffing shortages worsen. If the government intends to recruit more RNs to the profession, asking them to do more with less is not the answer, and guaranteeing workplace freedom from violence is a must.

In hospitals, funding continues to deteriorate. The Ontario Hospital Association just said last month, "attempts to squeeze out any more perceived hospital inefficiencies—with existing system structure and capacity—will likely worsen hallway health care." We couldn't agree more.

Just last month, the Premier and his counterparts called on the federal government to raise the Canada Health Transfer to 5.2%. To that, Ontario nurses say, "Mr. Premier, walk the talk." If you believe Ontarians deserve 5.2%, then fund our hospitals at 5.2%. It's what the Financial Accountability Officer has recommended. Within hospitals, as hospitals are now consistently running well over 100% capacity right across this province—in Markham, Hamilton, Sudbury, Ottawa, Brampton—surely it's time to show leadership to fund hospitals appropriately. Overcrowding like this endangers everyone, and these conditions are irresponsible and risky.

In our communities, planned provincial cuts to public health loom. Municipalities simply do not have the tax base to sustain the cuts, and public health prevents today the avoidable illnesses of tomorrow.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): One minute.

Ms. Vicki McKenna: As we watch on the news about viruses in China, we're reminded of the vital role of public health and the recent layoffs, surprisingly, of nine public health nurses in Windsor-Essex.

Health care restructuring and dissolving the LHINs has created a great deal of uncertainty. They are health care problem-solvers for the patients in our hospitals seeking to live comfortably at home. Ontario needs them, not less.

Long-term-care profit-making seems to be the great motivator, rather than quality. Short staffing and a lack of resources leave our elderly and disabled living and dying in undignified conditions, and our members are at their wits' ends. Following last year's public inquiry, now is the time for systematic change in long-term care.

To summarize, if hallway health care is downstream, community care is upstream. If the government intends to tackle hallway health care, then it must invest in a robust public health program, better long-term care and more care coordinators.

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Make 2020 the year the government chose to turn Ontario's health care system around for the better. Honour our nurses and—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you. I apologize to cut you off. I will have to move to the opposition side for questioning. MPP Shaw?

Ms. Sandy Shaw: Would you like to finish your thoughts?

Ms. Vicki McKenna: Sure. Honour our nurses and health care professionals, respect our patients, and invest the resources that Ontarians desperately need and deserve.

Ms. Sandy Shaw: Thank you. We're going to switch over now.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): MPP Arthur.

Mr. Ian Arthur: Thank you very much. I want to get you to elaborate a little bit more on this, on what I call the efficiency myth: \$487 below the national average being spent, per capita, in Ontario. How can you reconcile that?

I would love an answer from the government about how we can spend \$500 less than the national average, per person, in Ontario and expect better outcomes than anyone else. At what point do we just actually have to put some dollars into health care?

Ms. Vicki McKenna: This is our very point. It's enough already.

Health care has been politicized—many public services are. I'm not here about the politics of it all. What I'm here about is our health care system and the members that support it, our nurses.

You're exactly right. How is it that we have fallen to these depths? We can talk about who did what or what happened in another government. I don't frankly care about that. What I care about is: How do we move forward? How do we provide the care that is essential?

Efficiencies: The false notion of there being all these inefficiencies in health care—let me tell you, I've been in the system for almost 40 years working as a front-line nurse. Though there were inefficiencies, we are way beyond that now.

Now is the time to invest, to ensure that the health care is there for Ontarians no matter where they are in the province. It is expensive. Absolutely, health care is expensive. You've got drugs; the drugs are expensive. There are strategies on what you can do around pharmacare; however, I don't see that happening. In fact, I see a step back, in that when this government came into place, right off the hop you changed the OHIP+ program here in Ontario. Pharmacare—a provincial or a national pharmacare program—will save this government billions of dollars. If you want to see savings, that is one place to save billions and reinvest in the system.

Mr. Ian Arthur: I just want to carry that train of thought a little bit further, because if you're going to claim that there are these magical efficiencies that we're going to find—which, frankly, I don't think they exist. I've never heard from a single health care worker that they exist anymore. I actually hear that they're worked to the bone and doing everything they can with very, very little.

By claiming that those are out there, the implication of that is somehow that health care workers in Ontario aren't doing their jobs well, which to me is a stretch, to say the least, and insulting, to say the worst. Do you think that these workers are doing anything other than their absolute best to hold together a system that needs more money?

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): One minute.

Ms. Vicki McKenna: I absolutely know that people, as I mentioned, right across this province—no matter where I go, our nurses and health care professionals are working overtime, coming in early and staying late. They are working way beyond what they should be on productivity hours, when you get into the whole studies of productivity. They're way beyond it, in fact, to the point that they're the most injured of any workforce in this province. They are injured, they are tired, and it's time to address these serious shortages that exist so that Ontarians are cared for properly.

Mr. Ian Arthur: Thank you so much.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you. We have to move to the government side now. MPP Anand?

Mr. Deepak Anand: Thank you, ONA. Thank you, Ms. McKenna. We value the work you're doing. This is the International Year of the Nurse and the Midwife by the World Health Assembly.

Ms. Vicki McKenna: Thank you.

Mr. Deepak Anand: By the way, in the place where I was born, we actually call a nurse a "sister." This is the value that we give to the nurse.

My question is: The government is making a variety of scope-of-practice changes to empower Ontario's health care practitioners to fully apply their skills and potential towards patient care. In the 2019 budget, the government committed to expanding nurse practitioners' scope of practice and asked the College of Nurses of Ontario to consult broadly on registered practical nurses' scope of practice. About this, how could these potential scope-of-practice changes, in your opinion, improve services for patients and make health care more efficient?

Ms. Vicki McKenna: This is a really interesting topic, and it's a lot longer than one minute to answer because it is complicated. But what I'll say is this: We need every nurse in the system, every nurse in Ontario, working—absolutely. It's about where they're working and the patient population they are working with.

I lived this scenario in another jurisdiction, and I don't see it going any better than it did there. You have to be very careful and cautious, and work with the research that is there. It is very clear, the value of registered nurses in our system, not only to the patient outcomes side but to decreased morbidities/mortalities and shorter lengths of stay, therefore costing the system less overall.

Therefore, if you have a skill set that doesn't work in that population of patients that you have, then you have increased lengths of stay, higher morbidities/mortalities, and more costs to the system.

It's a very complex situation. It has to be done very carefully. What I fear, and what I'm seeing, is a licence to under-skill the workforce. In some cases, it's happening like that.

We need everybody. Don't get me wrong. You're not going to see me get into a fight about this classification of nurse or that classification of nurse. That's ridiculous. What we need to be focusing on is the needs of the patients we care for, and making sure we have the appropriately skilled nurse there.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you. MPP Piccini?

Mr. David Piccini: Just speaking of the needs of the patient—I think that’s an excellent point. I know, from rural Ontario, the commitment of OHTs to follow and wrap around the needs of the patient is critical. My riding was selected as one of the first.

One of the programs which has been widely lauded was the dedicated offload nurse program, that served over 71,000 patients around Ontario, and the important role that nurse practitioners are now playing in the OHT, especially in rural Ontario—where sometimes, to be frank, we have found it difficult getting physicians out—and the role they play in our family health teams.

Can you just speak to that important role and how it will intersect with Ontario health teams, and where you see that value being in OHT?

Ms. Vicki McKenna: This is really interesting. I’m listening to the different team structures and looking at all the players on some teams. What I mean by that is participants in any one health team. No two will be alike.

Mr. David Piccini: Yes.

Ms. Vicki McKenna: No population they serve will be alike. But I’ll say this: Nurses, whether they be nurse practitioners, RNs or RPNs—health care providers need to be at those tables in the early stages of these health team developments, and I’ll be telling you that they’re not. That is very worrisome.

There is a lack of structure. I understand that there will be differences, no matter where we are in the province, but nurse practitioners, nurses—and unions, quite frankly, that negotiate the contracts—we need to be there—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): I apologize to cut you off. That concludes our time. Thank you so much for your presentation.

INSURANCE BROKERS ASSOCIATION OF ONTARIO

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Next, I would like to call upon the Insurance Brokers Association of Ontario. Please state your name for the record. You have seven minutes for your presentation.

Mr. Joseph Carnevale: Thank you, Mr. Chair. We’re pleased to appear before you today representing the insurance brokers of Ontario, the IBAO. My name is Joseph Carnevale. I’m the president of the IBAO, and also managing director of sales for our insurance brokerage, Brokers Trust Insurance Group, in Vaughan. Joining me today is Brett Boadway, our chief operating officer for the IBAO.

We represent over 13,000 licensed insurance brokers. These brokers service six million policyholders in the province of Ontario and are a direct connection to Ontario consumers. Some 62% of all insurance written in Ontario is done through an insurance broker. Interestingly, approximately 95% of business insurance in Ontario is done through an insurance broker as well.

Brokers are uniquely positioned to represent the best interests of our customers—your constituents. Brokers do

not work for insurance companies. We shop for the best policies from multiple companies to find the best available product and price. We are the consumers’ only source of independent expert insurance advice.

Insurance brokers are highly trained professionals with strong community ties. We own or are employed by small and medium-sized businesses, with some large as well, located across rural and urban Ontario. We often lead social responsibility initiatives that contribute to our local communities. Brokers participate in community initiatives and fund social causes. Brokers service Ontarians in multiple languages, promoting diversity and inclusion. Brokers provide insurance access and education to remote communities, and brokers support safety education and training.

IBAO is an important voice on a number of policy-related issues that affect consumers and brokers, whose interests are intertwined. Both require a transparent market in order to function optimally—one that is accessible, accountable, efficient and fair.

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The following four areas of concern are of significant importance to our professions and to the consumers we serve around the province.

Auto insurance: IBAO remains deeply involved on the issue of auto insurance and bringing meaningful reforms to vehicle owners. There is a universal recognition that the status quo of the current auto product is failing to serve Ontarians. We commend the government for acting in several areas to work to reform the auto landscape.

In Ontario, there are many inefficiencies within the current system, most of which have been identified and outlined by the current government within the driver care advisory group. Our message today is that these recommendations need to be implemented in a timely manner.

Currently, brokers are seeing Ontario drivers become disgruntled as they have seen their insurance premiums account for a bigger chunk of their household budgets. We have been helping our customers effectively navigate volatile market conditions and price fluctuations, but sustainable relief will only come if the inefficiencies outlined by the advisory group are executed.

Given the nature of the auto product in being a compulsory product, it needs to encompass certain basic coverages that ensure that consumers who need protection are covered. One concern would be that too much choice or too low a coverage may expose those who are most vulnerable in our society. Choice is extremely positive if the decisions driven by that choice are made for the right decisions, i.e., choosing to pay less is not a choice when you just cannot afford to pay any more.

Some of the stakeholders you hear from may encourage you to simplify the auto insurance product, but our perspective is that simplification should not mean a reduction of choice or a reduction of coverage levels. We would have great concerns if consumers were given the choice to opt out of a coverage to reduce their premiums but did not have an alternate plan to cover this exposure. Work would need to be undertaken to establish the rules

in which policies would be claimed against in each circumstance. These additional benefits could simply become part of the policy buy-up options.

Auto insurance pricing based on the likelihood of a driver making a claim and the location they live in, among other things, makes sense. Where you live is one of the strongest predictors of how much an insurance company will pay out per claim, and one of the strongest predictors of claims risk. Removing geographical rating would mean that individuals living in regions where claims costs are less than half of that of the GTA would see their insurance premiums increase by hundreds of dollars per year.

We are encouraged by the early work of the Financial Services Regulatory Authority of Ontario, FSRA. We also remain committed to our ongoing work consulting with relevant government departments on ongoing reforms to the auto industry. Announcements like the move to electronic pink slips, which aligns well with other jurisdictions in Canada, are further evidence of the progress we are making. Our recommendation: Continue with reforms and consultations for auto insurance in Ontario, making decisions based on market evidence and targeted reforms towards addressing issues of fraud and inefficiencies. We all have an obligation to help families manage the increased costs of insurance within their household budgets.

Next is flooding. The issue of flooding and water damage to properties is of concern to many Ontarians. We have witnessed extreme weather events more frequently over the past several years, of which flooding remains a primary concern. Flooding now costs Canadians more than any other climate issue.

Across Ontario, brokers have been stepping up and doing their part to help however they can. Brokers have been speaking with media to get the word out to consumers about different types of coverage, best practices and next steps. Our recommendation: We seek a stronger, more cohesive plan with both the federal and provincial governments involved in flood mitigation.

Third is market conditions. In Ontario, the insurance industry is currently in a hard market. An insurance market hardens when the capital used to fund insurance transactions becomes less readily available. This affects product pricing and/or product availability. Profits ensure that retail insurers' product availability, supply and price can be held stable, and currently they're experiencing reduced profits due to two main factors: auto insurance and severe weather events.

The hard market is having ripple effects on other lines of insurance coverage. For example, we will highlight three industries that are struggling to find affordable insurance coverage: condominium corporations and high-rise residential rentals; trucking fleets; and snow removal operators. Our recommendation: Continuing with reforms to the Ontario auto product and implementing a flood mitigation plan will have a very broad, positive impact on the provincial economy and Ontario businesses.

Finally, small business: Insurance brokers are massive economic and social contributors to the Ontario economy—\$1.6 billion in GDP. Insurance brokers operate

small businesses in virtually every city and town across Ontario, creating employment and contributing to the local economy. Our recommendation: We encourage the government to continue taking steps that support small and medium-sized businesses in Ontario, reducing or, at a minimum, not increasing their tax burden—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you. I apologize to cut you off. We have to move to the government side for questioning. MPP Sabawy.

Mr. Sheref Sabawy: Thank you very much for the presentation. There were lots of details. Thank you very much for the information.

Our government is committed to reforming the auto insurance industry. As part of this commitment, we are seeking to create a regulatory framework that allows for a more modern auto insurance sector. Understanding the complexity and the dependencies and how difficult it is to change anything in auto insurance, in your expert opinion, what do you think we should do as a government to achieve this goal, to modernize the industry and cut red tape?

Mr. Joseph Carnevale: In two minutes? Sorry. That's an excellent question. Thank you for that question.

We'll happily provide, in great detail, exactly the answer to your question. Essentially, I have to say that the government is taking great steps to move this along. I think the establishment and the way FSRA is operating right now is exactly what you're looking for. It's a very modern operating agency. They've brought in a lot of people to consult, to look at different ways to modernize how we do things. We have a lot of confidence in what they're doing.

I think if you would speak to FSRA, they might say that at this point what needs to happen is a commitment or action on the government side to actually move the product. We're constantly told that the Ontario auto insurance product is owned by the government and the government needs to make changes to it. Once those changes are made, then the rest of it can work through.

I think the fact that you continue to consult and you continue to look at innovative ways—we're very supportive of that.

Again, we will share greater detail with you—because I think in two minutes it would be impossible to answer that question. I appreciate the question, though.

Mr. Sheref Sabawy: Thank you very much for the answer.

So you are satisfied with the process the government went through to consult with the stakeholders in trying to come up with a good framework?

Mr. Joseph Carnevale: Oh, yes. The consultation process has been very supportive. It has been excellent. We always look for greater involvement, as we continue to do. We're very happy with the process.

Mr. Sheref Sabawy: Just a complementary question to the first one: Part of this government's review of auto insurance is examining practices in other jurisdictions having the same kinds of issues. Are you familiar with—your expertise—other jurisdictions doing a better job or solutions coming from other areas that we can employ?

Mr. Joseph Carnevale: That's another good question. Yes, we are. I know that FSRA itself has been consulting with different jurisdictions, one of which was the former regulator for New Jersey. I believe they're looking at Singapore as an example. As an association, we're always looking globally at ways of—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): One minute.

Mr. Joseph Carnevale: We don't need to reinvent the wheel. If someone has figured it out, we're happy to borrow that from them or learn from that and cater that to our local environment.

Mr. Sheref Sabawy: Are there any other jurisdictions in Canada you are aware of which have a better solution than what we have in Ontario—

Mr. Joseph Carnevale: We are unique in that, in Ontario, we're constantly asked why our product is so expensive related to other provinces. It really has to do with one major factor. When you're in a different province and you have an auto accident, you're really just insuring the auto itself. In Ontario, we're insuring the individuals in the car, in addition to the auto. That was taken off of OHIP a while ago. It's a more expensive product because the product itself is offering different things that OHIP does not cover. In that sense, it's really difficult to compare to other provinces and learn from them because they don't offer the same type of services as we do.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): MPP Anand.

Mr. Deepak Anand: I know there are probably 10 seconds left.

For the trucking fleets and for the people who have—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you. I apologize to cut you off.

We have to move to the opposition side for questioning now. MPP Shaw.

Ms. Sandy Shaw: Four minutes: climate change. How's that? I noticed that you talked a lot about flooding, but you don't really reference climate change specifically. We know, even from your own website—you say that climate change is profoundly impacting this industry. Even the governor of the Bank of England, Mark Carney, literally just recently said that the impact of climate change could render the assets of many financial companies worthless. These are huge and profound statements about the financial industry and the insurance industry. It goes beyond that, but you're here talking—I don't expect you to solve climate change, but I certainly would like you to start to quantify how this is impacting your industry, and also maybe just touch on what you see that the government should be doing, not just to move people out of flood plains but to actually be going upstream and preventing the kinds of carbon emissions that are creating the climate change catastrophe that we're seeing.

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Mr. Joseph Carnevale: Both are great questions. Absolutely, flooding, we would believe, would be as a result of climate change. Anecdotally, conversations that we've had with several global insurance companies have indicated—I don't have the statistics to show you—that globally, Canada has suffered to a greater extent than other countries as far as the impact of climate change.

Ms. Sandy Shaw: We're warming at twice the rate of the rest of the world.

Mr. Joseph Carnevale: Obviously, this has an impact on many factors, including the weather patterns, which then lead to flooding, which was our focus on that. So that was the first one.

Secondly, what can the government do? I think we have greater detail in our submissions to you, as opposed to what I spoke about. Essentially, we see that the first step of identifying this issue is understanding how bad it is and where everyone is, mapping out exactly where the flood plains are and who is impacted. There are all kinds of opportunities that local, provincial and federal governments can take to mitigate those floods, to put in measures that would divert or do something that would take it away from populations.

But ultimately, to your point, I think that if we're going to continue to sell insurance to people who can't afford it because they're living in a flood plain and the chance of them being flooded is fairly high—it's either not going to be available to them by insurance companies, or it's going to be so expensive that they couldn't possibly afford it. There has to be a better solution than families losing everything because they're living on a flood plain. I think the long-run solution may very well be identifying if you are living on a flood plain. Then, if something happens, we shouldn't be rebuilding there; we should be rebuilding somewhere else.

I don't have all of the answers to those today, but I do know that we have a very comprehensive list of items that we would want all levels of government to commit to doing. The first step is just mapping everything and having a really good understanding of exactly where all the problems lie. Then, before we can figure out the solutions, we need to know where the problems are.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): One minute. MPP Arthur?

Mr. Ian Arthur: I actually do want to just continue down that road. The BlackRock announcement yesterday was quite sensational in terms of its implications for climate adaptation. But you represent consumers. In terms of the products that are available and the cost burden of those products on those consumers, where are you in terms of affordable insurance for people in the age of the climate crisis?

Mr. Joseph Carnevale: Great question. We're here speaking to you, making sure that insurance companies provide coverage to people who need it, so we are speaking on behalf of consumers. We do speak to insurance companies on a regular basis, obviously, about the product offering, the pricing of the product and the availability of the product. Ultimately, though, we can't force the insurance companies—

Mr. Ian Arthur: But in your opinion, do you think they're ready? Because we're running out of time. Do you think they have adequate coverage for climate—

Mr. Joseph Carnevale: Clearly not, given that there are people who don't have coverage who need it right now. There's already a disconnect right there.

Mr. Ian Arthur: Yes. Sorry. That's the point I was trying to get at there.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you. That concludes our time. Thank you so much for your presentation.

Mr. Joseph Carnevale: Thank you.

THE HOSPITAL FOR SICK CHILDREN
SICKKIDS CENTRE FOR COMMUNITY
MENTAL HEALTH

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Next, I would like to call upon SickKids and the SickKids Centre for Community Mental Health. Please come forward. If you can please state your name for the record, and you will have seven minutes for your presentation.

Ms. Christina Bartha: My name is Christina Bartha. I'm the executive director of mental health programs at SickKids and the SickKids Centre for Community Mental Health. Should I just begin?

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Yes, please.

Ms. Christina Bartha: Thank you for the opportunity to speak about child and youth mental health and its importance in the overall health of young people in the province.

At SickKids, we're well known for the role we play in the delivery of specialized physical health services for children and youth, but today I want to speak to you about our interest, recognition and commitment to the pressing need for mental health services for children, youth and their families. With 70% of mental health disorders presenting before the age of 17, mental health in pediatrics, and extending to transitional-age youth, is now a critical area of concern.

At SickKids, we serve young people with primary mental health concerns, as well as those with concurrent medical and mental health diagnoses. We see the complex challenges faced by their families, and the impact of these disorders on the health and development of their children. So much is dependent on whether they can access the right intervention at the right time in the right environment.

SickKids' interest in better serving children and youth was expanded in 2017, when we integrated with one of the largest Toronto children's mental health agencies, the Hincks-Dellcrest Centre, now known as the SickKids Centre for Community Mental Health. Across two community sites and at our hospital, we operate a full continuum of mental health services: early intervention, counselling and therapy, intensive and residential treatment, emergency services, urgent care, and mental health in-patient beds, which includes our pediatric ICUs, where we admit children and youth as a result of suicide attempts. The breadth of this continuum, and working with our system partners, allows us to have a comprehensive perspective on what is needed.

Our five-year trend data at SickKids tells an important story in Toronto, but is reflective of the provincial situation. At SickKids we have seen a 41% increase in

patients with mental health crises presenting to our emergency department, compared with 32% across the province—both staggeringly high numbers; a 20% increase in admissions to our mental health unit; and a 27% increase in kids admitted with both medical and mental health disorders.

To address this need, we started an urgent care clinic that provides rapid access to short-term acute intervention. It now sees over 200 children and youth per year, but it doesn't address the shortfall in more intensive therapy that is needed for kids with complex conditions.

How to understand these huge increases in demand comes from the recently published Ontario Child Health Study, which updated the first study done in 1984. The study found that while the one-in-five prevalence rate of children and youth having a mental health disorder has not shifted in 36 years, what has changed is a threefold increase in parents and youth recognizing the need for mental health support and intervention, and a corresponding rise in demand for service where a shortfall in supply exists. We are seeing big jumps in hospital use because the community-based and primary care mental health services don't have capacity.

Across the same five years, SickKids has seen a growth in demand for outpatient mental health treatment services: a 32% increase at the hospital and a 21% increase at our community sites. This has stretched resources and compounded the long-standing access issues of this sector.

SickKids is no different from other providers: The longest waits are for intensive services for the highest-need kids. These are children and youth with significant anxiety, depression and challenging behaviours that lead to difficulties with school, peers, their families and in the community. Left untreated, or even undertreated, the long-term development and outcomes for these young people are compromised.

At our community site in northwest Toronto, we operate an intensive integrated therapy and school program for 24 children with complex mental health needs. An intensive approach involves a comprehensive assessment, customized treatment, and time to implement care. At such a young age, it's essential that these children get rapid access to the right care, to avert the long-term risks of more serious mental health issues, including addictions, involvement in the justice system, and suicide. The wait to get into our program is typically six to eight months.

With the exception of children and youth with complex medical needs, most mental health services are based in the community, where it is a best practice to offer services close to home wherever possible. We need to address the front-line resource and system-building gaps that have prevented appropriate access to service.

At a systems level, the Ontario health teams and the centre of excellence for mental health and addictions are promising directions to address system fragmentation, better pathways and models of care, and quality and standards. At SickKids, we are fully on board with working with these new structures and mechanisms to improve patient and client care, but it will take more to move this forward.

We believe we have a system that very clearly needs two things. We need to increase capacity by increasing the number of front-line clinicians who serve kids, youth and families. The current system is undersized to respond to the huge increase in demand. We see the challenge in our emergency, where patients present from not only Toronto but Peterborough, Oshawa, Simcoe county, Peel and even as far west as London. Many families drive to SickKids seeking help, and when we try to refer them back to their home community, we see the long wait times that they are facing.

We need investments in system-building. The OHT initiative is a promising redesign of our health system, and much of the conversation has been on seamless pathways of care, informed by information flow made possible by technology.

Children's mental health has not been part of an agenda that has looked at the building blocks of good system support: clinical documentation systems allowing for data capture, analytics that help inform decision-making. Budgets were not built with any of this in mind, and these resources are an important part of planning and measuring our progress.

At SickKids, we're developing a strategic plan for mental health that will encompass our entire enterprise, community to hospital. Through many consultations with youth, parents, staff and cross-sectoral community partners, the response has been overwhelming. Mental health touches every aspect of care in pediatrics, and everyone endorses it as a priority. Collaboration-integration partnerships will help us leverage the resources that we have, but with growth numbers as high as 41% in the emerg, 20% in our in-patient unit and 20% to 30% in our outpatient services, there is a foundational resource problem.

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Front-line care and system-building investment are essential across the province and in Toronto. At SickKids, we see this as a compelling need, and we hope that you do too.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you. We'll move to the opposition side for questioning. MPP Mamakwa.

Mr. Sol Mamakwa: Thank you, Christina, for the presentation. I know that when we talk about children and youth within the system of whatever service that we provide, sometimes we refer to children as the voice of the voiceless because sometimes they're not given a voice on some of the issues that they face.

I say that because I know, within my riding of Kiiwetinoong in northwestern Ontario, the most northerly riding in Ontario, I serve a lot of fly-in communities, fly-in First Nations that I represent. One of the things we faced over the holidays was numerous suicides—children and youth dying by suicide, the youngest being aged 12 years old.

Some of the stuff that you're recommending—you believe in the one-door approach. I think it's more significant that there's no access to services—minimal services is more significant in the north. I'm just wondering: How

does your organization, SickKids, work with the whole province rather than just in Toronto?

Ms. Christina Bartha: Probably our biggest outreach across the province is through our telepsychiatry program, where we offer mental health consultation to many parts of the province through a virtual platform, as well as doing training and education, which has been the work of one of my colleagues.

I couldn't agree with you more about the depth of need that we need to address. I would add the importance of collaboration and co-design with many of our partners across the province to really find the right models that are customized to their particular needs. I think in the instance that you're referencing too, it's probably a top priority to focus on that as foundational to the solutions that we need to build.

Mr. Sol Mamakwa: One of the things we face, too, as First Nations—if you're in fly-in communities or on-reserve, there's the jurisdictional ambiguity of it. I ask questions to the government to help with some of the prevention not just when a crisis happens, and sometimes the answer is, "That's a federal responsibility." But because we're talking about the lives of youth, I don't think jurisdiction should be an issue; it should be non-partisan.

I'm just wondering if you have any comments on that, when we talk about collaboration.

Ms. Christina Bartha: I don't know if I can answer your question directly, but from a service provider perspective, both at the hospital and in the community, our perspective is that we want to partner and collaborate both locally and provincially. That would fall within our role as a pediatric provider. We take it from a clinical capacity-building perspective, and that's how we approach the opportunity to partner and build capacity across the province.

I don't think I can answer your cross-jurisdictional question, but I can give you our philosophical approach to how we want to address the needs of kids and youth across the province.

Mr. Sol Mamakwa: How would you, say, in a fly-in community—how would this program service—other than online or through—

Ms. Christina Bartha: Through telepsychiatry?

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you. Sorry to cut you off. We have to move to the government side for questioning. MPP Anand? MPP Roberts?

Mr. Jeremy Roberts: Definitely I'll leave time for my colleague as well. I know everyone has got a lot of questions.

I had the chance recently to tour around, in my local area in Ottawa, CHEO, to tour around the future site of their 1door4care project with Alex Munter and Anne Huot. They're starting to do some geological work on the site. I'm really excited about that. Obviously the goal there is to create a better system for navigation and ease of access. How important is that in terms of improving children's mental health services across the province, from your experience here in Toronto?

Ms. Christina Bartha: There has been a lot of focus and conversation about ease of access, simplification and

care navigation to support kids, youth and families, so it has definitely been a priority for us to simplify things, to work with our system partners here in Toronto, but also even with our own system at SickKids, towards streamlining and simplifying things. I think it's important. I think all of health care is working on that, and children's mental health is no different.

You have to create simple pathways to get in and then pathways to refer to a treatment service that has capacity to pick up your case and provide care. There is still the worry that as we simplify the front door, we're simplifying it to wait-list people for intensive treatments. That would be an area where we have an opportunity to make a lot of gains and some improvement.

Mr. Jeremy Roberts: Sure. My second question, before I pass it over to my colleague: Obviously there's a lot of work being done right now on how we are going to invest this large sum of money in mental health and what that's going to look like. What are some of the best practices that SickKids has on patient care, and then specifically on outcomes in this field, that you think would be worthwhile for us to look at as we look at how best this money can be spent to improve the services here in Toronto and across the province?

Ms. Christina Bartha: I think we should take an approach where we look to the evidence as to what are the best-practice models out there that we can apply in the Toronto and provincial contexts, recognizing that different areas of the province have different needs, so we do have to adapt and customize best-practice models to those kinds of circumstances. I think that offers us a lot in terms of optimizing system design.

In my earlier comments, the reason I focus on system-building is because you have to measure what you do in order to evaluate whether you're making progress. I think that we have never been resourced in children's mental health to actually do that well. There's an opportunity to really address that gap so that what we do going forward over the next number of years we can evaluate to see if it's making the gains that we hope it will. I think that's very important in children's mental health. At SickKids, we are collecting outcome measures, and we have implemented a program where we have the same outcome measures in the community as in the hospital.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): One minute.

Ms. Christina Bartha: So we have alignment there.

Mr. Jeremy Roberts: That's great. I'm really thrilled to hear that. Hopefully, we can learn some lessons from SickKids, because I know you're doing great work. I'll pass it over to Mr. Anand.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): MPP Anand.

Mr. Deepak Anand: Thank you for coming. I've never taken my kids to SickKids hospital, but I had a chance to visit because my friend's child was in the hospital. I can commend the work that you guys do. It's a Disneyland of SickKids here.

My question—it's not a question; it's more of a comment. You guys are the leader and you're a brand for Canada, for Ontario. I was looking at your financial

statement: 3% of the revenue comes from the services. Of the total revenue, only 3% comes from the services. My comment would be something of a message that you can take back to SickKids. It's kind of train the trainer; you are already the trainer. Maybe you can add more value or more revenue by adding those services to the other hospitals—not just in Canada, but across the globe—by sharing your experiences—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you. I apologize to cut you off again. That concludes our time. Thank you so much for your presentation.

Ms. Christina Bartha: Thank you.

SOCIETY OF UNITED PROFESSIONALS

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Now I would like to call upon the next witness, from the Society of Energy Professionals. Please state your name for the record. You have seven minutes for your presentation.

Ms. Michelle Johnston: Thank you for this opportunity to speak with you this afternoon. My name is Michelle Johnston, and I am the secretary-treasurer of the Society of United Professionals, Local 160 of the International Federation of Professional and Technical Engineers. We are a union of more than 8,000 professionals working in the public, private, regulatory and not-for-profit sectors. Our members include engineers, legal aid lawyers, scientists, accountants and supervisors, and our members work for employers such as Bruce Power, Ontario Power Generation, the Independent Electricity System Operator and Legal Aid Ontario.

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Today I'm joined by Nathan Jackson. He is our research officer.

The first of the four areas I wish to discuss with you today is access to justice. The Society of United Professionals calls on the government to restore the \$133 million it cut from Legal Aid Ontario back in 2019. This 30% cut to Legal Aid Ontario's budget created a full-blown crisis for the province's legal system. Ontario courts are moving more slowly, while costs are increasing. Our members see the impact of this short-sighted cut in all aspects of their front-line work with vulnerable Ontarians. I want to provide you with three examples of how this cut has backfired and is actually costing Ontario more than it saves.

First is bail representation. The cut means that fewer people are eligible for legal aid. Those who do not qualify for legal aid but also can't afford a lawyer remain in jail even when it is not in the public interest. For those who do qualify for legal aid, it takes longer to have their application heard because duty counsel do not have the resources to match the new volume of work they have. Every additional day in custody comes at a cost of hundreds of dollars per inmate per day for taxpayers.

Second, self-representation in our courts is more common now, and it is causing delays and increasing costs. Self-represented people require more time to have their matters heard. As mistakes are more likely to be

made without representation, costly appeals are more common, as are wrongful convictions.

Finally, Legal Aid Ontario funds legal clinics that end up saving money in our social services and health systems, yet the clinics have faced cuts and cannot take on as much work now. This includes less help for people facing evictions, as well as people who are unjustly denied entitlements like workers' compensation. Preventing homelessness and poverty is the most cost-effective way to address those issues. The government and certainly the people of Ontario would be best served by reversing last year's unpopular \$133-million cut.

Now I'd like to discuss how Ontario should tackle climate change and invest in low-carbon power. The Society of United Professionals offers two recommendations here.

First, we believe that Ontario should adopt an ambitious climate change plan. This should include an aggressive shift towards electrification, particularly in Ontario's transportation system.

Second, we recommend that the government ensure that Ontario continues to have a low-emissions energy system by working with Ontario Power Generation on a new publicly owned and operated nuclear power station to replace the Pickering generating station.

Since taking power in 2018, this government has moved in the wrong direction on climate action, even as Ontario continues to see evidence of the unfolding crisis. By acting decisively now, Ontario can help stave off climate catastrophe and build a thriving local economy. Canada is now committed to being a net-zero carbon emitter by 2050. Electrification, especially of our transportation system, will be an essential component of achieving net zero. A crucial early step toward the goal is creating a system of charging stations and financial incentives that make choosing an electric vehicle a viable option for every Ontarian.

Ontario's greatest contribution to climate action to date is our work to close the coal plants and move toward a carbon-emission-free energy system. Today, 93% of Ontario's energy output is from greenhouse gas resources, including hydro, renewables and nuclear. However, as the Pickering generating station moves toward decommissioning, we are at risk of losing 3,100 megawatts of carbon-free energy from our grid. As renewables are not yet capable of providing baseload power for Ontario, the true choice is between nuclear and fracked natural gas.

In light of the climate crisis, as well as the economic benefit to the province, Ontario must choose nuclear. By starting the work on a new-build project now, Ontario will be capable of achieving Canada's net-zero carbon emissions commitment by 2050.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): One minute.

Ms. Michelle Johnston: Now I want to address Bill 124. The Society of United Professionals urges the government to repeal Bill 124 and allow free and fair collective bargaining for all public and broader public sector workers.

By removing the most significant tools available at the bargaining table—wage and compensation changes—the

government has limited both employers' and unions' abilities to negotiate fair deals that are mutually beneficial to both parties. This one-size-fits-all approach undermines the government's cost containment objective while trampling on workers' constitutional rights. Consequently, legal challenges are already under way. The government should save the cost of fighting workers in court and instead repeal Bill 124.

Our written submissions go into greater detail, but I want to conclude by stating our support for strong public services, including health care and education. These are services that our members, their families and communities rely upon. At minimum, the forthcoming budget should sustain current service levels.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you. First of all, I apologize for misstating the name; it's actually the Society of United Professionals.

We'll move to the government side now for four minutes of questioning. MPP Sabawy.

Mr. Sheref Sabawy: Thank you very much for your submission.

Actually, I'm kind of puzzled about where to start because you covered four different areas which are not really very connected.

Let's talk about modernizing the legal system. Given the fact of the complexity of working with the legal system, navigating your way through the legal system—especially if you are not a professional lawyer or inside the industry—it is very challenging for individuals who are facing some legal troubles or some legal interaction to navigate without help. How do you find the modernizing of the outdated and complex legal aid system—adding some initiatives like allowing LAO to use a mix of service providers, private practices as well as community legal organizations, and expanding the scope to include summary advice, alternate dispute resolution services and unbundled legal services for part of the case—to help the members of the community being served? How do you evaluate the changes we are proposing to make it easier for the end users—

Ms. Michelle Johnston: You're talking about Ontarians who are using the legal system?

Mr. Sheref Sabawy: Yes.

Ms. Michelle Johnston: Our position is that the most vulnerable people are being impacted by the changes that this government has made. Those people include women—particularly single mothers—and Indigenous peoples, people who really need the help when it comes to the court situations. We need to focus on that. We need to make sure that all people have the ability to get through the court system and get the representation they need in order to get through the situation they're in.

Mr. Sheref Sabawy: Yes, I understand that. Our government is proposing a little bit of changes to make sure that the people who need the help can get the help—but making it more cost-efficient.

Ms. Michelle Johnston: Do you have anything to add, Nathan?

Mr. Nathan Jackson: Nathan Jackson, research officer with the Society of United Professionals.

The reality is that Legal Aid Ontario has been starved for funding. A 30% cut to their budget has already been seen by our front-line workers who are working with vulnerable people trying to navigate the legal system. When we talk about making changes to the legal system, there is some modernization that needs to be done, but the reality is, when we're talking about Ontario's most vulnerable people, denying them access to legal aid—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): One minute.

Mr. Nathan Jackson:—which denies them access to the legal system, is the biggest change that your government has made.

I think the number one thing that we would like to see in this budget is reversing those cuts so that vulnerable Ontarians who need access to legal aid have access to it. A study by the Canadian Bar Association showed that every dollar spent on legal aid, on average, saved \$6 in the system elsewhere. So not only is this cut to legal aid cruel to Ontario's most vulnerable people, but it's also short-sighted fiscal policy, because an investment in legal aid saves money in other parts of our social services.

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I think that when we talk about the need to modernize, to make sure that everyone has access to legal aid, the number one thing that we're concerned about is making sure that there's funding in place.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you. We'll have to move to the opposition side for questioning now. MPP Shaw?

Ms. Sandy Shaw: Thank you very much for your presentation. I would like to get you to talk a little bit more about Bill 124. I believe you deputed at the hearings for Bill 124. Maybe, in expanding on this, you could talk a little bit about some of the people that you represent that are impacted by Bill 124, very specifically—it seems to me that we had some presentations from universities with researchers, doing cutting-edge research, whose assistants were impacted by this—to give people a more granular sense of who is being impacted by Bill 124, and the impact it will have on innovation, research and economic growth.

Ms. Michelle Johnston: Yes. I'll speak to the actual impact on our members. The impact on our members ranges from our engineers who work at Ontario Power Generation—it's across the scope of our membership. It also includes the legal aid lawyers that work at Legal Aid Ontario.

I'll hand it over to Nathan to talk a little bit more about the specific stuff, because Nathan was here.

Mr. Nathan Jackson: That's right. Our president, Scott Travers, was here with me to talk to Bill 124. We believe that Bill 124 is a violation of our members' constitutional rights, but we also believe that it is not getting the best outcomes for either party involved: the employer—the province—or the union members.

A good example of that is the award that our members and OPG were able to achieve at arbitration prior to Bill 124 coming into place. We were able to get a compensation increase above the 1% cap, in exchange for something that, in the long run, is much more cost-effective for OPG,

and that is an agreement on how we go forward with the decommissioning of the Pickering nuclear station.

Our concern with Bill 124 is that not only is it a violation of our rights, but it also removes the biggest bargaining chip that we have—that both sides have—when we go into bargaining, to make sure we have mutually beneficial agreements that can actually save the government and save employers money in the long run, which is, I think, a perfect example of what we saw with the OPG and Society award that we got back in November.

Ms. Sandy Shaw: Thank you for that. What we have been saying about Bill 124 is, 100%, it's a violation of people's charter rights of free and fair collective bargaining. But as you described, it wasn't just about capping the wages, in some instances, of the most vulnerable workers in Ontario. It was a whole scope of workers. It's capping their wages as well as violating their constitutional rights. But it has so many other significant impacts—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): One minute.

Ms. Sandy Shaw:—on the collective bargaining process.

So now, instead of being at a bargaining table, we're going to be in a courtroom. What are the costs of that, the cost implications of that? Do you have any sense, when these court challenges go forward—I guess it's your opinion. Is this the best way to do this, that we're going to resolve this at a court challenge?

Ms. Michelle Johnston: My point is, a court challenge is going to be significantly more costly than allowing the parties to come to a mutual agreement through collective bargaining. That's the point.

These court challenges are coming up, and there are a lot of unions that are involved in them. The cost, in those court challenges, will be significantly higher than the increases that workers will see through collective bargaining.

Ms. Sandy Shaw: As we've seen before in the past, it's not only just the legal fees that will be paid by the Ontario taxpayers; it's the settlements that are most likely to come from this. So I just wanted to make sure that we understand that with Bill 124, the implications of this go way beyond just capping the wages—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you. I apologize to cut you off. That concludes our time. Thank you so much for your presentation.

ONTARIO PUBLIC SERVICE EMPLOYEES UNION

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Next, I would like to call upon Ontario Public Service Employees Union. Please come forward. Please state your name for the record. You have seven minutes for your presentation.

Mr. Smokey Thomas: Hi. I'm Smokey Thomas, president of the Ontario Public Service Employees Union. With me today is Clarke Eaton; Clarke is my assistant on business, government and stakeholder relations. We're here on behalf of 165,000 front-line public service workers

who belong to OPSEU. I'd like to thank you for inviting us to talk about the upcoming budget.

We were here last year too. We sat before this very same committee and suggested things we'd like to see in the budget. They boiled down to two things—more investment in public services and less privatization—and we all know that the government didn't listen to our suggestions. Instead, they tabled a budget that was full of cuts and full of privatization. They tried to hide and downplay those cuts and that privatization, but the truth came out over time, and we all know what happened next: The Premier's popularity plummeted and the finance minister took the fall.

So here we are again. We have a new finance minister, and the Premier says he has learned his lesson. He has promised a new era of respect and decorum. He has promised to start listening. Judging by his wage cut bill and the shameful way he's bargaining with education workers, I don't think he has started listening yet. But I'm an optimist. I have always believed that people can learn and grow and expand their horizons, so I look at this upcoming budget as an opportunity. It's an opportunity for the Premier and this government to prove that they have truly learned from past mistakes and that they are really ready to start listening.

For the sake of everybody in the province, I hope they do start listening, because the things OPSEU members say are worth listening to. We know public services because we deliver them every day. We know what works, we know what doesn't work and we know how to make them better—and better is what we all want, I think. I think we can all agree on that. We want it to be better: well-run public services that are more effective, more efficient and more successful, because the more successful our public services are, the more successful Ontario is—healthier, better educated and more prosperous.

Just imagine, if you would, headlines that could be possible, headlines like, "As Personal Debt Shrinks, the Economy Booms"; "Ontario's Last Food Bank Closes Because the Need Has Dried Up"; "For the First Time in Decades, Hospital Wait Times Shrink"; and, "Innovative College Programs Drive Green Growth." Wouldn't we all love to wake up to headlines like that? But instead, we have to endure headlines like these: "Patient Placed in Filthy Conference Room in London Hospital"; "Ontarians Filing for Bankruptcy at More Than the National Average"; "Report Says More Employed Individuals Are Using Food Banks"; "Inhumane Conditions at Toronto South Detention Centre Amount to Deliberate State Misconduct." That was a judge who said that.

These kinds of headlines are what we get when the government takes its lead from Conservatives like Mike Harris: slash and burn and privatize everything that moves; privatize alcohol sales, privatize employment services, privatize more health care, cut social assistance, cuts to post-secondary education and student loans, cuts to public health, cuts to legal aid, and, for all workers, cut wages and cut working conditions. Is this really the best Ontario can do? I don't believe that for a second. This

province is wealthier than it has ever been. The question is: How do we translate all this wealth into prosperity for all?

The answer lies not with Conservatives like Mike Harris but with Conservatives like Bill Davis. Davis was one of the most successful and respected politicians in Canadian history. He didn't win four elections as Premier by tearing Ontario down; he was elected over and over again because he had the courage to invest in Ontario and build it up. He created the first Ministry of the Environment. He created TVO. He brought in the income supplement and a drug plan for seniors. He expanded municipal transit and French-language services and brought in rent control, and of course he built the entire community college system from the ground up. That's the kind of courageous government we need now, and for all you Conservatives on the committee, that's the only kind of Conservative government that we believe stands a chance of being re-elected.

Where to start? How can the upcoming budget start to build better services and a better Ontario? One word: investment. It's a fact that Ontario invests less per person in its public services than any other province in Canada. The result is chronic understaffing. From our members in almost every sector and ministry, we hear the same thing over and over: There are not enough front-line workers to do the work that needs to be done. Decades of cuts and austerity have taken their toll. Layoffs, unfilled vacancies and too many managers are a problem across the public service.

Work and caseloads are at a crisis level. That's why wait times are so long. That's why we're stuck with hallway health care. That's why the courts are backed up. It's simple: When you don't have enough workers, good work can't be done. The Premier knows this from personal experience. When he was first elected, he boasted that his cabinet was just 21 people, but after his disastrous first year, he realized he didn't have enough people to do the work so he increased the size of his cabinet by 33%. It's time for the government to do the same for public services and for the people of Ontario.

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Before we start to hear fearmongering about our debt, let me just say this: It's time for us to grow up. For one thing, economists and bankers understand that government debt is not a bogeyman. You have the responsibility to understand that too. For another thing, the Premier is trying to suck and blow at the same time. He fearmongers about the debt while claiming the economy is on fire and that hundreds of thousands of new jobs have been created. That extra revenue should go to the great equalizer, and that's public services.

We ask you to stop cutting. We'd ask you to drop all the privatization schemes. They don't work; they cost more. Just ask people in Ottawa how they like their new privatized light rail. Privatized alcohol would be even worse: more alcohol-related diseases, more lost productivity and lost revenue from the LCBO. Instead, we ask you to invest. We believe that we're worth it and we believe that you can do it.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you. We'll go to the opposition side for questioning. MPP Arthur.

Mr. Ian Arthur: Thanks for coming and thank you for the presentation. It's great to see you. I think we turn out some pretty good folks in Kingston, Ontario, actually.

Mr. Smokey Thomas: That's right. I believe the same, yes.

Mr. Ian Arthur: Thank you for putting the stuff about Bill Davis in here because that is the sort of Conservative who has not had influence politically in Ontario in a very long time, and thank you for listing all the things that he created and invested in. What a dramatic difference from that sort of Conservative of that generation to what we're actually seeing now in government. We've seen a stripping of rent control, we've seen money cut out of municipal transit systems, and we've seen downloading of the cost of municipal transit systems. Where do you think they went wrong? At what point did that stop being the central set of values for that party?

Mr. Smokey Thomas: In the late 1980s there was—I can't remember the guy's name. He wrote a book called *Reinventing Government*. The NDP read it, the Tories embraced it, and the Liberals in the dying days of Peterson were flirting with some of the stuff in that. That reinventing of government really was an American model, which was, "Privatize everything; the private sector can run everything better." So when Mike Harris got in, he took that to heart. As he said, he didn't really care what anybody thought; he was going to do what he was going to do. He was honest about it. He just did it. The Liberals didn't rebuild the things that they promised they'd rebuild; they didn't do it. So it really started in earnest with Harris, and nobody has ever rebuilt what he cut.

Mr. Ian Arthur: I want to talk a little bit about that public delivery of services, particularly on a municipal level. We're actually beginning to see jurisdictions across Ontario begin to bring some of those services back into the public realm because of the negative experiences they had with private delivery. We are seeing the outcomes of this in snow clearing in northern Ontario, among other things. You also have things like the delivery of simple municipal services like water and stuff like that that were privatized that they're now starting to bring back. Do you want to speak to that a little bit?

Mr. Smokey Thomas: Yes. Out of Walkerton came a thing called OCWA. We represent those workers in the Ontario Clean Water Agency. Hamilton, Ontario, had privatized its water. They brought OCWA back in; they're saving millions a year. A little town like Erin, Ontario, had a privatized water service provider called American Water. After OCWA came in and took over—we represent the members, so I talk to them. They were ripping Erin off. There were 40%, 50% markups on simple things that should never have been marked up.

Water and sewer is the classic example of Mike Harris privatizing it. We got Walkerton, OCWA—government employees went door to door. They were knocking on the doors saying, "Do not bathe, do not drink, do not wash in that water at all." People are still dying as a result of lifelong ailments from privatized water.

I think almost the last vestiges of privatized water are out of Ontario, but there are still a few more to go. That was probably one of the most tragic outcomes of privatization of public services that I've ever seen, but under Mike Harris there were countless more—driver testing, highways, all kinds of stuff.

Mr. Ian Arthur: In terms of the actual cost to Ontarians and putting money into their pockets, to take the government's expression, if the public sector can actually deliver these services cheaper, is that not a better use of our public dollars?

Mr. Smokey Thomas: I have always lived by this mantra: Public services should be for people, not profit. I still have—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you.

Mr. Smokey Thomas: I have the T-shirt from the—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you. I apologize to cut you off.

We have to move to the government side now. MPP Skelly.

Ms. Donna Skelly: It's nice to see you again, Smokey. It's always a pleasure to have you—

Interjection.

Ms. Donna Skelly: Yes, he did. I was just talking to him.

It was a great presentation. I don't think we have any questions from the government side. Again, I'm sure we'll be hearing from your unions for the next few days. Thank you very much.

Mr. Smokey Thomas: All right. Thanks.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you for your presentation.

INCOME SECURITY ADVOCACY CENTRE

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Next, I would like to call upon the Income Security Advocacy Centre. Please state your name for the record. You have seven minutes for your presentation.

Mr. Arash Ghiassi: My name is Arash Ghiassi. I am a lawyer with the Income Security Advocacy Centre, or ISAC.

ISAC is a legal aid clinic. Our mandate is to advance the rights and interests of low-income people in our province. We're here today to talk about what low-income people in Ontario need from our spring 2020 budget. The main message is that what is good for low-income Ontarians is good for all of us.

I am sure you agree that it is a moral imperative for us to do right by the poorest among us. But the money we spend on low-income Ontarians is an investment that will pay many times over, because low-income people tend to spend their money on necessities in their communities and so that money gets put back into our economy and creates jobs right here in Ontario.

In our written submission, which you should have before you, we highlight nine recommendations. But today, because of the time limitations, I'm going to focus on the most important three. First, we recommend that the

social assistance rates be increased. Second, we recommend that the current definition of “disability” used to deliver social assistance not be changed. Third, we recommend that the minimum wage be increased to \$15 an hour.

So, first, we recommend that the rates be increased. Today, in Ontario, a single person with no income who needs financial assistance receives only \$733 from the Ontario Works program. If they have a disability, they receive \$436 more. The cost of safe housing and nutritious food in Ontario, as we all know from our experience, is much higher. People on social assistance live below the poverty line. Last year, these low amounts were not increased, even to keep pace with inflation.

Raising the rates is the right thing to do because everyone deserves to live with health and basic human dignity. But, as mentioned, major investments in social assistance are also good for the economy. For every dollar invested, the return for Ontario is \$1.30. It will also reduce costs in other areas of government, including health care, the justice system, and in lost productivity, which currently leads to billions of dollars in lost tax revenue. Increasing the rates is good for all of us.

The second recommendation is to maintain the current definition of “disability.” If you are a person with a disability in Ontario who has financial need, you can get assistance from the Ontario Disability Support Program, or ODSP. But first, you need to prove that you fit within the program’s definition of a person with a disability. The current definition is inclusive and realistic, and it reflects a modern understanding of disability. It recognizes that disability can be episodic or temporary and it could affect some areas of life and not others; that disability is not an on-and-off switch.

However, the former minister announced that this definition could change to be more similar to a federal definition. But that federal definition is itself under review because it is based on stereotypes about people with disabilities. It requires that the disability be severe and prolonged—basically, a situation where you will never be able to work ever again. If this change goes forward, many people will be excluded, particularly people with episodic disabilities such as multiple sclerosis, arthritis, some forms of cancer, and mental health issues, who may be kicked off the program altogether or at least not allowed to get on it anymore. This would not only be unfair, but it would also be economically detrimental for the province. It would cost the government far more in health care and other costs than it would save in reduced benefits.

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Moreover, the administrative costs of switching over to a new definition, including reprogramming computer systems, retraining staff and potentially running two separate definitions at the same time, will be an immense and bureaucratic waste of resources. Keeping the Ontario Disability Support Program strong is good for all of us.

Lastly, we recommend that the minimum wage be increased to \$15 an hour. The minimum wage has been frozen at \$14 an hour for two years. Meanwhile, the cost

of living has gone up. This is effectively a wage cut on those in Ontario who make the least money. According to the current schedule, the minimum wage will not increase to \$15 for almost six years. By that time, it will once again be below the poverty line.

Raising the minimum wage is good for the economy. After the minimum wage increase in 2018, Ontario’s unemployment rate dropped to the lowest levels since 2000. Job growth and wage growth in Ontario has been, more than the rest of Canada, in low-wage industries like food and accommodation. We have strong sales and high profits. Major banking institutions agree that our economy can absorb the minimum wage increase, which is crucial for low-wage workers. Increasing the minimum wage to \$15 an hour will boost consumer spending and improve our economy.

Again, unlike the wealthiest, who save more and spend less, low-wage workers spend their money on things like food, clothing and children’s necessities, and keep our economy going. Increasing the incomes of low-income people in Ontario is good for all of us.

Before ending, I should also mention some of our other recommendations, which you can find on pages 1 and 2 of our written submissions: making sure that the new Canada-Ontario Housing Benefit is available to all social assistance recipients; reinstating personal leave days; and reversing the cuts to legal aid.

Legal clinics provide a vital service to Ontarians, and each dollar spent on legal aid, as we heard, multiplies in vast savings in other areas. I can tell you that from my office of 10 people, we’re now shrunk to five because of the cuts that were announced.

I am happy to take questions about these recommendations in the time allotted. Thank you very much.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Jeremy Roberts): Thank you so much. We’ll start with the government on this. MPP Piccini.

Mr. David Piccini: Thank you very much for being here today. I’m going to be quick. I know we both lamented at lunch over the short time, so if you could keep your responses semi-brief, we’ll try to get to a couple questions. I have a few important ones.

Appeals process: I know it can be costly and time-consuming. From what I gather from the Ministry of the Attorney General, a lot of them are successful anyway. What can we do to streamline this process? I gather from Legal Aid Ontario that 31% of cases were on ODSP appeals in 2018-19. So please.

Mr. Arash Ghiassi: Thank you very much. That is a very, very important issue.

I think part of the process is that a lot of times, material is not complete when it is originally given to ODSP. For that reason, it is initially rejected, and then later is completed and, for that reason, it is accepted. So if folks have more supports in filling out those forms, including peer support groups, folks who are already on ODSP who can help them fill out the forms and, frankly, investments in legal aid, that could really help out with that process.

Mr. David Piccini: Thank you. I’ll turn it over to my colleague here. Do you have any questions?

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): MPP Roberts.

Mr. Jeremy Roberts: Sure. One area that I'm really curious about personally—it's an area I worked on in my former career—is how we can get more individuals with disabilities into the workforce. I've spent some time over the past year meeting with a number of different groups—LiveWorkPlay, Reena, Tamir in Ottawa and the Sinneave foundation—that have a whole bunch of neat and interesting models on how we can do this. Any thoughts from your organization's perspective on strategies we can use to increase that labour force participation from individuals with disabilities, whether they be physical or developmental?

Mr. Arash Ghiassi: Thank you very much. I think what's really important is making sure that barriers to folks with disabilities entering the job market be removed. That includes accessibility needs.

I note that the government is piloting a new kind of employment services for folks with disabilities. It's going to start in March, so it's too early to say how it might work, but we do have some current concerns about it from the outset, and that's just to make sure that folks who—it needs to be supportive and not punitive. You can imagine a situation where the service provider is incentivized to encourage people to take any job, even though it's not a very good job, even though it doesn't incorporate their needs, and then, once that person either doesn't accept it or accepts the job but can't stay in it, that person is penalized by being kicked off ODSP and programs like that. We think that shouldn't happen, for sure.

Mr. Jeremy Roberts: I appreciate that. I'll bounce back, Mr. Chair, if there's some time remaining, to Mr. Piccini, who has another question.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): MPP Piccini.

Mr. David Piccini: A quick question about what we can do to get more ODSP and Ontario Works folks working.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): One minute.

Mr. David Piccini: I know you referenced job numbers. I brought it up just because I wanted to clarify: Job numbers increased by 25,000. Obviously, Ontario leads the way in terms of job creation—75% of jobs in Canada, the bulk of which were full-time work: private sector, public administration and construction, which shows that our modernizing the skilled trades is working.

But I know that a lot of people want to work. You spoke to episodic, and I can't underscore, from what I'm hearing, the importance of that for people who do want to work but maybe can't work year-round. Please talk about what we can do to reduce barriers.

Mr. Arash Ghiassi: Right. I think you're exactly right. Folks who grapple with episodic disabilities like multiple sclerosis are sometimes able to work and sometimes not. What I will say is that it's important that these folks be housed and it's important that they have all sorts of employment supports, and that means not changing the definition of disability, which might kick them off the program.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you. I will have to move to the opposition side. MPP Shaw.

Ms. Sandy Shaw: I want to focus on your comments about precarious workers, essentially. We all are very aware of some of the tragedies that have happened—Fiera Foods. We are quite aware of the fact that there's precarious, temporary work, where the people are not covered by protections, and when they are covered by workplace protections, they seem to be being eroded and cut back by this government.

I'm going to give you, basically, the bulk of the three minutes and 30 seconds that are left to talk about the landscape of precarious workers in this province, because I don't think people understand what's going on out there for workers just trying to get by, to feed their families, and that they will take any job despite the fact that it might kill them.

Mr. Arash Ghiassi: Thank you for that question. Precarious work is work that is part-time, contract, not full-time, and where there's no job security. The bulk of folks who are in those kinds of job situations are women, racial minorities, folks with precarious immigration status and folks who are particularly vulnerable to being taken advantage of by their employers.

We see all sorts of violations in those kinds of workplaces. We see people not being paid properly—the amount that they are supposed to be paid. We see them not receiving the holidays that they're supposed to receive. We also see health and safety violations. We see situations where folks are not following the proper regulations about the kind of protective gear they need to wear or how long they're supposed to work.

It's difficult because oftentimes these folks also face barriers in enforcing their rights. They don't have the means to have a lawyer—they're precarious workers, low-wage workers—and legal aid has been cut, on the one hand. On the other hand, we see that there's not enough investment and investigators at the Ministry of Labour. That actually goes to one of our recommendations as well, that we need to have more investigators, both in terms of employment standards like pay and holidays and hours of work, and also health and safety.

We heard of the Fiera Foods worker—a big tragedy, and not the first one who tragically died at that location. In his case, he was a temporary worker. He was with a temporary agency. That's one form of precarious work. And we know that there are issues with WSIB covering folks who work at temp agencies.

I don't know if that goes some way in answering your question.

Ms. Sandy Shaw: I just think that it's a landscape that we need to understand. We need to understand the people, as you've described—they are working in precarious jobs; they don't have the protections of a union—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): One minute.

Ms. Sandy Shaw: —or the protections of a lawyer. They may not be working in a workplace, in fact, where they are even legally engaged by that employer, so the employer has no responsibility if something goes wrong.

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I would just say that that's what I think we need to talk more about, as people more and more are struggling just

to pay the bills, like I said earlier. They're forced to take jobs where they may get injured on the job. Women in particular do piecework, where there's a possibility that they'll never even get paid for the work that they've done, and they have no way to enforce that.

I just wanted to make sure that you had the ability to get that on the record, and that the cuts to legal aid will impact your ability to represent these people, who have already been treated so poorly by the system.

I commend you and all of the legal aid clinics that do fantastic work in our communities—not just legal representation, but understanding the kinds of community supports and the kind of community development that we all should expect in our communities. So thank you for being here today, and thank you for your presentation.

Mr. Arash Ghiassi: Thank you very much.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you. That concludes our time as well.

INSURANCE BUREAU OF CANADA

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): I would like to call upon the next witness, from the Insurance Bureau of Canada. Please come forward. Please state your name for the record, and you have seven minutes for your presentation.

Ms. Kim Donaldson: Good afternoon. Good Friday afternoon. My name is Kim Donaldson, and I am the vice-president, Ontario, of the Insurance Bureau of Canada, representing Canada's private home, car and business insurers. Its members are 90% of the property and casualty, or P&C, insurance market in Canada. I'm here with my colleagues Arthur Lofsky and Ryan Stein.

Insurance touches the lives of virtually every Ontarian and plays a critical role in keeping our economy strong. In 2018, the industry directly contributed \$8.8 billion to Ontario's real GDP. In 2017, P&C insurers paid over \$759 million in premium taxes and \$142 million in health care levies. In 2018, P&C insurers employed 48,000 Ontarians. For every 100 jobs that the P&C insurers created, 62 further jobs were created in other industries.

IBC looks forward to supporting the Ontario government to fulfill its commitment to tackle rising costs and put more money in the pockets of families and individuals in every corner of the province.

Recently, Doug McNeil, the government's special adviser on flooding, made 66 recommendations to enhance flooding resilience in Ontario. IBC supports the special adviser's recommendations, many of which are consistent with our National Action Plan on Flooding.

There are approximately four million private residences in Ontario, 360,000, or around 9%, of which are at high risk of flooding. IBC's National Action Plan on Flooding aims to help Ontarians protect their homes and their financial security.

Amongst the main components of the plan is education. IBC is asking that all levels of government invest to improve the quality of the terrain data that is foundational to all flood mapping, thereby empowering consumers to

reduce their risks by taking the steps needed to protect their properties and their family.

Also, relocation and protection: Provide federal and provincial incentives for moving homes away from the areas that flood repeatedly, and provide a one-time buyout for the homes at highest risk. IBC recommends that Ontario work with the federal government and other provinces to develop high-risk insurance pools for those residents remaining in high-risk areas, to ensure they have affordable insurance.

Ontario's P&C insurance industry is facing many difficulties. Our industry has experienced a steady increase in insured catastrophic losses resulting from the growing frequency of severe weather events. In 2016, the industry paid \$262 million in damages from catastrophic events. Two years later, in 2018, insured catastrophic losses in Ontario had ballooned to a whopping \$1.42 billion.

IBC recommends that the Ontario government implement our National Action Plan on Flooding so that everyone in the province is protected from those dangers.

For the more than 10 million drivers in Ontario, car insurance is a necessity that is too expensive. Drivers in our province pay more for car insurance than anyone else in any other province, except the government-run system in BC. As our government's 2019 online survey indicated, Ontario drivers want a more affordable insurance product that provides more choice and better service. That is exactly what IBC's member companies want to deliver. Consumers want coverage that better matches their needs and their budget.

IBC fully supports the government's target, outlined in the 2019 fall economic statement, to make auto insurance more affordable by cutting system costs in a sustainable way. This commitment builds on the spring budget, which laid out a number of priorities for improving insurance affordability, including increasing competition, providing greater consumer choice to match driver circumstances, and a focus on ensuring that collision victims get the treatment they need rather than cash settlements. For insurers, the new system will let them respond to the changing dynamics of the marketplace and work to increase competition. Competition is a powerful incentive for companies to deliver the best product at the best price.

I want to draw your attention now to a really important public safety issue, and that's roadside vehicle recovery. Making changes in the direction we're recommending will improve people's experiences in an area that's challenging on the best of days. More needs to be done for consumers by all parties in this area. Roadside vehicle recovery and storage requires transparency and uniform province-wide oversight. It would be in the best interest of consumers for the Ontario government to implement standards, to license all related and relevant vendors and operators in the province, and to mandate the standardization of those forms used in all aspects of this industry. We believe this will increase stability in an increasingly fraught situation in which consumers are frequently caught.

Our industry is seeing significant losses in underwriting income. Across all insurance lines, IBC estimates that

between 2016 and 2018, annual underwriting income fell by 133%, to an across-industry loss of \$477 million—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): One minute.

Ms. Kim Donaldson: —in 2018. The industry's return on equity also dropped sharply, to an anemic 1.4% in 2018. There is a stark difference between the ROE earned by insurers and other financial institutions. Over the three most recent years for which their financial results were available, the top eight Canadian banks posted an average ROE of 1.4%. When we consider only the auto insurance sector in Ontario, the numbers are equally disturbing. These kinds of results threaten the stability of our industry. An affordable, sustainable insurance industry protects drivers, homeowners and business owners from the particular risks that all Ontarians face.

When tragedy strikes, insurance helps people rebuild their lives and businesses so that people can pick up where they left off.

We look forward to working with the government on solutions.

Thank you very much.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you. This time we'll go to the opposition side for questioning. MPP Arthur.

Mr. Ian Arthur: Good afternoon. Thank you for coming in.

I do have some questions about this, because it appears that throughout this, you're asking for government supports and protections for increased liabilities, in terms of flooding, relocation—for governments to cover the costs of relocating if your home becomes, frankly, valueless. If it's in a constant floodplain, you won't be able to get insurance. That's tragic. That is something we're going to have to figure out a way to deal with. You're asking for, essentially, support for your industry so that it can remain profitable going into the future.

You have compared yourself to the return on equity for Canadian banks, which, frankly, are in a very different business than yours, necessarily. I just wonder, partly, where is that comparison? Why is that a good comparison with the insurance brokers of Canada?

In terms of the auto insurance, you quoted British Columbia as having public auto insurance. I assume you don't support public auto insurance and wouldn't want to see auto insurance made public in Ontario. You quoted that as an example of costing more. But you didn't bring up Manitoba, Quebec and Saskatchewan, which all actually have cheaper auto insurance than we do and also run public systems.

So I'm a little bit confused here. You would like the government to provide funding that makes your business more viable so that you can be more profitable again?

Ms. Kim Donaldson: I hear about six different questions here.

Mr. Ian Arthur: There were lots of questions in that; sorry.

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Ms. Kim Donaldson: Arthur, do you want to start on the environmental piece?

Mr. Arthur Lofsky: Yes. I think you're misinterpreting what we're trying to say.

Mr. Ian Arthur: That's what I'm trying to figure out here.

Mr. Arthur Lofsky: In terms of buyouts for very high-risk properties, that's a last resort, okay? We estimate that 9% of Ontario properties are high-risk. A small number of them will be flooding at an ever-increasing rate over time.

Currently, the Ontario government has a disaster recovery program called DRAO, Disaster Recovery Assistance for Ontarians. All we're asking is that, in certain cases, instead of building back, where they're entitled to government support already, buyout could be an option, but as a last resort.

We're also asking that when you build back, you build back better. Sometimes that's more expensive, but it's an investment that will save the treasury. We're not asking for subsidies.

Ms. Kim Donaldson: Ryan, did you want to—

Mr. Ryan Stein: The purpose of comparing with the return on equity with the banks was just to show the comparison of the ROE between two different industries.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): One minute.

Mr. Ryan Stein: The insurance industry's ROE is quite low. I think the banks comparison just shows how low it is. Insurance, obviously, is often an industry that people think has big returns like the banks, and we're just showing that comparison to show that that's not the case.

The comparison with British Columbia was pretty much just to say that Ontario auto insurance is extremely expensive, but it's just not the most expensive. There's somewhere else that's more expensive. There are other provinces that have cheaper auto insurance than Ontario—a lot cheaper. You named two of them. Alberta's cheaper, and PEI, Newfoundland, Nova Scotia and New Brunswick.

We believe strongly that a private sector market is best for consumers. They have more choice every time they want to buy insurance. In those other provinces, they don't, and we don't think that's a good situation—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you. We'll have to move to the government side now. MPP Anand.

Mr. Deepak Anand: Thank you so much for coming. I'm just trying to understand. Being from the Peel region, we hear a lot from the residents on auto insurance. As you said, drivers in our province pay more for car insurance than those in any other provinces. Then you said that Ontario drivers want affordable insurance, and then you said that that is exactly what IBC's member companies want to deliver. It's kind of saying that the consumer wants something, and you're ready to deliver the same thing. So where is the disconnect? Why are we not getting that? Why are we not getting the better rates?

Ms. Kim Donaldson: We have to change the product. Until the government helps and gives permission to the whole system to change, we continue to sell the same product. The same product will cost the same price, and there will be built-in inflation. That's part of the challenge.

Arthur, did you want to—you're looking like you're desperate to get in there.

Mr. Arthur Lofsky: We're a very highly regulated industry in auto insurance. This is the Ontario Insurance Act and the regulations—very prescriptive. This government has committed, so far, to loosen that up a bit, to improve competition and offer choice. So we need government help to do it because of the highly regulated nature of the industry.

Ms. Kim Donaldson: Ryan?

Mr. Ryan Stein: I was just going to add that auto insurance is different than the other types of insurance. With home insurance, if there's a problem with it, like cost surge—there are unintended costs and it's getting too much—companies can go in, they can change the contract and they can sell a new product.

In auto insurance, the contract that all the companies sell is prescribed in legislation. So when there are unintended costs, or costs are higher than customers want, insurance companies can't just go and change the product. They have to work with the government, who would have to amend legislation and regulation to make that change, and then the insurance companies can sell the product that customers want that will provide the best care and at the most reasonable cost.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): MPP Skelly?

Ms. Donna Skelly: I'm going to continue on this line of questioning from MPPs Arthur and Anand.

You mentioned choice. How do we increase choice for consumers? What is it? We need to address these regulations? You believe that that increased choice will offer a reduction, perhaps, in the rates or more—

Mr. Ryan Stein: Just to build on what I was saying and to answer your question, all the auto insurance products that companies sell is prescribed in legislation. To offer choice, the legislation has to provide that opportunity for companies to offer that choice. That's why, when we're talking about fixing auto insurance for Ontarians, it's really important that government, the regulator and the industry work together. Without all those parties working together, you can't make the change that the customers need.

Ms. Donna Skelly: There's one minute left. Quickly: What could we do tomorrow that would be reflected in lower rates on Monday for our drivers? Is there anything that we could change immediately?

Ms. Kim Donaldson: The government is considering, as it outlined in six pages of the budget last year, a variety of measures that will absolutely bring relief to consumers. They have yet to articulate what that framework would be, but I do believe that these are thoughtful, considered ideas that the government has. To Ryan's point, until the government fully articulates the suite of changes it is considering, we're not able to price it or to tell you, "This is exactly what it's going to be," or, "This is the percentage that it will reduce," because we don't know yet what it's going to look like.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): That concludes our time. Thank you so much for your presentation.

EPILEPSY ONTARIO

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Next, I would like to call upon Epilepsy Ontario. Please come forward. Please state your name for the record. You have seven minutes for your presentation.

Mr. Drew Woodley: Good afternoon. My name is Drew Woodley. I'm the director of government relations with Epilepsy Ontario.

Over 95,000 people in Ontario live with epilepsy, 30% of whom do not have effective seizure control. While recurrent seizures are the most obvious effect of uncontrolled epilepsy, epilepsy can impact all parts of a person's life, including their family, education, employment and mental health. It is also often associated with other conditions, like autism, at a significantly higher rate than the general population.

Like many other chronic diseases, such as Alzheimer's or diabetes, an important component of epilepsy treatment is education and support outside of the clinical environment, in the community. However, unlike other chronic diseases, community-based education and support programs for epilepsy have not been integrated into Ontario's health care system. Across Ontario, 14 community epilepsy agencies do the same work as many health charities that receive government funding, providing key information to patients, families and the community about how to manage the disease, recognize when a situation is and is not a medical emergency, and how to respond appropriately. Agencies facilitate support groups and other ongoing support programs, with larger agencies providing first-line mental health assistance through counselling programs. Yet these agencies are in a consistently precarious financial situation, relying on charitable fundraising efforts and short-term grants. This means that agencies are chronically under-resourced, and many parts of the province do not have a local agency serving their community. This comes despite the province's own guidelines for epilepsy care recognizing that community epilepsy agencies and the programs they provide play an integral role in effective epilepsy treatment. By not funding these programs, the province is incurring needless health care costs through unnecessary emergency department usage, in-patient stays and medical costs associated with poor mental health.

An investment of \$11.9 million, or roughly \$3 million per year for four years, to fund programs at Ontario's community epilepsy agencies would not only pay for itself in reduced health care costs; it would produce an additional \$9.5 million in net savings by the 2023-24 budget year. This modest investment will achieve savings for the province's ledger and improve the quality of Ontario's health care system.

An executive summary of our proposal to the Ministry of Finance has been provided.

Education programs are the core service that community epilepsy agencies provide. These education programs for people with epilepsy and their families focus on how to manage the disease and include when seizures can be

handled safely without medical interventions and when they need to be escalated to contacting EMS. Individuals and families knowing how to respond appropriately decreases unnecessary hospital usage both in the emergency department and through in-patient admissions, and reduces hallway health care.

These education sessions should be provided to every individual who has been diagnosed with epilepsy and their family. Sadly, this is not the case in Ontario, as physicians do not have the capacity to deliver a 60- to 90-minute education session, and the lack of formal integration of community epilepsy agency programs into the Ontario health care system means most patients are not referred to their local agency. Even with proper referrals, agencies would not have the resources to meet the need without provincial funding. Put simply, instead of receiving a basic epilepsy information session from trained community staff such as social workers or health educators, thousands of people with epilepsy are making tens of thousands of unnecessary emergency department visits.

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Of the approximately 20,000 visits every year to emergency departments in Ontario where the main diagnosis is epilepsy, 77% arrive by ambulance, 73% had no other diagnosis, 64% had no medical intervention, including supplemental testing, and two thirds of visits were made by only one third of patients. Even a modest reduction in the nearly 20,000 annual visits for epilepsy, achievable with proper patient education, will produce millions in savings. As well, patients who have received epilepsy education have fewer and shorter in-patient admissions, saving additional money, freeing up hundreds of bed spaces per year and reducing the hallway health care crisis.

Community epilepsy agencies also provide ongoing support programs, particularly to those clients who have complex needs and comorbidities. These supports include facilitated peer groups, advocacy and system navigation, intervention in schools and workplaces, and, where the capacity exists, individual and group counselling for mental health issues. These ongoing support programs are especially critical for individuals and families impacted by multiple comorbidities such as autism or mental health issues. Improving mental health amongst people with epilepsy benefits those individuals, their families and the health care system. People with epilepsy are 71% more likely to have a mental health issue in their lifetime, and up to 55% of people with uncontrolled seizures are affected by depression. The completed suicide rate of people with epilepsy is 30 times the global average.

Basic mental health intervention such as cognitive behavioural therapy or mindfulness therapy that can be delivered by trained staff at community epilepsy agencies have been shown to reduce depression scores in people with epilepsy. This approach not only improves quality of life, but saves the health care system money. Even moderate reductions in depression are known to reduce other health care system costs like GP visits. Through education and ongoing support programs, community epilepsy agencies help provide wraparound services to those individuals and families with complex needs.

Epilepsy is associated with above-average rates of other serious conditions. Up to 30% of people with autism also live with epilepsy, compared to less than 1% of the general population. The Ontario Autism Program Advisory Panel recommendations emphasized that co-occurring conditions can have a multiplier effect on people and families affected by autism and that wraparound services to address those other conditions are necessary. Likewise, older adults who are diagnosed with epilepsy are at an increased risk of being diagnosed with dementia. By ensuring that epilepsy-specific supports exist through community epilepsy agencies, those families impacted by both epilepsy and other serious medical conditions have access to the right resources to address complex needs.

By providing community epilepsy agencies with \$11.9 million over four years for education and support programs, Ontario can pay for those programs, produce additional savings towards its deficit elimination goal, reduce hallway health care, supplement mental health, dementia and autism services, and ensure that people with epilepsy receive the right care in the right place.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you so much. We'll go to the government side for questioning. MPP Roberts?

Mr. Jeremy Roberts: Thank you so much, Drew. I really appreciate that presentation. Epilepsy is something I'm unfortunately very familiar with. My younger brother, Dillon, has suffered from epilepsy since birth, but we just recently celebrated four months seizure-free.

Mr. Drew Woodley: Fantastic.

Mr. Jeremy Roberts: Every milestone is always worth celebrating.

I've had the chance to engage a couple of times with Epilepsy Ottawa. I was a judge at their fire truck pull this summer, which was a ton of fun. I've talked a lot with them about the important role of the education piece and whether or not there is stuff missing from our current health curriculum in Ontario to help prepare individuals to deal with somebody having a seizure and the right ways to respond. Is that something that you are interested in engaging on? Have you had a chance to speak to the Ministry of Education on that topic at all?

Mr. Drew Woodley: Certainly. We, at Epilepsy Ontario and the individual agencies, often work with schools to provide better education to staff who are responding to or supporting students with epilepsy.

In terms of integrating it into the curriculum, there are actually a couple of programs that have been rolled out in Ontario on a project-by-project basis, both in the primary and high school levels, and it's certainly an important piece. One of our key challenges, though—educating the general public is important, but first and foremost, we need to make sure that patients and their families and their support systems and their schools and their workplaces are educated, because we know that those are the people most likely to respond to a seizure and those are the people most likely to be in a position to support that person.

Mr. Jeremy Roberts: Absolutely. I also want to touch a little bit on your comments on the autism panel's report.

In my capacity as parliamentary assistant to children, community and social services—that's one of my files, the OAP revamp—one of the things that I've been hearing a lot of parents talking about is how the panel recommended four different streams of service. We had early intervention, foundational core, and then this last piece, the crisis or urgent response mechanism. A couple of parents have raised concerns. Will that bucket of funding just be available for folks dealing with behavioural crisis issues where, as you rightly note, a lot of these children are also dealing with the dual diagnosis, with epilepsy or seizure disorder?

Would you just be able to speak a little bit, perhaps, to the importance of making sure that that piece of the dual diagnosis is considered in moving forward on some of those crisis pieces? I assume you guys have an opinion on that.

Mr. Drew Woodley: Sure. The advisory panel—one of the key points that they emphasized and they used is complex needs, that when you have these multiple conditions, you need to have a complex set of care. Certainly the crisis piece is important, but we want to be in a position to have the supports in the community before it gets to the crisis point, right? It isn't necessarily that it needs to flow through the autism stream, but those additional wraparound services, those wraparound community supports that impact a huge percentage of families living with autism, also need to be there so they have those epilepsy-specific resources available to them in the community.

Mr. Jeremy Roberts: Perfect. Thank you so much, Drew.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you. We'll move to the opposition side now. MPP Shaw.

Ms. Sandy Shaw: Thank you very much, Drew, for your presentation. I would like to commend you for this presentation, because I learned a lot from this. I didn't really realize the extent of the problem, and I didn't really realize some of the compounding problems that people who suffer from this face. You talked a lot about mental health supports—which should have been an obvious one to me, but I needed to have it spelled out for me.

I guess what I would like to ask about is the other quality-of-life issues for people with epilepsy around housing and employment, and if those are the kinds of concerns that you're seeing from some of the people who seek out your services.

Mr. Drew Woodley: Absolutely. The unemployment rate for people with epilepsy tends to be two to three times the national average, so employment is a big piece. The part that the community agencies try to focus on is providing that first-line support. At some of the larger agencies, they're able to provide an additional set of supports, particularly around employment.

There are sort of two phases of it: people who have been perhaps out of the workforce for an extended period of time—because epilepsy can often be an episodic disability as well, so they may not have been able to be in the workforce, but they want to transition back in. So they

need supports to get back in, even just basic supports about getting in.

But the more epilepsy-specific piece tends to be around making sure that once somebody is in a job, they can keep it, working with employers and employees to make sure that the reasonable accommodations that can be put in place to make sure someone stays in their job, stays employed over the long term, are there. That is often simply a function of having the resources available at the agency to go and work with the client, but also work with the employer, to make sure that piece is filled in.

Ms. Sandy Shaw: That's a really important piece of the work that you do. When people find work, it may just be a matter of accommodation, but also education. I think maybe not all employers are prepared to address that or deal with that.

I wanted to ask you: You specifically have an ask for funding over a course of four years. Can you describe a little bit about the current funding regime and whether you've seen any cuts currently, or cutbacks?

Mr. Drew Woodley: We haven't seen cuts from government funding because we aren't government-funded. This is new. As charities, we have relied almost solely on grants and private fundraising, and we've seen over the last few years that granting agencies have shifting priorities in terms of the organizations that they fund and the work that those agencies do, so we are in a continuously precarious situation when it comes to being able to deliver the services.

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The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): One minute.

Mr. Drew Woodley: The service level that we have is not where we want it to be. The agencies that do exist do excellent work with the resources they have, but none of them have the resources that they could use to get to capacity, and there are large parts of the province that do not have a local agency serving them. Parts of eastern Ontario and northern Ontario in particular don't have staffed agencies, so that's why we've asked for these resources in particular. It gives us, as a sector, stability. It gives us the opportunity to expand the capacity of the existing agencies and to reach out into parts of the province that are currently not served or underserved.

Ms. Sandy Shaw: I think you make a compelling argument, particularly around the use of emergency departments. I think it's Timmins, Ontario, that just announced that they are under a surge plan; they've asked no one to go to emerg because they're so overcapacity. If your organization is looking to specifically make sure that you're relieving some of the pressure on emergency—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you. I apologize to cut you off. That concludes our time. Thank you so much for your presentation.

ASSOCIATION OF LOCAL PUBLIC HEALTH AGENCIES

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Next, I would like to call upon the Association of Local Public Health

Agencies. Please state your name for the record. You have seven minutes for your presentation.

Dr. Eileen de Villa: Thank you very much. Good afternoon, Chair and members of the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs. I'm Dr. Eileen de Villa, vice-president of the Association of Local Public Health Agencies, better known as ALPHA, and I'm also Toronto's medical officer of health. I'm joined today by my colleague Loretta Ryan, ALPHA's executive director.

ALPHA represents all of Ontario's 34 boards of health and medical officers of health. As you may know, in essence, the work of public health is organized in the Ontario Public Health Standards as follows: chronic disease prevention and well-being, emergency management, food safety, health equity, healthy environments, healthy growth and development, immunization, infectious and communicable diseases prevention and control, population health assessment, safe water, school health, substance use, and injury prevention.

Last January, in the ALPHA pre-budget submission, ALPHA noted that public health is on the front line of keeping people well. Public health delivers an excellent return on investment. Public health is an ounce of prevention that is worth a pound of cure. Public health contributes to strong and healthy communities, and public health is money well spent.

Furthermore, ALPHA recommended that the integrity of Ontario's public health system be maintained, that the province continue its funding commitment to cost-shared programs and that the province make other strategic investments, including in the public health system, that address the government's priorities of improving services and ending hallway health care. In regard to this last point, public health's contribution to ending hallway health care is summarized in ALPHA's public health resource paper.

Despite this advice, the 2019 Ontario budget announced that the government would be changing the way the public health system was organized and funded.

On October 10, 2019, Ontario named Jim Pine as its adviser on public health and on emergency health services for the consultations. Subsequently, on November 18, the Ministry of Health launched renewed public health consultations and released a discussion paper. ALPHA was pleased with these recent announcements and has been fully engaged with the consultation. For example, on November 15, ALPHA released a statement of principles respecting public health modernization.

On a funding note, on September 11, the Ministry of Health confirmed that the cost-sharing formula for public health will change to 70% provincial and 30% municipal, to be applied to almost all mandatory public health programs and services. This said, as the Premier announced on August 19 at the AMO conference—and which ALPHA welcomed—municipalities would be receiving one-time transitional funding to limit the increase in costs borne by municipalities in 2020 to no more than 10%. Despite this, many boards of health have reported that they have had to draw on their reserves to ease the financial burden that this decision has placed on their obligated municipalities.

A more positive announcement in the 2019 Ontario budget was the decision to proceed with a new, 100% provincially funded, public-health-unit-delivered Ontario Seniors Dental Care Program, or OSDCP, which was officially launched on November 20.

ALPHA believes that a modernized, effective and efficient public health system that is adequately resourced is needed more than ever. ALPHA agrees, for example, with the Standing Committee on Public Accounts report about the importance of addressing key chronic disease risk factors, such as physical inactivity, unhealthy eating, alcohol consumption and tobacco use, of which the attributable burden of illness places huge demands on the health care system. Moreover, in its presentation to the Standing Committee on Social Policy, ALPHA warned about the unforeseen consequences of the legalization of cannabis and the promotion of vapour products, such as e-cigarettes and other similar products.

Finally, as the Office of the Chief Medical Officer of Health has recently noted, the Public Health Agency of Canada is tracking a novel coronavirus outbreak in Wuhan, China. As our experience with SARS demonstrated, infectious diseases know no borders.

With all the foregoing in mind, ALPHA respectfully recommends the following:

—led by Ontario's adviser, the Ministry of Health continue to pursue meaningful consultations with key stakeholders, including ALPHA, respecting public health modernization;

—any changes to the public health system be implemented in accordance with ALPHA's statement of principles and pending response to the public health modernization discussion paper;

—that the public health system receive sufficient and sustainable funding to address population health needs—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): One minute.

Dr. Eileen de Villa:—that Ontario preferably restore the previous provincial-municipal cost sharing 75-25 formula for public health and, at the very least, make no further changes to the current 70-30 formula; and

—that Ontario continue to invest in public health operations and capital, including 100% funding for priority programs such as the Ontario Seniors Dental Care Program.

I'll thank you for your attention, and we would be very pleased to address any questions you might have.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you. We'll go to the opposition side this time. MPP Shaw.

Ms. Sandy Shaw: Thank you very much for your presentation. I commend you for your work. I would say that people didn't understand what public health did previous to these abrupt changes; we understand it now.

I would also like to say, we remember when SARS happened, and Dr. Sheela Basrur—the heroic efforts that we took to prevent that from being a full-blown crisis. It was 15 or 16 years ago; how quickly we forget, right? So I think we need to keep reminding ourselves that when we need public health to be able to mobilize, we really, really need it.

So I want to commend you. I understand the work that you do. I always did. I want to say that we're fully supportive of what you do. There's no misunderstanding on the part of the New Democrats of what you do.

My question is very specific because we've got a short time. About the changes to the public health unit, the geographic deployment—so 35 units that are going to now, perhaps, be shrunk down to 10. This is a question about my riding in Hamilton, where our medical officer of health, Dr. Richardson, has expressed some of her concerns, particularly now that we are an Ontario health team and we do not know how the Ontario health team is trying to get on with their work without any direction—really clear direction, I would say—from the government and without the understanding that this public health unit will now maybe be beyond the geographic area of the Ontario health team.

So there's a lot of confusion out there in terms of what's happening. I'm wondering if you have any understanding of that or any advice around what the impact will be when these health units shrink.

1620

Dr. Eileen de Villa: Thank you for the question. At this stage of the game and as alluded to in my remarks, there are ongoing consultations right now in respect of public health modernization as proposed by the current provincial government. My understanding at this stage is that there is still open discussion with respect to what will be the configuration of local public health units. You're right: Right now, there are currently 34. There were some original proposals made last year. We're understanding at this stage of the game that there is some revisiting, a "reset," I believe, is the word that has been used. So we don't know yet where the discussions will land.

However, I would say that there are some important questions to ask here and some important considerations for the committee. First public health as a system is separate from the health care system. There are important areas of interaction that we need to have between public health and health care, but they are in fact distinct and separate. The Ontario health teams fall more within the context of health care, and that's a very important role that needs to be played. I think there are certainly some questions as to how that will manifest itself in the future. However, it is in fact separate from public health.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): One minute.

Dr. Eileen de Villa: That's not to take away from its importance.

Ms. Sandy Shaw: Thank you.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): MPP Arthur.

Mr. Ian Arthur: Thank you so much for your presentation. I echo the sentiments of my colleague.

Just very quickly: The upstream causes of health care costs were talked about for a long time. It seems to have receded a bit in terms of the discussion. With skyrocketing health care costs, do you see any avenue other than dealing with those upstream causes for bringing those expenditures under control?

Dr. Eileen de Villa: Thank you for the question. As a public health practitioner, we are all about the upstream.

That is our focus. That is where we live, and that's where we provide the most value to the system. There will always be some need for health care, which is downstream. However, we know that what constitutes and what maintains health are the social determinants of health, the conditions within which people live and the environments within which they live—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you. I apologize to cut you off. We'll have to move to the government side now. MPP Skelly.

Ms. Donna Skelly: Thank you for your presentation. This year our government committed over \$700 million—close to \$800 million—in funding for public health units right across Ontario. Yes, we believe that there is an opportunity and several challenges moving forward in the restructuring and modernization of delivery of those services, and we are consulting, I believe under the leadership and direction of Jim Pine. He is the emergency health services adviser. He is leading the dialogue, meeting with representatives from municipalities, meeting with health service sector representatives from right across the province, in order to understand what the challenges are, in order to identify perhaps some of the duplication of services. We have seen examples that have been brought forward to our government.

I'm just wondering if maybe you could, while we have this opportunity at this committee hearing, share with this committee some of the areas that you have identified as duplication in the delivery of health care services under these current boards.

Dr. Eileen de Villa: Thank you for the question. I'm going to talk about duplication in respect of public health as opposed to health care.

Ms. Donna Skelly: I should say "public health." Thank you.

Dr. Eileen de Villa: Yes, because they are quite distinct, as I indicated earlier. You're quite right around the consultations; I think that there is an opportunity to engage in conversation around what's best for public health. The public health system, however, does require the co-operation and collaboration of several partners. There's certainly a role for provincial entities. There's a role for local entities, some of which are governmental and some of which are community-based.

Where are there areas that we could improve? There are always areas for improvement, whether we're talking about public health or health care. When it comes to public health, I think what we have seen through the various reports—some of which emanated from local public health; some of which have come through Auditor General-type reports—would include areas like research.

I think there is an opportunity, as well, to confer across the province around what are some of the directions and priorities that we should be seeking together, because we know that where we have had success in public health in the past, most of the successes have come through the collaborative efforts of a variety of local or regional public health entities, as well as the province.

I think those are just a few examples of some areas where we could collaborate better and perhaps reduce duplication.

Ms. Donna Skelly: One of the programs that you raised involves dental care for seniors, which is, of course, something I think most of us really believe is long overdue.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): One minute.

Ms. Donna Skelly: Can you speak to some of the limitations, some of your observations, since we've started introducing that program?

Dr. Eileen de Villa: It's a relatively new program, launched in November and currently being delivered through public health units. I would say that for many of my colleagues around the province, one of the challenges is that they did not have pre-existing seniors' dental care programs, or facilities through which to deliver such clinical services. Certainly, establishing those facilities is one of the challenges that exist right now.

But as mentioned in our remarks, we at ALPHA are extremely pleased. This was certainly one of the positives in respect of recent funding announcements when it came to public health and public health delivery programs.

Ms. Donna Skelly: Thank you.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you so much for your presentation.

ONTARIO SECONDARY SCHOOL TEACHERS' FEDERATION

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Next, I would like to call upon the Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation. Please come forward. Please state your name for the record. You have seven minutes for your presentation.

Mr. Harvey Bischof: Thanks. I'm Harvey Bischof. I'm pleased to make this 2020 pre-budget submission on behalf of OSSTF/FEESO. As a reminder, OSSTF represents not just English public high school teachers, but many thousands of education workers working in a wide variety of roles from JK to grade 12. We also represent the support staff in a half dozen universities in Ontario, so I will address some things with regard to them as well.

Ontario's public education system, as evidenced by the recently released 2018 PISA results and other measures, is one of the world's best. However, that standing is under threat because of funding cuts to the K-to-12 system. Changes to funding for Ontario universities would have a similarly negative effect.

Last spring, the Conference Board of Canada released its report *The Economic Case for Investing in Education*. It showed that every dollar invested in education returns \$1.30 to the broader economy. With every dollar cut from education, \$1.30 of economic benefit is lost.

Additionally, investment in education reduces the demand for social services, such as health care, welfare payments and the judicial system.

In other words, investment in education produces, with a multiplier effect, economic benefits as well as personal and social benefits. This alone should prompt the

government to reverse its already unilaterally imposed and further proposed cuts, and make investments in education.

The Financial Accountability Office has released a report detailing that the projected growth in Ministry of Education spending is well below basic education cost drivers, such as enrolment and inflation, over the next four years. This means that compared to the last school year, there will be significantly less per-pupil funding. According to the government's memo B14 from last year, per-pupil funding is down \$54 per student in the first year of a multi-year plan for cuts. This will only get worse, negatively affecting the province's economy and students' prospects as they look to take on the jobs of the future.

To counter this damaging approach, OSSTF/FEESO makes the following recommendations.

With regard to kindergarten-to-grade-12 education, we propose restoring funding to match the 2018-19 level of staffing. Reverse the proposed change to the funded average class size, the elimination of the secondary programming grant, and the removal of local priorities funding. When complete, the cumulative effect of the government's intended cuts will result in the elimination of over 10,000 secondary teachers, as confirmed by the FAO.

Over 60,000 course sections are eliminated, drastically reducing student choice. We are already witnessing program cuts, as school boards struggle to meet a funded class size of 22.5 to 1. We recommend that the government listen to the overwhelming majority of Ontarians and restore teaching staff to last year's levels.

The cumulative effects of cutting numerous grants, including the reduction in the funded level of early childhood educators, has forced school boards to cut education workers. Education worker losses to the system are set to increase over the next four years.

Education workers frequently support our most vulnerable students, those at risk and with special needs. These students have benefited in recent years from having more educational assistants and professional support staff personnel in our schools. We recommend that the government restore funding so that education workers are rehired, and fund these positions based on the needs of students.

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Mandatory e-learning is detrimental to many students, particularly students at risk. If every student in Ontario is forced to take two mandatory e-learning credits to graduate, with a class size of 35 to 1, this will eliminate even more teachers and education workers from the system. Parents, students, teachers and education experts have been unequivocal in their opposition to mandatory e-learning. We recommend that the government maintain voluntary e-learning credits only.

In school boards that offer LINC, LBS, adult ESL, and other non-credit programs for adults, the funding is not just from the Ministry of Education. These funding streams do not provide for appropriate preparation time required by adult education instructors. Portfolio-based learning assessment methodologies have been mandated as the method of assessment, but the workload and time required to adequately operationalize the program is non-

existent, creating pressure on adult education instructors and frustration for students. The GSN funding for adult non-credit instruction must be increased. Improving language skills in adults, including those new to Canada, has significant impact on the economy as these adults seek employment within Ontario.

We recommend increasing funding for adult credit day school. Adult day school teachers teach the same curriculum as regular day school teachers to students 21 years and over, yet they do so in conditions that are more difficult. Adult day school teachers have little to no preparation time, no class size protection, and fewer teaching materials compared to their regular day school colleagues.

Our recommendations with regard to post-secondary education: The government's announcement of a 10% reduction in tuition rates starting this academic year for university and college students should be good news. However, with no corresponding funding adjustment in the block grants, it will mean a reduction in funding to universities and colleges of about \$440 million provincially. There will be fewer services for students, as institutions cut, with non-academic staff most vulnerable. The FAO reports a much deeper cut of \$615 million in funding over last year. We recommend that the government restore this funding.

Finally, the government announced it will increase the portion of funding for universities and colleges that will be outcomes-based to 60% from 1.2% by the 2024-25 academic year.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): One minute.

Mr. Harvey Bischof: This change flies in the face of research that counters outcomes-based funding and the fact that there are no actual metrics to assess the outcomes. The previous government's consultation raised concerns regarding this type of funding, which resulted in only a small portion of funding set to become outcomes-based, and only for special-purpose funding for universities.

The Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario studied outcomes-based funding and found that it has shown little evidence of improved student outcomes. Outcomes-based funding favours the creation of a system that advantages institutions in large urban areas, disadvantages those in the north, stifles equity and access for students, and demolishes the culture of universities as incubators of free thought and academic liberty. We recommend that its use be stopped.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you so much. We'll go to the government side for four minutes of questioning. MPP Piccini.

Mr. David Piccini: Thank you for being here today and the work that you do to represent your members.

In November 2019, you spoke to the Standing Committee on General Government, and you were given an opportunity to speak about the average salary of your teachers and how that ranks nationally. So my question to you today is, what is the average salary of an OSSTF teacher, and how does that rank nationally?

Mr. Harvey Bischof: The average salary of an OSSTF teacher is approximately \$86,000. I don't know the national ranking. I will say for context, over a lifetime of

earnings, net of the cost of education, a teacher earns about as much as a skilled tradesperson. I think that's a worthwhile context. Skilled tradespeople certainly earn the money that they make; I think my teacher members do, as well.

Mr. David Piccini: So when you were asked in November—from then to now, you still don't know where you rank, roughly, nationally across the rest of Canada?

Mr. Harvey Bischof: Roughly, it's around third, I think, in the nation.

Mr. David Piccini: When we heard earlier today from a presenter on the Catholic school teacher board, she spoke about values and priorities, since she both valued and prioritized public Catholic education. I was just wondering, do you?

Mr. Harvey Bischof: Values and priorities?

Mr. David Piccini: And would you prioritize Catholic education?

Mr. Harvey Bischof: I think where you're going here is, we have a policy on the books with regard to OSSTF that calls for the creation of a single school system in each official language. That said, under the current circumstances and the attacks on publicly funded education, we find that we have far more in common with our Catholic colleagues than what separates us. It's why we've been working so effectively with our Catholic colleagues.

Mr. David Piccini: So you would support the removal of—it's just that I had a parent who came to my office whose daughter is in the Catholic board. I just wanted to relay that. Do you support Catholic education in Ontario? Yes or no?

Mr. Harvey Bischof: The long-standing policy that we support is the creation of a single publicly funded secular education system in both official languages.

Mr. David Piccini: Now, that mum also came to speak to me about some of the disruption and what union-led escalation—the reality that's facing her daughter. I wanted to ask for that mum, who works a minimum wage job—the average income in my riding is about \$45,000. With public sector compensation representing approximately half of government expenditures, what do you have to say to that mother, who worries about tax increases to fund the \$1.5-billion raise that you're asking for?

Mr. Harvey Bischof: I would say to her that tax cuts won't benefit her nearly as much as having robust public services, including an excellent publicly funded education system which is free access for all, which doesn't require additional costs and which gives students the opportunity to move ahead, to move up. That's the way that people in the middle and lower classes get ahead: not on the basis of having a few extra dollars in their pocket but through access to robust public services.

Mr. David Piccini: I think a few extra dollars is important because—is compensation not an important factor for you?

Mr. Harvey Bischof: I think that for these people you're referring to it's not nearly as important as having access to the currently excellent publicly funded education system.

Mr. David Piccini: So is compensation an important factor for you?

Mr. Harvey Bischof: Compensation is an important factor for everybody who earns a living through work, yes.

Mr. David Piccini: And it's an important factor for you and your OSSTF teachers?

Mr. Harvey Bischof: Well, as we are part of everybody, then I guess we would be included within that Venn diagram, yes.

Mr. David Piccini: Okay. Thank you.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): We'll move to the opposition side now. MPP Arthur.

Mr. Ian Arthur: Good afternoon. It's a pleasure to have you here. It's remarkable that it actually took pre-budget consultations to allow you to be at the same table as the government at any given point.

Can we talk a little bit about the cuts that are actually happening right now? This has been displayed in the media constantly, but I want to loop back to whether—he brought up a constituent who is having some trouble. What is your feeling about the public support from families across Ontario standing with teachers and standing behind teachers in opposing the cuts that this government is trying to force on schools?

Mr. Harvey Bischof: Yes, thanks. I'll go beyond my feelings and I'll go to the data. We've been conducting internal polling for weeks. It tells us that, overwhelmingly, the public supports our positions, as compared to government positions. It supports educators as the ones looking out for students' best interests, as opposed to the government, which, overwhelmingly, people don't believe are looking out for students' best interests.

A very important question that the public was asked: Do you think that educators should continue to resist these cuts, or should they simply capitulate to the government's destructive path? Overwhelmingly, the public has told us that we should continue to resist. So I know there's a narrative that the government is trying to pursue, but it's not supported by the data.

Mr. Ian Arthur: And just in terms of the government's position in this narrative they're trying to create, they have implied that they are making concessions by moving from four mandatory online classes to two. But in your opinion, is more bad versus less bad actually giving up something?

Mr. Harvey Bischof: To go from last year's average class size of 22 to 1, for example, to their proposed average class size, which comes with another kicker on the bargaining table, by the way, of the elimination of all class size caps—but to go from 22 to 25 is not a concession; it's creating damage. To go from zero mandatory e-learning credits to two mandatory e-learning credits is not a concession; it's creating damage.

I guess I'll describe it in the way I just described it to a couple of journalists outside: When somebody steals your bicycle and gives you back a wheel and you say, "Really, I want my whole bike back," and they say, "Come now. Be reasonable," we can see that that's kind of the realm that we're in right now.

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Mr. Ian Arthur: As a personal aside—I'm sorry to take up some of your time on this—without our public education system, there is no way I would be in the job that I'm in right now. I had a single parent. There wasn't a lot of income that was available. There is no possible way I could have ever gotten to this position without the teachers that I had. They deserve every single penny they are being paid.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): One minute.

Mr. Ian Arthur: They change people's lives. I am so proud that we have stood with them consistently and behind you and your efforts.

Anyone else want to add anything? Sandy?

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): MPP Shaw.

Ms. Sandy Shaw: I would echo what MPP Arthur is saying. I was on the picket line with your members. I would say that my office only receives calls from parents and students who know what's going on. Let's not forget the students understand that it is their education that is under attack. So I would just echo that what we're seeing is support, that you're standing and holding the line on education. People see that what you're doing is about education, but it's also upholding the line against cuts to all of our public services, as you've mentioned—health care as well. I want to also say thank you for what you're doing for all of us in Ontario. It has been very well received in my riding.

Mr. Harvey Bischof: Thank you. Public education is the great democratizer. It's the greatest driver—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you. That concludes our time. Thank you so much for your presentation.

ONTARIO LONG TERM CARE ASSOCIATION

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Next, I would like to call upon the last presenter of the day, from the Ontario Long Term Care Association. Please come forward. Please state your name for the record. You have seven minutes for your presentation.

Ms. Donna Duncan: Good afternoon. My name is Donna Duncan. I'm CEO of the Ontario Long Term Care Association. I'm joined today by Dan Kaniuk, chair of our association board. Dan is also a senior executive at the Responsive Group, which operates and manages long-term-care homes across Ontario. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Today, we would like to discuss the critical and urgent need to invest in long-term care and, in doing so, invest in Ontario's seniors. As you may know, more than 40% of Ontario hospital patients receiving an alternate level of care are waiting for long-term-care beds. The provincial wait-lists for long-term care are soaring, and there are more than 36,000 people currently waiting in communities for placement. In addition, these seniors transitioning into long-term care are presenting with increasingly more complex and acute needs, requiring far more specialized care and more palliative care.

Long-term-care homes want to be part of the solution, but are having to navigate a perfect storm that is challenging them in meeting current needs, let alone in assuming a larger, more integrated role in our health care system. This storm has been created by the convergence of a staffing shortage that has reached a crisis point, especially in rural and northern communities; unstable funding coupled with funding and program cuts; and a provincial capital redevelopment program and process that have proven unworkable to date.

The government has committed to building 15,000 new beds and redeveloping 15,000 older beds, but that program is at risk unless we can resolve these outstanding issues. These are foundational challenges that cannot be addressed in isolation and cannot be addressed alone. If we are to succeed, we must work together.

To that end, we are asking for government support with the current staffing emergency. Long-term-care homes are wonderful places to work in for the right person. Unfortunately, there are simply not enough candidates in the system to meet current needs, and the current regulatory environment creates barriers to recruitment and retention. Some 80% of Ontario long-term-care homes are having difficulty filling shifts, recruiting and retaining staff.

To begin to address these issues, we are asking that the government update regulatory and funding policies to allow homes more flexibility in the type of staff they can hire for different positions and to reduce the volume of administrative paperwork currently required by nurses and personal support workers so that we can redirect that time to care.

To tackle the larger structural and systemic issues feeding this crisis, we ask that the government establish a long-term-care human resources emergency task force.

Further, to support recruitment and retention, we need to work together to address the stigma of working in long-term care that has been fostered by a punitive regulatory and inspection framework. As a starting point, we are asking for a change to the tone and approach in licensing and compliance and a step towards a just and balanced culture of quality improvement and accountability, with a focus on resident care rather than on process and compliance.

The current inspection and reporting program focuses on and amplifies failures, regardless of the materiality of an incident or complaint. The focus is on the failures, not on the opportunities or steps taken for improvement. We need to ensure that long-term-care homes are viewed as, and are, safe places for care, where families no longer feel guilty for having their loved ones placed there and where employees are valued, respected and supported.

This year, Ontario long-term-care homes face significantly reduced annual funding and the elimination or reduction of several important streams of funding. The current long-term-care funding model is complicated and unpredictable. There is a very narrow focus on rigid, discrete funding envelopes that are misaligned with increasing and changing resident needs and the need to better align with other providers in support of health system transformation and integrated care models.

The current model is precarious. Each funding change has not considered codependencies among the envelopes and has resulted in unintended consequences. We liken it to a game of Jenga: You can only move so many pieces before your tower of pieces collapses.

Inflation and labour agreements have been higher than ministry funding increases. There has been a loss of specialized long-term-care pharmacy services and supports. Proposed cuts to the high wage transition fund and the structural compliance premium have individually and collectively been profoundly destabilizing. Many long-term-care operators do not feel confident in proceeding with new long-term-care beds or the redevelopment of their current homes when the operating environment is so unpredictable.

We are proposing a simplified funding model that would give homes a predictable and stable operating foundation; support them in managing their staffing issues better, given system constraints; enable them to adapt to a changing resident population; and support them in securing and managing financing for the redevelopment or the development of new beds.

Consistent with our proposed funding model, and to support a viable capital program, we are asking the government to adjust the construction funding subsidy to reflect the actual cost of construction of new beds, and to index this to inflation on an ongoing basis. It is not a case of one model fits all; land and development costs vary widely across the province. Although the increase in this subsidy will not impact the 2020-21 budget, operators need a commitment on the subsidy now as part of a comprehensive capital program to support financing and allow homes to advance plans to take on new long-term beds.

Further, as part of a comprehensive capital program, we have asked government to streamline and document the current provincial and municipal planning and approval processes and to establish service guidelines so that projects can proceed more quickly and predictably. To complement this, we have also asked that the government establish a senior facilitator role with a mandate to work with homes in eliminating policy and/or process barriers across government to advance capital projects. It cannot be business as usual.

We have a collective responsibility to ensure that Ontario's seniors receive the care they need, where they need it, as quickly as possible.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): One minute.

Ms. Donna Duncan: If we are to end hallway health care and support our seniors and their families, we must have a viable and sustainable long-term-care sector. Our action plan and the investments to support it are set out in our budget submission. We have mapped a path through the perfect storm we face today that will set us on a course toward achieving those goals.

Thank you, and we welcome your questions.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you. We'll go to the opposition side for questioning. MPP Shaw.

Ms. Sandy Shaw: Thank you very much for your presentation. Just so I'm clear, you represent operators. So are

your members that you represent all for-profit long-term-care homes? Is that who you represent?

Ms. Donna Duncan: We are the only association that represents only long-term care, and we represent the full continuum. We have municipal members; we have charitable members, non-profits; we have small private; and we have large operators.

Ms. Sandy Shaw: Okay. So it's not just for-profit.

Ms. Donna Duncan: It's not just all profit.

Ms. Sandy Shaw: Okay. That's great, that you clarified that.

I would like to support your notion that long-term-care facilities are wonderful places to work. They should be. What I hear more often than not about people who work in this sector or work in homes is that they are just—they're worked to the bone. In some ways they're traumatized. Because they're so short-staffed, they can't give the kind of care they would like to give to the members. It really is a form of trauma when they sit and watch some of the residents, as you talked about, who they know and who they'll probably most likely spend their last minutes with, and yet they can't provide them with the care that they're expected to.

In Wentworth Lodge in my riding in Hamilton, we had some of the personal support workers say that they have to start getting their residents ready and dressed at 4 or 4:30 in the morning in order to have enough time to get them down to breakfast because they're working so short. And what they talk about is working short. They're working understaffed; they're working short.

I guess I'm giving a bit of a speech here, but what I would like to say is—your thing says, “Many long-term-care operators do not feel confident in proceeding with new long-term-care beds” when the operating environment is so unpredictable. I would say that the same is true of the folks who work in long-term care. It is unpredictable. They have to put together two and three jobs to qualify for benefits—well, that's what I think, so I'm going to ask you, to make sure I understand that. They are also not able to provide the kind of care that they want to to their residents to the level of the profession they've entered into.

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I know you're talking a lot about the capital and building beds, which is important, but I would like to just focus on the staffing levels and what we can do to support personal support workers who are keeping our loved ones healthy and safe as much as they can, to make it an attractive line of work. Given the conditions, people are not going into this line of work, and we're seeing shortages. What could your association do to make sure that people see personal support workers in the long-term-care homes as a job that they would want to go to, that they would like to spend—

Mr. Dan Kaniuk: Clearly, we are facing an HR crisis. There's a dearth of PSWs in the sector. Many community colleges have closed their PSW programs because of a lack of interest. I think part of that is related to the kind of

environment that PSWs work in. It's not an easy place to work, but it's a very rewarding place to work.

We have mature collective agreements—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): One minute.

Mr. Dan Kaniuk: We have mature collective agreements that reflect normative standards of wages and benefits across the province, but we do need more funding to address the kinds of acuity levels that we're seeing so we can bring more additional staff into the workplace. Certainly, many areas of the province are experiencing shortages of RNs and RPNs. As a provider ourselves, we partnered with a college to fund the PSW program, and we only got eight people registering for the program.

Ms. Sandy Shaw: Can you just address the notion that people think that PSWs are underpaid, that they're part-time jobs, that they don't receive benefits? Is that a condition that you're trying to address with your emergency task force?

Mr. Dan Kaniuk: Yes. I would say it's actually not the present condition. Part-time people are covered by collective agreements. There are benefits. They're prorated benefits. They're very mature collective agreements that cover all of our staff at our homes.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): We'll have to move to the government side now. MPP Skelly.

Ms. Donna Skelly: Thank you for your presentation.

I recall, and MPP Shaw and I were talking about this last year when we had all of these committee hearings—the continuous messaging of “We cannot find people to work.” It's in every region of this province, in every sector. You said that it's a staffing shortage that has reached a crisis point. I think this is one of the areas where it's so dangerous, because now you're dealing with people's lives. We are hearing it in every sector, whether it's truck drivers or people in the aerospace industry, the skilled trades, PSWs. What can we do?

Mr. Dan Kaniuk: One of the recommendations of the association is that the government open up the regulatory framework for the kinds of positions—as you know, we have funding envelopes that are geared towards care and programs and activities and raw food and other accommodations. The first three are pass-through envelopes, so in other words, all the funding we get we utilize for those very prescriptive things, and what doesn't get utilized gets sent back to government. What we're asking for is some flexibility in the regulations so that we can bring on not just PSWs and RPNs—but can we bring back the health care aide program, for example; can we bring back porters?

Ms. Donna Skelly: What would that mean? What is the difference, then—excuse my ignorance—in terms of the difference in the job descriptions?

Mr. Dan Kaniuk: It's a shorter training program and less costly. A PSW program will run six to eight months and will cost an average applicant about \$6,000. Many people who are new to Canada can't afford to be without work for six to eight months and can't afford those kinds of tuitions. If we could allow some flexibility in staffing

so we could bring on porters, for example—personal assistants, those kinds of positions. The current regs don't allow us to do that.

Ms. Donna Skelly: I understand.

MPP Piccini has a question.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): MPP Piccini.

Mr. David Piccini: Thank you very much for being here today.

This is a big and important issue in Northumberland—Peterborough South, my riding. I know with the \$72 million more invested this year and a commitment in our region of over 300 beds either being redeveloped or being brought online—juxtapose that with the 611 beds built between 2011 and 2018. I think it's a step in the right direction. Does more need to be done? Without question.

We've heard a lot about staffing. I want to take a deeper dive on the staffing piece and talk about scheduling and wages. I know that both are important, but talk to me about the scheduling piece, because the more I take a deeper dive, the more I really see scheduling. I've heard from workers who have to go a day here, and then at the end of the day, they're going somewhere else—in rural Ontario, in many cases, kilometres apart. How can we fix the scheduling issue?

Mr. Dan Kaniuk: I would say that most operators work with a master schedule so that people have some predictability in their lives. Those schedules are posted six to eight weeks in advance. Then, of course, we have offset part-time people who complement the full-time people. So we try to introduce as much predictability for people as possible.

The reality is, though, that we only have so many full-time and part-time positions that we can fund.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Fifty seconds.

Mr. Dan Kaniuk: We would welcome the ability to staff at higher levels, but we just don't have the flexibility to do that today.

Mr. David Piccini: How has it been, working with this government? You worked with the last government and this government. Have we been consulting and reaching out to you? What has that relationship been like and what more can we do to reduce red tape for you?

Mr. Dan Kaniuk: We're actually quite encouraged by the level of engagement that we have with the government and with the new Minister of Long-Term Care that has been dedicated to this sector. We've had some very fulsome, meaningful conversations. We think, really, that it's moving in the right direction.

Ms. Donna Duncan: We do think that more can be done to work across government, so the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities and the Ministry of Municipal Affairs on capital and Infrastructure Ontario, rural affairs—as we think about these issues, these are provincial issues, and we do think that it shouldn't be up to a single minister to bear them alone. We think there's a great opportunity to work with our MPPs on all sides of the House in addressing these issues.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you. I apologize to cut you off. That concludes our time. Thank you so much for your presentation.

That concludes our business today. As a reminder, the deadline for written submissions is 6 p.m. Eastern Standard Time on Friday, January 24.

The committee is now adjourned until 9 a.m. on Monday, January 20 in Sioux Lookout. Thank you so much.

The committee adjourned at 1657.

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