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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

Thursday 17 September 2020

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Jeudi 17 septembre 2020

The House met at 0900.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Good morning. Let us pray.

Prayers/Prières.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

NOT-FOR-PROFIT CORPORATIONS

Hon. Lisa M. Thompson: I move that, pursuant to clause 10.1(2)(b) of the Legislation Act, 2006, S.O. 2006, c. 21, sched. F, the assembly resolve that the provisions of the act listed below, which have not come into force in the period since their adoption, not be repealed:

Not-for-Profit Corporations Act, 2010, S.O. 2010, c. 15:

Sections 1 to 104, sections 106 to 110, subsections 111(1), (2), (5) and (6), sections 112 to 115, subsections 116(1), (2), (4), (5), (6), (7), (8), (9) and (10), section 117, subsections 118(1), (2), (3), (6) and (7), sections 119 to 210, 213, 218, 221, 223, 224, 225—

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Bingo!

Hon. Lisa M. Thompson: I was waiting for that, actually. Thanks, Gilles.

—227, 228, 229, 230, subsections 231(1), (3) and (4), sections 232, 233, 235, 236, 237, 238, 239, 240, 241, 242, 244, 245, 246, 247, subsections 248(2) and (3).

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Ms. Thompson has moved government notice of motion number 89.

Would the minister care to lead off the debate?

Hon. Lisa M. Thompson: Yes, I would. Speaker, today I'm pleased to share my time with my outstanding parliamentary assistant from Sarnia–Lambton, MPP Bob Bailey.

Today, I rise before the House to speak about the resolution for the Not-for-Profit Corporations Act, 2010. It's known as ONCA. The Not-for-Profit Corporations Act, 2010, is a vital piece of legislation that will have positive impacts for the not-for-profit sector in Ontario, from one end of this province to the other.

In our province, there are over 58,000 not-for-profit corporations. This important sector strengthens our communities, supports countless causes and initiatives that are important to Ontarians and provides meaningful employment for many. Unfortunately, Canada's not-for-profit sector has been especially hard-hit by COVID-19, as many of you would well expect. In August 2020, CBC reported on the results of a survey conducted by the Ontario Non-profit Network, known as ONN. The results indicated that one in five of the survey's 1,100 respondents said that they

may have to shut down by the end of December. Another quarter said that 2021 will likely bring greater financial struggles even more in the next year. These are troubling stats.

In response, our government has created the Resilient Communities Fund to provide \$83 million in grants through the Ontario Trillium Foundation, to support eligible non-profits as they recover from the effects of the pandemic. I applaud and share my appreciation with Premier Ford and the Honourable Lisa MacLeod, Minister of Heritage, Sport, Tourism and Culture Industries. These grants will absolutely help organizations like food banks; child and youth programs, like the Ontario 4-H program that is near and dear to my heart; and the Royal Canadian Legion branches to bounce back and continue the delivery of vital programming in their communities.

And I commend Minister MacLeod. She has taken it upon herself to travel across the province. She has seen first-hand, and she has spoken to representatives of the not-for-profit organizations that prop up our communities. She realizes that they do indeed need the government's attention and support to help navigate these challenging waters. So I thank her on behalf of all of government for the work she's doing in that regard.

Going back to the program, the Resilient Communities Fund, I'd like to share that these grants of up to \$150,000 per eligible organization are being provided to support activities such as adapting or reimagining the delivery of programs and services. I think about our rural communities. I am so proud to represent the riding of Huron–Bruce, and almost every community in my riding celebrates the fall, celebrates the practice of farming, the harvesting of food. Our fall fairs have really been hard-hit because they haven't been able to host their annual events. The agricultural societies across Ontario that host fall fairs could potentially apply to the Resilient Communities Fund, because again, we're going to have to adapt. We're going to have to reimagine how we host those events that we hold near and dear to our hearts.

This fund can be used for adapting or reimagining the delivery of programs and services, procuring equipment or renovating spaces to meet the changing needs of the organization; the funds could also be used for creating and/or adopting new approaches for organizations to work together to meet the needs of communities. There are two more categories that organizations could consider for this fund: They could also develop alternative sources of revenues, and they can equip their board members and employees with what they feel they need to prepare for change and to build resiliency for their organization.

While it will take time to restore our not-for-profit sector, this investment will help many not-for-profits to continue with their critical work supporting our communities and our most vulnerable citizens.

Madam Speaker, in the spirit of making life and business easier for our not-for-profit sector, I'm pleased to speak to you and our esteemed colleagues about the Not-for-Profit Corporations Act and the actions that we can take to save it by supporting this particular resolution.

0910

The Not-for-Profit Corporations Act, commonly known as ONCA, received royal assent in 2010—2010. That was years ago. That was before many of us in this House today were even elected. The Liberals let the not-for-profit sector down. Stakeholders have waited and waited for years to see this come into force. Our government, under the leadership of Premier Doug Ford, is going to make that happen. As a result of the 10-year rule in section 10.1 of the Legislation Act, right now, if we don't pass this resolution, it is in jeopardy of being automatically repealed.

ONCA is a critical piece of legislation that will establish a modern legislative framework for not-for-profit corporations, including charitable corporations. Incorporating a not-for-profit or charitable corporation under ONCA will provide critical benefits for the organization. For example, it will include the assurance of a formal operating structure; permanence should leadership change, as we know it does as people work their way through the board positions; as well as legal protections for members. Furthermore, ONCA will reduce burden on not-for-profit corporations and facilitate a prosperous business climate. This is key: Our government is dedicated to digital-first, and ONCA will help organizations move from paper-based filing to digital services, for example, electronic filings of corporate documents. ONCA will also enhance flexibility for businesses and corporations. It will make it easier for people to do business in Ontario and will also support the province's plan to reopen Ontario and help not-for-profit corporations return to what we now deem the new normal.

However, the implementation of ONCA is tied to the launch of a new business information and registration system, otherwise referred to as our new business registry. The new registry will enable electronic filings under ONCA for not-for-profit corporations, as I've mentioned, enabling many of the benefits I've talked about. This is a digital-first model that will replace the current legacy system that relies heavily on paper-based processes.

Unfortunately, because they're so intertwined, ONCA cannot come into force until the new business registry is active, and this may not occur before the date by which ONCA will be automatically repealed. So our government, recognizing the value of ONCA and how long stakeholders have been waiting for this piece of legislation to come into force, is saving this important piece of legislation and bringing it into force as soon as possible so Ontario's not-for-profit corporations can benefit from enhanced and modernized legislation.

To save the ONCA legislation and eliminate the risk of it being automatically repealed, I'm proposing this resolution today. If passed, this resolution will save ONCA from being automatically repealed and provide the time we need to launch the new business registry. I will note that this resolution will exclude certain new voting provisions that provide for a separate class of voting and voting rights for non-voting members in certain circumstances.

I want to pause at this moment and thank all of our stakeholders for the advocacy and the opportunity to discuss how we can make sure ONCA fits their particular environment in terms of their organizations. In particular, the Ontario Federation of Agriculture: Peggy, from northern Ontario, thank you for coming forward and sharing concerns that, quite frankly, I had heard for years. I think of the provincial director from Perth county, Brent Royce; he spoke about this for years, while the Liberals were in government. We, the PC government of Ontario, have listened, and we're making sure that your concern in this particular regard has been acted upon.

I'd also like to share with everyone that the launch of the business registry and the proclamation of ONCA align with our government's commitments to help businesses and not-for-profit corporations recover from the hit of COVID-19. It will implement modern solutions that embrace technology and reduce burden and red tape for not-for-profit corporations—and you know our government is all about making life easier for businesses and organizations.

At this time, as a little teaser, I have to tell you that Minister Sarkaria has done just an amazing job in terms of reducing burden and cutting red tape and listening to stakeholders. I can't wait for his work to hit this chamber later this fall.

ONCA is intended to provide Ontario not-for-profit corporations, including charitable corporations, with a modern legal framework to meet their needs in the current environment—one that sets out clear, helpful guidance for the full life cycle of not-for-profits, including incorporation, governance and dissolution. In technical terms, a not-for-profit corporation is a corporation without share, which means the corporation does not issue ownership shares. It is dedicated to purposes other than pursuing a profit. It may not distribute any profits to its members, directors or officers. It must use any profit exclusively for its not-for-profit purposes, and it can be charitable or non-charitable.

Some examples of not-for-profit organizations include service clubs such as Rotary, Lions, Kinsmen, charitable organizations, sporting and athletic organizations, social clubs, and even some daycares. I'm sure we all can think about our own respective organizations that we work closely with in our own ridings, from minor sports through to 4H associations, agricultural societies, horticultural societies—the list just goes on and on. Again, I want to thank all of those volunteers who work with those organizations, because they truly are pillars of our community. That's why it's important that our government make sure

that ONCA does not get repealed, and I ask for everyone's support in this chamber to help us make that happen.

It should be noted as well that not all not-for-profit organizations are incorporated. Not-for-profit organizations may incorporate if they wish, but actually, there is no requirement to do so. An organization may be formal, meaning incorporated, or informal, meaning unincorporated. By incorporating under ONCA, once in force, an organization must comply with the rules set out under it and other legislation. This includes keeping records, having annual meetings and filing annual returns. In turn, the organization will benefit by having a formal operating structure that makes it a distinct legal entity with the powers of a natural person and enables the corporation to enter into contracts.

ONCA will also bring permanence, meaning that a corporation may go on forever, even if membership changes, until the corporation is dissolved. And we all know it's important to have a flow of membership and executive members through our local organizations to make sure that there are fresh ideas and that there's some sustaining of important values associated with our local organizations as well.

Through ONCA, the organization will also benefit from having limited legal responsibility, or liability, for members, meaning that, generally, members of a corporation are not personally responsible for its debts and obligations, unlike members of an unincorporated organization. However, directors and officers may be personally responsible in certain circumstances.

And finally, ONCA will benefit organizations by giving them the ability to hold a title to land that can be in the corporation's name. Legal title to the property stays with the corporation even when the membership changes.

With everyone's support in this chamber, when ONCA does come into force, it will simplify the incorporation process, making it easier and more efficient. It will also clarify rules for governing a corporation and, importantly, it will increase accountability.

It will also clarify that not-for-profit corporations can earn a profit through commercial activities—such as selling T-shirts or Girl Guide cookies or mementos from a particular event—as long as it is reinvested to support the corporation's not-for-profit purposes.

It will also enhance members' rights and outline actions that they can take if they believe directors and officers are not acting in the corporation's best interests. Also, it will give members greater access to financial records. Accountability is paramount.

0920

Additionally, ONCA is intended to allow a not-for-profit corporation to provide, in its bylaws, other means of voting, such as by mail, telephone or electric means, in addition to or in place of voting by proxies. Again, we're embracing our new environment by doing this. ONCA is also intended to allow a member of a corporation to appoint a proxy holder, but only if the articles or the bylaws of the corporation permit it.

It will also set out a due diligence and good-faith reliance defence for directors. A director will not be legally liable in certain circumstances if they acted with the care, diligence and skill a reasonably careful person would have acted in in similar instances.

ONCA will also list specific requirements for directors and officers to report a conflict of interest in certain circumstances. It will also allow the opportunity to state that corporations do not always have to include a member's proposal in meeting notices in certain circumstances, and it will provide members with actions they can take if they believe directors are not acting in the best interests of the corporation.

Another feature of ONCA, if saved, would introduce a new process for reviewing a corporation's financial records, called review engagement. This new process is less cumbersome than an audit and, as a result, generally less expensive. I appreciate this very much, being a member of various organizations in my home communities through the years. You work hard to raise money and, in some instances, just to meet requirements, like a financial audit, your profits can disappear very quickly. So I think this particular piece will be very well received. I'm going to repeat it: In this new process, less cumbersome than an audit, organizations will essentially be able to engage in a process called review engagement. Again, it's less expensive than an audit, and it aligns with our government's commitment to make life easier for Ontarians and businesses by removing barriers. I know that's going to be well received.

However, it does not compromise the necessary controls that need to be in place to promote good governance. We all agree in this House that good governance is paramount. Whether or not a corporation can use a review engagement instead of an audit or waive an audit and review engagement will depend on its revenue per financial year and on whether or not it is a public benefit corporation.

In streamlining incorporation as a charitable corporation, ONCA will no longer require Office of the Public Guardian and Trustee approval. All applications for articles of incorporation will be submitted directly to ServiceOntario.

And, just as important, ONCA will bring Ontario up to speed with other jurisdictions in Canada that have modernized their not-for-profit corporations' laws. For instance, the Canada Not-for-profit Corporations Act came into effect on October 17, 2011, at the federal level. Again, that was years ago. So I'm very happy that we're able to finally bring ONCA up to a modernized level that will benefit organizations across this province.

Speaking of October 17, 2011—I'm looking at Madam Speaker and around the House—I think it's on October 6 that we have a very special anniversary coming up for many members in this House.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): It was 2014.

Hon. Lisa M. Thompson: Oh, 2014? Okay. Well, love you all the same—and I'm sincere about that.

Anyway, there are a number of members who are celebrating their ninth anniversary on October 6. Congratulations to everyone who came into the House at that time.

Moving on about ONCA: ONCA harmonizes with other modern legislation, including the Canada Not-for-profit Corporations Act, which came into force in 2011. Ontario's Business Corporations Act and not-for-profit legislation in other jurisdictions also came into effect at that time—like Saskatchewan, British Columbia and California. So I'm glad Ontario is finally catching up.

Madam Speaker, I hope all members can agree that there are many, many positive aspects to this ONCA legislation. Again, I sincerely look forward to your support for this motion.

I would now like to provide some details on how ONCA will affect organizations. If we save ONCA and bring it into force, it will generally apply automatically to every corporation that does not issue ownership shares, meaning it does not have share capital that is incorporated under an act of the Ontario Legislature, including the current Corporations Act.

There are some cases where ONCA would not apply. For example, ONCA is not intended to apply to insurance corporations under part V of the Corporations Act; corporations without share capital that fall under the Co-operative Corporations Act; when a statute clearly says otherwise; or companies with social purposes, like share capital social clubs such as some golf, tennis or country clubs. These companies will continue to be governed by the Corporations Act.

If they were incorporated or continued under this act, they would have a transition period of five years once ONCA comes into force. Within the five-year transition period, they must continue as either a non-share capital corporation under ONCA, a co-operative corporation under the Co-operative Corporations Act or a shared capital corporation under the Ontario Business Corporations Act. Additionally, with some exceptions, ONCA would apply to not-for-profit corporations that are incorporated under special or private acts.

ONCA would make a new distinction between public benefit corporations and other not-for-profit corporations. A public benefit corporation is a charitable corporation or a non-charitable corporation that receives more than \$10,000 per financial year in either donations or gifts from people who are not members, directors, officers or employees of the corporation, or grants or similar financial assistance from federal, provincial or municipal governments or a government agency.

Special rules would apply to public benefit corporations under ONCA that do not apply to other not-for-profit corporations. Examples include different audit and review engagement requirements; and board composition, specifically that not more than one third of the directors of a public benefit corporation may be employees of the corporation or any of its affiliates.

To prepare not-for-profit corporations for the potential transition to ONCA, my ministry has assembled a number

of resources that are available on the Ministry of Government and Consumer Services ONCA website, including an ONCA plain-language guide, transitional considerations and draft default organization bylaws.

The plain-language guide to ONCA that we have developed is a comprehensive guide that gives a more detailed overview of the act itself. The guide is intended to be used by members, directors, officers, administrators and other supporting organizations that are thinking of incorporating as a not-for-profit corporation, but that may not have not-for-profit experience. It is structured to provide useful information, organized under easy-to-understand categories. For example, the definition section provides readers with common terms and explanations that are relevant to ONCA.

The guide outlines the difference between a not-for-profit organization, a for-profit business corporation, a co-operative corporation and a charitable corporation, and it outlines the benefits of incorporating. It also includes general information about charitable and non-charitable corporations, and it defines key duties and obligations of directors, officers and committees. This resource guide is available for free to all Ontarians.

We have also shared guidance with not-for-profits on where they can seek assistance to prepare for ONCA. There are a number of organizations and materials that will support their transition, such as Community Legal Education Ontario, known as CLEO, which has dedicated tools and hosts a directory of non-profit or charity lawyers in Ontario who are knowledgeable about ONCA; the Law Society Referral Service, which can connect organizations with lawyers and paralegals who provide up to a half-hour of free legal consultation; the Not-For-Profit Incorporator's Handbook, which provides general information about not-for-profit corporations and guidelines on how to incorporate; the Office of the Public Guardian and Trustee, which provides information for Ontarians who use, run or donate to charities; and, finally, the Canada Revenue Agency, which outlines how to register and operate as a charity in Canada.

Madam Speaker, nothing is more important than protecting the health and well-being of Ontarians. Since day one of the COVID-19 outbreak, our government has taken action to ensure the people of this great province are supported through these challenging times.

0930

I am proud to say that my ministry, the Ministry of Government and Consumer Services, has taken an active role in supporting Ontarians through the COVID-19 outbreak. The Ministry of Government and Consumer Services has employees who have worked literally around the clock at the beginning of this pandemic, and they continue to put endless hours in to making sure that our responsibilities are addressed quickly, efficiently and responsibly. GCS has provided ongoing supports to the establishment of the Stop the Spread Business Information Line, the Ontario Together line, the Consumer Protection Ontario price-gouging line and ServiceOntario general inquiry lines.

The Legislature also passed legislation to allow corporations to hold virtual meetings, defer annual meetings and file documents digitally with electronic signatures during COVID. While we have waited to be able to bring ONCA into force, we have taken necessary measures to support Ontario's not-for-profit sector. For example, we have made a number of important changes to the Corporations Act. These changes share some key features of ONCA and give not-for-profits more flexibility for ONCA before it becomes law. Some of the changes to the Corporations Act include:

- allowing electronic notices to be given for members' meetings;
- allowing members' meetings to be held by electronic means;
- giving not-for-profit corporations natural person powers, such as buying and selling property, as well as borrowing money;
- giving a not-for-profit corporation flexibility to sell, lease or exchange all or a substantial amount of its property;
- allowing for the adoption of pre-incorporation contracts;
- creating a standard for the duties of directors and officers;
- allowing for the removal of directors by majority vote of members generally;
- making it easier to waive an audit and not appoint an auditor by lowering the members' approval threshold and changing references from "income" to "revenue" for clarity;
- not requiring directors to be members if it's stated in the corporation's bylaws;
- allowing an application to a court for an order to appoint directors if a corporation has neither directors nor members; and
- updating rules governing protections if a corporation is continuing in another jurisdiction.

Mr. Speaker, it's clear our recent initiatives have provided real relief for Ontarians, essential workers and businesses across the province. We listened and we took action. But there is always more we can do, especially for the not-for-profit sector in Ontario. We must work in partnership with Ontarians and businesses to respond to the challenges they face and support the long-term health and prosperity of Ontario's economy.

In this chamber, we all know our province is the country's economic engine, and we need to do what we can to help kick it back into gear. Madam Speaker, the not-for-profit sector has an important role to play in supporting our communities and our economy. As I have outlined, there are many positive benefits to ONCA, and that is why I, along with my colleagues, am committed to saving this legislation.

Again, our not-for-profit sectors—all of us in this House can think of our local organizations that make such a tremendous difference in our communities. It behooves us to support this motion and make sure that they know

we're standing with them as we navigate these challenging waters, as I mentioned before. I hope that all members can see the benefits of the ONCA legislation for our not-for-profit sector and will be supportive in saving ONCA.

Again, I'd like to thank all of my team at GCS for all the work they did to bring us to this point in debating ONCA. I know that we have put forward very compelling reasons why everyone in this House should work together in saving ONCA and getting a job done that the formal Liberal government just didn't do. And again, I thank the Premier and all of my colleagues on this side of the House for allowing me to do just that.

Now I would like to invite the member from Sarnia–Lambton, MPP Bob Bailey, to continue in speaking about the benefits of the Not-for-Profit Corporations Act.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): I remind all members to refer to members by their riding or title at all times.

I recognize the member from Sarnia–Lambton.

Mr. Robert Bailey: Thank you, Madam Speaker, and good morning. Good to see you in the chair this morning.

I rise before the House today to speak in my role as parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Government and Consumer Services. As my colleague the Honourable Lisa Thompson, Minister of Government and Consumer Services, explained, we are at a critical juncture for the ONCA legislation. This is important legislation that needs to be saved until such time as it can be proclaimed into force. Without this resolution, if it is not proclaimed into force on or before December 31, 2020, it will be automatically repealed as a result of the 10-year rule under the Legislation Act.

The not-for-profit sector has been anticipating this legislation for many years, and prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, the sector was actively preparing to meet their obligations under ONCA. We know how far-reaching and impactful a legislative change would be for the not-for-profit sector. I'd like to note there are over 58,000 not-for-profit corporations in Ontario, and they support many communities across the province, providing for those who are most vulnerable.

As we have heard from the minister herself, the not-for-profit sector faced numerous challenges due to COVID-19. Rest assured our government is committed to taking action to help relieve that burden for this sector so that it can bounce back stronger.

With that said, a key action that we can take today to support charities and not-for-profits is to preserve the ONCA legislation. A lot of time and effort has been invested in ONCA, and with the end goal in sight, we must do everything we can to see it across the finish line. We have heard from many stakeholders on a range of issues to do with not-for-profits, everything from understanding how a not-for-profit works, rules around governance, and, of course, questions about bringing ONCA into force.

I'd like to share with the House some of the correspondence that has been received to provide some colour for the types of inquiries that have been submitted and a greater understanding of how impactful this legislation will be for

the sector and the people it serves. In June and September 2019, emails were received from Ontarians across Ontario asking the Ministry of Government and Consumer Services to confirm if the Not-for-Profit Corporations Act had come into force yet.

In December 2019, the ministry received the following from a constituent in Oakville, Ontario: “What aspects, if any (and when) of ONCA (2010) have been incorporated in recent years? What date is planned for full enactment of the ONCA (2010)? Many thanks.”

On November 29, 2019, the ministry received an email from an individual named Donald. Donald asked, “I am looking for information on whether or not audits are required for non-profit organizations (without charitable status, so non-soliciting) with an operating budget of under \$250K. I can find information relating to the new ONCA legislation, but that hasn’t come into effect yet. If you could either pass on information or tell me where I might find it, it would be most helpful. Thanks! Donald.”

In May of this year, a constituent from Hamilton, Ontario, asked, “Our non-profit is looking at ONCA in preparation to update our bylaws once the new ONCA is passed. One question we have is with section 24(1). Currently our directors are on our board for up to two three-year consecutive terms. ONCA states one four-year term. Do we need to apply the rule in subsection 24(1) or can we define our own term? Thank you.”

Also in May 2020, a constituent from Ottawa, Ontario, asked a question related to community associations. That constituent asked, “I will be speaking to three community associations in Ottawa. Each association collects about \$300 per year in fees to cover the cost of managing and maintaining its community centre. I am to provide an update on the ONCA and hope you can give me an indication of likely timing of proclamation. We are following the development of the ‘online registry’ with considerable interest and optimism. Can you tell me anything more about that ‘technical solution’? Many thanks for any additional information you can provide. Cheers.”

The Ministry of Government and Consumer Services has also heard from a number of colleagues in the House who have questions from their constituents. A constituent in Ottawa contacted his local MPP’s office just a couple of months ago to ask about the following:

“I do volunteer work with an organization and some of the new policies/rules that they are looking at have to do with ONCA (Ontario Not for Profit Corporations Act). I do not understand some/much of the proposals so I do have two questions:

“Will ONCA be implemented soon and how proactive should an organization be?

“Thank you for checking into this.”

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Also, in June 2020, The member for Barrie–Springwater–Oro-Medonte, the Honourable Doug Downey, Minister of the Attorney General, received a request from a constituent seeking his insight on the status of the ONCA legislation.

The member from Nepean, the Honourable Lisa MacLeod, Minister of Heritage, Sport, Tourism and Culture Industries, has received questions from stakeholders and constituents alike in her role as minister. Many of the stakeholders the minister works with will be impacted by ONCA, so she is aware first-hand of the need to bring ONCA into force. I thank Minister MacLeod for the great work her ministry is doing to support Ontario’s not-for-profit sector.

The member from Kitchener–Conestoga, a fellow parliamentary assistant, to the Minister of Natural Resources and Forestry, received a note from an individual in his constituency. This individual indicated:

“Our organization is a not-for-profit company with shares. We are attempting to bring our company in line with the ONCA to be a not-for-profit company without shares. This process entails a great deal of work in seeking out shareholders in order to hold a meeting and a vote on such a change. We have been actively engaged in such a process for some time, anticipating that the ONCA would soon be proclaimed.

“As you are likely aware, the act is nine years old as of December 31, 2019 and has not yet been proclaimed. It is our understanding that although the ONCA is referenced in the Cutting Unnecessary Red Tape Act of 2017 (Bill 154), and that since it is nine years old, something must be done before the end of 2020. My inquiry to you is to determine if you have any update on when the ONCA might/will be proclaimed. Thanks for any information you are able to provide.”

Again, staff in the office of the Minister of Government and Consumer Services are also receiving inquiries from Ontarians themselves. This one from an individual in Toronto reads:

“I am emailing you about a question I have in respect” to ONCA, “which is expected to come into force in 2020. Under ONCA, a non-charitable public benefit corporation is defined as a corporation that receives more than \$10,000 of revenue in a financial year either in the form of:

“—donations or gifts from persons who are not members, directors, officers...;

“—or grants or similar financial assistance from the federal government or a provincial or municipal government or an agency of any such government.

“My question is, in the event a non-charitable not-for-profit corporation ran an event where they raised more than \$10,000 from non-members and gave all the money away to the community and to charity, does the money they raised qualify as revenue (which could lead to them being classified as a public benefit corporation)?

“Any assistance you could provide would be very much appreciated. Thank you, kindly!”

Madam Speaker, I share these examples to illustrate that there are people across this province keenly interested in this legislation. Through the organizations they represent, they have told us that efforts are under way to prepare for ONCA coming into force. I would like to note that these efforts have been under way for many years, and once ONCA is brought into force, they will be ready. It is

incumbent upon us as members to take the preventive steps to do what is necessary to prevent ONCA from being automatically repealed on December 31, 2020, should it not come into force by that date. This resolution provides us with the opportunity to bring ONCA into force when the infrastructure to support it is ready.

As the minister has already stated, if passed, this resolution will save ONCA, except for certain new voting provisions that provide for separate class voting and voting rights for non-voting members in certain circumstances from being automatically repealed on December 31, 2020, until such time as a new business registry is launched.

I'd like to take some time to speak about the new Ontario Business Registry. The Ontario Business Registry system is the technology infrastructure that manages the business registration life cycle for businesses in Ontario. This registry supports transactions that allow customers to register their businesses, corporations and not-for-profits and keep all of that information up to date on a searchable public record. The current system was built in 1992 and runs on an outdated technology platform. MGCS, the Ministry of Government and Consumer Services, has been building a new business information and registration system to replace the current legacy system that relies heavily on paper-based processes.

Madam Speaker, our government is working to adopt a digital-first mindset that will create better government services for Ontarians and businesses. The new online business registry represents smarter government service delivery and supports the creation of a more competitive business environment. The new business registry promotes use of digital services and streamlines business interactions, saving businesses, corporations and not-for-profits time and energy. These efforts will improve the services delivered to businesses and not-for-profits, lower administrative burden and cost of doing business, while opening new avenues for innovation and simplification of process.

While this project has been several years in the making, it is timely in assisting with COVID-19 economic recovery efforts. The new business registry will give Ontario businesses a modern digital registry that reduces the need for in-person interactions. I have a few short examples to illustrate how the new business registry will work to make things simpler, faster and better for Ontario corporations and businesses, including the not-for-profit corporations.

Let's start with Zylar. What about Zylar? Zylar is a small business owner who wants to set up a simple business corporation. The paperwork was filled out and submitted by mail. The paperwork was returned when Zylar failed to properly complete the share provision section for the corporation. Not having a clear understanding of how share provisions work, Zylar decided to consult a lawyer for legal advice and assistance with the forms. After three weeks and additional expenses, Zylar received the official documents by mail.

In this hypothetical situation, the small business owner had to spend a fair amount of time and money resolving

the situation—two things we know are precious to small business owners. Once the new business registry is launched, small business owners like Zylar will not have to worry about incurring additional expenses for complex business corporations.

With a simple selection, 80% of business owners, such as Zylar, will be able to select predefined text for share provisions that have already been reviewed and approved by their lawyers. By using this feature, Zylar can confidently set up a new corporation, secure in the knowledge that the information included in the submission complies with the legislative requirements. They could also complete this new process in less than one day. This will save time and money and the worry of waiting to hear back from government, and can be invested back into their new business.

Let's consider Sol, the owner of multiple franchises of a pizza restaurant. It is set up with a numbered corporation with multiple business names under it to manage all the franchises. When relocating, there was a need to update the corporate address and information in the current system. To make these changes, a separate form had to be filed for the corporation and each of the business names registered to the corporation. All the duplicate forms required were submitted, and it took 15 days for the change to take effect.

However, with the new business registry, it will allow Sol to change the corporation's address once and, with a simple confirmation, the change will be automatically applied to the business names registered to that corporation that requires the corporation's address. All change made is reflected in real time, eliminating the need to wait for the change to be reviewed, accepted and manually entered in the registry. This will be a huge upgrade for the thousands of users of the business registry.

Finally, I would like to consider an example specific to the not-for-profit sector. Priyanka wanted to set up a charitable organization—i.e., a type of not-for-profit corporation—to help support the homeless people in Toronto who are transitioning to affordable housing. To incorporate the charitable corporation, Priyanka would either need to apply directly to ServiceOntario using “pre-approved objects,” or apply through the Public Guardian and Trustee using “objects specifically drafted for charity.” Confused by these directions, Priyanka needs legal advice. With the launch of the new business registry, Priyanka will be able to incorporate the charitable corporation online in just a few minutes.

ONCA will be proclaimed when the registry launches and will support simplified incorporations of not-for-profit corporations with a digital self-service, and will eliminate the need to incorporate charitable corporations through the Public Guardian and Trustee. ONCA will also introduce increased member oversight of not-for-profits, clarify the right of not-for-profit corporations to engage in for-profit activities under certain circumstances, and update corporate governance for boards of directors.

Ultimately, ONCA and the new business registry will make it easier for Priyanka to set up and manage this charitable corporation effectively, focus on its core mission,

helping Toronto's homeless transition to affordable housing, which is a laudable goal I'm sure we all support.

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Madam Speaker, our government is committed to saving this important piece of legislation and bringing it into force as soon as is humanly possible so Ontario's not-for-profit corporations can benefit from enhanced and modernized legislation. We've heard from Ontarians and we know what actions need to be taken.

Together, we have an opportunity to support Ontario's not-for-profit sector. This is a sector we know has been greatly impacted by COVID-19. We've seen the reports and read the statistics. Recovery efforts are under way, but this will take time. I encourage all members to support this important action, which signals our intention to bring this legislation into force as soon as possible.

I'd like to thank the Minister of Government and Consumer Services for leading the effort with her ministry to save this legislation from being automatically repealed by tabling this resolution.

I would also like to acknowledge all the non-profits in Ontario that are supporting our communities each and every day, and our fellow Ontarians. I know that these are trying times for your organizations. You have our support and admiration from this Legislature. Our government will continue to work for you so you can continue to do the good work across this province.

With that, Madam Speaker, thank you. My remarks are coming to an end.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Further debate?

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Madam Speaker, let me just start in this debate by saying what the government is doing here looks fairly innocuous. It's a bill that was passed here some years ago, Bill 65, and, if I remember correctly, I think it might have passed unanimously when it did come through the House. All the parties did support it. Contrary to what the Tories always say, that it was always the NDP that was propping up the Liberals, the Conservatives were certainly doing their own fair share because they were supporting the government about 50% of the time—52% to be exact, or 57%.

This is one of those bills that they voted for when the Liberal administration was in place, because every government has legislation that comes to the House that has every opposition party and every independent member—that other people agree with. So, at times, we vote in favour of things; sometimes we vote against.

This particular bill, as I understand—this is actually a motion—but in the bill itself, there are to be sunsetted provisions in that bill if they're not enacted by, I believe, December 31. Of course, we don't want that to happen, so we are needing to deal with this way before December 31.

I want to say a couple of things first before I get to my criticism of the process in regard to an issue that the member from Sudbury raised, and I know that the member for Nickel Belt was also part of this, when it comes to working with our YMCAs. The YMCA in northern Ontario, and specifically the one in Sudbury—I believe

that the president is Helen Francis, if I still remember correctly. They are going through some tough times as a not-for-profit, Minister, and to the Speaker. They have lost about 70% of their revenue as a result of the pandemic. Keeping the doors open, paying the heat, paying the bills, doing the things that you have to do to keep the place going is getting more and more difficult.

They've been calling on the government to move on a sector-stabilization kind of strategy, or act, or whatever it might be, for all Ontario charities, not just the YMCAs, because obviously there are other not-for-profits.

I can tell you that in our community, the Croatian Hall, the Dante Club, La Ronde, all of those organizations are struggling because the revenue that they need in order to be able to operate their facilities is gone, as in your riding of Oshawa, where you can't, for example, at the community halls, have weddings unless you have a crowd smaller than 50 people. So they're really, really struggling.

The YMCA had this teleconference—or video conference by Zoom, these days; that's how we do most things—with our two members from Sudbury, the member for Nickel Belt and the member from Sudbury, Mr. West and Madame Gélinas. They implored them, in order to try to get the government to move on doing something around a sector stabilization so that the not-for-profits are able to survive through this pandemic.

We will get through this pandemic in time. But we want to make sure that when we get on the other side of it, there are still going to be those not-for-profits out there that are doing what needs to be done in our communities and supporting many of the activities and services that we take for granted, which are not run by government but rather run by these not-for-profits. They're a big part of our communities. We need to have some sort of sector stabilization. When Helen Francis reaches out to the members from Sudbury, and I'm sure you've been contacted as well by other such organizations in your own ridings, I think it's incumbent upon us to be able to do something. Certainly that's something that was raised at this select committee that the government put in place.

I want to be critical of the process that we're following here this morning. It's rather unfortunate. Last night, at about 4:30, the government tabled this motion. Again, I say, it seems on the surface that it's not a problem, and it looks like it will get support from all sides of the House. But the government tabled the motion at 4:30. My staff people called me at about 4:37 or whatever it is and started telling me, "Oh, they tabled this motion," and everybody's at the last second trying—and the government says to us, "And we'll be debating this tomorrow morning at 9 o'clock." Myself, I go looking at the motion and I go looking at the actual bill. Our research people did, and people in the House leader's office as well and our whip's office. Here we are, trying as best as we can to get our heads around it, and the government didn't have to do that this morning. It's not until December 31 that the clauses in this bill are sunsetted. The government could have waited until next week. We could have done it on Monday, Tuesday or Wednesday. I don't think it would have been

a problem. I think it might have even gotten quicker passage in that way if the government had waited enough time for us to do our due diligence and to look at it.

Again, it's not just about the official opposition being able to read a bill; the not-for-profits have got to see this as well. The public has got to see this. The media has got to see it. People have got to get their heads around it and feed back to both the government and the official opposition and independents what they think of this. Is this good? Is it bad? Are we forgetting something? Does it need to be amended in some kind of way? I know that ministry staff did their utmost to draft this motion in a way that hopefully nothing is forgotten and that there's no error, but I don't know. The only thing I know is—I read the motion. The motion is in order. It seems to refer to the things that need to be referred to in the bill, but it's going to take a lot more than—what would it be? Roughly about 16 hours, and much of that past midnight last night, to be able to figure out if this motion is actually okay.

It might turn out to be okay; I'm not arguing for a second that it's not. But there's a possibility that there's a drafting error. We don't know. The people who would know that are those people who work in the not-for-profit sector, those legal beagles who work in law firms that do this kind of stuff for the not-for-profit sector, the media to be able to report on it so that people can be aware of it, and us to do our job, because I'm sure that the ministry has reached out, along with the minister's office, to not-for-profits about this. We certainly need to do the same, but we couldn't do that last night at 5 o'clock because all of their offices were closed. And we couldn't do it before 9 o'clock this morning because their offices don't open, many of them, until 8 or 9 o'clock in the morning.

So it's a flawed process. The ink is still being applied to the motion that is under consideration here in the House, motion 88, in regard to changing the standing orders, where the government will now have an ability to have a bill introduced on Wednesday afternoon at, let's say, 3:30 and be called on Thursday morning at 9. We, at least, had the right—all members of the House, not just the official opposition—to file a reasoned amendment that has the effect of holding the bill up for two days. The government is taking that provision away in the motion that we're now debating in the House, motion number 88. As we're debating that motion—and the government knows we have great concerns and that we're pushing back on losing the ability to have reasoned amendments, and that's why we've proposed the 48-hour rule that they have in Ottawa and amended it in a way that fits with what we used to do here in Ontario in our motion—the government decides, "Let's flaunt it to the opposition and the rest of the members in this House and let's introduce a motion in the House at 4:30 in the afternoon so we can have a debate the next morning at 9."

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I've got to tell you, if you're trying to reach out and say, "We want to work with you," it's certainly not a way of working with people. It's like going in as—what are they, with the bulls? The matadors. It's like the matador going

out into the arena and flaunting a flag in front of the bull. It's not the way of building the friendships and relationships that you need in order to operate the House.

Now, we're doing the best that we can. I looked at the bill. Our researchers looked at the bill. Other members responsible for it—I know Mr. Rakocevic looked at it as well, the member for—I don't remember the riding name. Sorry I used his name, Madam Speaker, but I just don't remember the riding. But everybody's trying to do the best they can. We've certainly been around here long enough to know how to read a motion and know how to read a bill, but again, you're trying to rush something through the House that you didn't have to get passed until December 31. Certainly the government could have said, "Okay, we're tabling this motion."

We're going to have a House leaders' meeting this afternoon at 12—a Zoom conference, not in person, which is good. We certainly could have had a conversation about, "All right, let us kick the tires and look at what this is all about and consult with the stakeholders, and we'll let you know Monday or Tuesday." We could have this motion passed fairly quickly with very little debate. But right now, this morning, I'm going to hold the floor as long as I can, because we need to notify the not-for-profits that this motion is coming.

I'm sure they're in favour. I don't think they're not in favour of extending the time of the sunset, because many of them have been working towards this, and they're just not ready. I don't think they're opposed to the concept, Madam Speaker; I would be very surprised if they were. But I'll tell you, I think we need to have some of their people look at the motion to make sure we didn't get something wrong, because it won't be the first time that governments that are in a hurry, who try to pass legislation quickly and without public scrutiny of the media and the public etc., end up with motions or bills that are in error, that there are drafting errors or there are policy errors in it that you have to then come back and fix a second time. To me, it's just a sloppy way of doing legislation, Madam Speaker.

My good friend the member from Timiskaming-Cochrane, yesterday on my morning video in regard to the standing orders change, used an analogy that I think applies here: A good carpenter measures twice and cuts once. You don't do it the other way around. Measure once, and you may have to cut twice. You may have to measure three times, right? But you double-check your measurement before you do the cut.

The government in this case is saying, "Nod, nod. Wink, wink. Let's introduce something at 4:30 on Wednesday and let's have a debate Thursday morning, and hopefully the opposition won't debate it very long and we'll be all done in the morning"—because it's a motion. There's only one reading of this particular motion. It's not as if it comes back for third reading or goes to committee. As a motion, it's either we're in favour or we're not, and if we're all in favour it passes. So we're in this unenviable position where we may not want to hold this up because it may very well be a perfectly drafted motion that's sitting

on the order paper, and that the sector is okay with it. But we have no way of knowing that because we couldn't call them last night at 5—their offices were closed—and we couldn't call them this morning because the House started at 9. The government could have waited until sometime next week in order to do this, and we would have been in a much better position.

So I just say to the government again that if the government is trying to find a way to reach out and to work with members of the opposition and the official opposition and the independents, they're certainly finding an odd way of doing it, Madam Speaker. They know that central to the debate on motion number 88 is the loss of the ability to file a reasoned amendment, for this very reason. The reason that we have the reasoned amendment is to allow a pause to happen when a government introduces a bill.

There are two reasons we have a reasoned amendment in our standing orders. The first one is that, yes, it provides a pause of up to 48 hours, depending on how we execute it, which gives the media, the public and the opposition a chance to get their head around the legislation. But the other thing is, it allows us to amend the actual motion. That's why the reasoned amendment is in place, and it seems to me that that is something in our standing orders that has served us well.

I heard the arguments—the government members and the government House leader say, “Oh, yes, but the NDP used it 17 times,” or five times or whatever the number was. Well, you've got some pretty controversial legislation. Yes, we're going to slow some of it down for the reason of trying to give the public a chance to get their heads around what you're doing. Changing the voting system in the middle of Toronto's election—yes, we're going to use a reasoned amendment, there's no question.

Your changes on Bill 175 to the emergency powers, and the other one, which was the omnibus Bill 178 or Bill 177—Bill 178, I think it is—yes, we're going to use reasoned amendments, because those are controversial bills. The measure is not that we've been using them too much, but that you've been doing controversial legislation. Previous governments had controversial legislation. When I was in government, we had some. When Mr. Harris was in government, they had some. When the Liberals were in office, they had some. But you guys have got far more. I don't know why. I think it's because you're kind of ideological in your desire to drive things, as I'm ideological on the other side. But some of the stuff that you guys are doing is fairly controversial. So yes, we use the reasoned amendment for that reason, Madam Speaker.

When the government files a motion—I believe this is motion 89, Clerk? I believe it's 89?

Hon. Lisa M. Thompson: Yes, it is.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: So the motion was filed, as motion 89, last night at 4:30, and the government expects that this is okay, this is not a problem. It tells you where their thinking is at. It's like, “We don't need to talk to you guys. We don't need to consult. We just do what we want.”

I've said in this House, and my colleagues have said in this House, that we've all accepted the results of the last

election. Would I rather the NDP had won? Absolutely. But the people of Ontario decided they wanted a majority Conservative government. Buyer beware. They may not be so enamoured of that idea, come two years from now, I would predict. My point is, that was the result. With that result, the government does have the right to introduce legislation, have their legislation debated and passed. That's an absolute right.

But the opposition also has a job to look at and either praise or criticize the legislation on its strengths. There are times where we get into this House in opposition, on both—it doesn't matter who's here, Liberal, Conservative, NDP or independents, where we'll actually say to the government, “Job well done,” but there are other times that we're going to say, “Not so well done.” It's our job as an opposition to hold the government to account.

So here's where we're at, as legislators today, with this motion. We have motion 89 sitting on the order paper, that may be perfectly well drafted—I certainly hope that's the case. I know we have some really good people at leg counsel who draft these things. But there could be an error, and nobody would be the wiser if we allowed this to pass this morning, and then we would have to come back and bring another motion to the House before December 31 in order to fix it.

We are going to do our job as the official opposition of reaching out to the not-for-profits. I know there's one particularly that I will contact in my riding because I've been doing some work with them on their incorporation. I'm sure that other members and our research staff are going to do the same in order for them to have their lawyers look at this, and look at Bill 65 that was passed about 10 years ago, and say, “Is this good? Is it drafted properly?”

Now, like I said at the beginning of this debate, Madam Speaker, we're not opposed to what the government is doing. That's not the issue here. In the end, we don't want those provisions to be sunset, but you have till December 31. You didn't have to do it this morning, on September 17, after you'd introduced the motion on the 16th at 4:30 in the afternoon. It's just not the way of doing things. In the midst of the debate around changes to standing orders, I think it either shows an ineptitude on the part of the government and the government House leader's office, or a disregard for the words they're using, which are, “We're trying to build a relationship.”

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The government House leader admitted that there was a difficulty in the relationship between him and I—and he uses me specifically—over the summer. Yes, yes, I had some disagreements with the government House leader not doing private members' bills in the middle of a pandemic. Do you expect me, as the opposition House leader, to say, “Oh, that's a great thing”? Every member of this House, government side or opposition side, are all experiencing the same thing in their constituencies where we have people coming to see us about issues that need to be addressed through public policy and, in some cases, motions or legislation. Members need an ability to be able to bring that to the House to do our jobs. It's what we're elected to do.

The government House leader, says to me, “Oh, well, we’re not going to do private members’ bills this summer because we’re in the middle of the pandemic.” If there was ever a time we needed private members’ bills, it was in the middle of a pandemic, because every member of this House has the same issue. It doesn’t matter if you’re Liberal or you’re NDP, Conservative, independent or Green, we have people who are coming into our offices by the droves around long-term-care issues, around education issues, around small business issues, around not-for-profit issues. They’re all coming in to see us.

The government House leader says, “It was all the NDP’s fault because they were being oppositional during the extended session this summer, the extended session of the spring into the summer.” Again, Madam Speaker, does he expect I’m going to say that it’s a good thing not to have private members’ bills? They didn’t allow opposition days to go forward either during that particular time. So, yes, I was pushing back. That’s my job. That’s the job of what we do as far as making sure that we afford members the ability to do their jobs by using the processes that are established in this Legislature.

What I find galling with what we’re doing here today is that the government knows that this is a sticking point in trying to make things work in this House. They’ve got motion number 88 on the order paper, which we’re currently debating. Central to this issue—to that motion 88 debate—is not having the 48-hour cool-off period, and the government introduces a motion at 4:30 on Wednesday night and says, “Let’s debate it at 9 o’clock on Thursday morning.” Hello? Do you think that maybe that kind of doesn’t help the relationship?

So I say to the government, we’re not wanting to slow this down for nefarious reasons or just for reasons of slowing it down. We need to do our jobs. If the government is trying to find a way to build a better relationship—and I’m all for that, because that’s how this place should work.

How many times have I gotten up in the House and spoken to how this House used to operate when I first got here? There was a collaboration between parties because the government, yes, had the right to pass legislation and they got it in the end, but the rules allowed us to hold them up so that there was a little bit of trading when it came to how much time in committee, if there would be any amendments to the legislation. In the end, it’s the government that benefits with that, not us. It allows us to do our job. But if the government drafts a better bill etc., the government, at the end, are the ones that wear the glory. But when you draft bad bills—and I’m not saying this motion is a bad one—at the end, you’ve got to wear it.

So I say to the government across the way, listen, if you’re trying to signal—and I know that the government House leader and I have talked about it at least twice today, but we’ve been speaking every day since Monday. Clearly, you can see the government House leader is trying to have a discussion, trying to build a better relationship. He’s certainly not doing it by his actions, because when you get these kinds of motions, it really puts us in a position.

Now, I see you’re looking for me to sit down here, Speaker. Is that what you’re looking—

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): I’m sorry to interrupt the member, but the time on the clock says that it is time for members’ statements.

Debate deemed adjourned.

MEMBERS’ STATEMENTS

COMPASSIONATE CARE VISITS

Mr. Percy Hatfield: We all have to live by the rules, but sometimes, I think it would be okay if we bent the rules on compassionate grounds from time to time. Diane Costello is in hospice care in Windsor. She’s been there for three weeks. She doesn’t have much time left. She wants to see her parents before she dies. Her parents live in Michigan. They came to Windsor two days ago, but the rules say that they must remain in quarantine for two weeks. The clock is ticking. Time is running out.

The family has reached out to the Prime Minister’s office. They’ve been trying to convince public health officials to make an exception.

Diane was diagnosed with cancer two years ago. In March, her doctors told her the treatment wasn’t working anymore. Her time has come, and she accepts that.

Here in this chamber, we talk a lot about cutting red tape. The rules are the rules, but as Diane Costello puts it, her parents brought her into this world, and more than anything, she wants to see them, hug them, and say goodbye before she has to leave this world. It’s her dying wish. It may take a miracle, but in cases such as this, perhaps bending the rules on compassionate grounds just might be the right thing to do. I call on the federal government to do the right thing for Diane Costello and anyone else in a similar situation.

Speaker, I don’t know if you saw the national news last night, but the feds granted an exemption to the billionaire buddies of Donald Trump to come here, hold a staff meeting and not wear masks. If they can make quarantine exemptions for buddies of Trump, they sure as hell can give Diane Costello the chance to hug her parents and shed a few tears before she passes away.

CHILD WELFARE IMMIGRATION CENTRE OF EXCELLENCE

Mr. Deepak Anand: Mr. Speaker, imagine a 15-year-old child, a son of a Canadian citizen, who has been living in Canada for over 10 years trying to become financially independent, who has a job but cannot work legally; or a 14-year-old girl, who was sent to Canada by an adult relative to live with another relative in Canada, supposedly to get a better education and a better life, but who has actually been trafficked. We wonder what happened with these children. Thanks to the Child Welfare Immigration Centre of Excellence, they both are safe. These are just some examples from 900-plus referrals received by the centre in the last two years.

Launched in 2018 and based in Mississauga–Malton, the Child Welfare Immigration Centre of Excellence is part of Peel CAS, the first of its kind, to help all children's aid societies across Ontario to address immigration issues. Just in this short period of time, the centre has supported 23 Canadian children to return home safely from 13 countries, and supported 83 children from 61 countries who came to Ontario unaccompanied and separated from their parents.

I would like to thank our Associate Minister of Children and Women's Issues, Minister Jill Dunlop, for your tireless efforts and announcing an annual investment of \$200,000 for this program. This investment will ensure that these children have the support they need for building a strong future in our province.

And to the CEO, Rav Bains, and the dedicated staff at Peel CAS, I want to say a big thank you for making a difference in the lives of these children and making Mississauga–Malton your home. I wish you blessings and success in supporting our communities forever.

LONG-TERM CARE

Ms. Judith Monteith-Farrell: There is one area of our pandemic response that cannot be repeated in the second wave or any time in the future. That is the treatment and abuse of residents in long-term care and congregate care settings.

Besides the stories that I heard back in the riding, on Tuesday night I had the privilege of hearing the stories of families from across the north on a call with the Ontario North Family Councils Network. Their experiences were truly heartbreaking, and for those of us who have been sounding the alarm, they confirmed our worst fears. Family members confirmed the physical neglect, lack of dental and foot care, devastating weight loss, dehydration and mental deterioration. They consistently praised the staff, and again and again talked about how more staff were needed. People who love and care for them could not be there. Those who wanted to take their parents or family out of a home were threatened that no place would be there after the pandemic.

We don't need directives that are inconsistently applied, but laws with mandated levels of care that provide the time to properly look after people. Family and caregivers are needed in our long-term-care system, and some families need to be the voice for the voiceless. We must ensure that people in long-term care and group homes have consistent, continuous and safe access to their essential caregivers.

We know more now. We can do better.

1020

COVID-19 RESPONSE

Mr. Aris Babikian: Mr. Speaker, a heartwarming number of our local businesses, organizations and individuals have voluntarily taken action to help respond to the COVID-19 crisis. Individuals delivered groceries, hot

meals and medicine to their neighbours. Businesses donated PPE to our local front-line workers and food to our local food banks. These donations during the last six months also demonstrated that Ontarians, regardless of their background, stand shoulder to shoulder to defeat the COVID-19 scourge. Heartfelt acts like these show how the spirit of Ontario can bring communities together at these difficult times.

As a small token of my appreciation, I would like to extend my heartfelt gratitude to:

- CCCGT;
 - Canada Guangdong Chamber of Commerce;
 - CCCO;
 - Canada Confederation of Fujian Associations;
 - CTCCO;
 - CPAC;
 - Fujian Communities Association of Canada;
 - Fuzhou ChangLe Guild of Canada;
 - New Immigrant Foundation for Special Needs;
 - Canadian Chinese Conservative Association;
 - Lufu United Association;
 - GlobalMedic;
 - North America Pan-Pacific Culture Economy and Trade Exchange Association;
 - Artistry Club Academy;
 - Unionville Academy;
 - Investar Global Financial Group;
 - Araz Fine Foods;
 - Enviroserve;
 - Shirag Bulgor;
 - Canada Immigration Service Network Inc.;
 - Gourmet City;
 - LinkGlobal Food Inc.;
 - GPC International Inc.;
 - Handsome International Trading Ltd.;
 - TeeMaker;
 - GuangDong FengLu Yuan Biopharmaceutical Technology Co. Ltd.;
 - Nanchang Xiangyi Medical Equipment Co. Ltd.; and
 - Sense of New You Inc.
- Thank you very much.

TREATIES RECOGNITION

Mr. Sol Mamakwa: Meegwetch, Speaker. Good morning. I'm rising today to speak again on treaties in this House. First Nations people across Ontario continue to honour our treaties by sharing the territories, the waters and the natural resources. Our ancestors signed treaties so that our territories across Ontario could be shared peacefully between settlers and the Anishinaabe people. We were all meant to prosper. The crown, through Ontario, has a role to play in this relationship. First Nations cannot be the only ones holding up their side of the treaties.

I want to be very clear: Recent legislative changes such as Bill 197 do nothing to uphold the treaty relationship.

My friends from Fort Albany made a statement in July on Bill 197 that I would like to share. They said:

“We have watched this with alarm, as our muskeg homeland in northern Ontario is one of the main targets of this government’s economic agenda, particularly through the Ring of Fire. The muskeg is the foundation of our identity and culture. It is also one of the most important and delicate peatland ecosystems in the world, with a critical role in storing carbon that would otherwise accelerate climate change.”

Leaders across the north are clear: Development in our territories will not happen without free, prior and informed consent. The lands, the waters and our way of life are too important.

GUILDWOOD TENNIS CLUB

Ms. Mitzie Hunter: I’m proud to rise today to mark a very important celebration in my community of Scarborough–Guildwood. This weekend, the Guildwood Tennis Club celebrated their 50th anniversary with a remarkable socially distanced gathering on the club’s courts. At the celebration, I heard many wonderful stories and anecdotes about how the tennis club has touched so many lives across many generations.

The club was founded originally as the Kiwaniwood Tennis Club in the 1970s by Bill Schachow, who became the first president, and his wife, Louise, who became the club’s treasurer. They served on the club’s executive for the next 32 years.

Club members shared stories of sometimes resentfully following the guidance of the tennis pro, Marina Pereira, as children, only to grow up with an appreciation for her training and the athletic success to prove it.

Victor Krustev, a club member and one of Marina’s former students, went on to win the under-12, under-14, under-16 and under-18 Canadian national championships in singles as well as doubles and is now attending the University of California, Santa Barbara, on a tennis scholarship.

Speaker, I would like to acknowledge the hard work of the club’s president, Ron Hoekstra. While recovering from a knee replacement, he led the opening of the club, along with the president, Dave Muir, and vice-president Cathy Carson, this summer. Tennis Canada, in fact, trained their national team this summer in Scarborough as a result.

Local clubs are instrumental to the success of Tennis Canada and strengthening community ties. Congratulations to the Guildwood Tennis Club. I wish you many more years of success.

AFFORDABLE HOUSING

Mr. Rudy Cuzzetto: It’s an honour to rise today to speak about a terrific investment our government is making in my riding of Mississauga–Lakeshore. On July 30, I was privileged to join the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing and our Peel regional chair, Nando Iannicca, to announce a joint federal-provincial investment of \$24 million to build 219 affordable homes at two sites in Mississauga–Lakeshore.

The first project, the Peel Housing Corp.’s East Avenue site, will include 151 affordable housing units, including one-, two- and three-bedroom apartments for families and seniors.

Yesterday, I was proud to attend the launch of the second project, by Indwell, which will include 68 affordable one-bedroom apartments for people with disabilities and programs to support them, including addiction services and life skills training. The ground floor will become the new home of the Compass food bank, which has been on the front lines of our response to the COVID-19 crisis, and I look forward to working with them at their new location.

Again, I would like to thank everyone who has worked so hard on this project, including the minister and his team, all levels of government, volunteers, our local churches and the Port Credit BIA. I know these projects will be a great addition to Mississauga–Lakeshore, and I look forward to seeing this come to life over the next several months.

PUBLIC HEALTH

Ms. Bhutla Karpoche: Like many Ontarians, the increased rate of COVID cases has me worried. This week marks six months since we first started experiencing the very real impact of COVID-19 in Ontario. The majority of the people across the province followed public health advice. Collectively, we made sacrifices to stop the spread of the virus and to flatten the curve.

I want to recognize local public health units, who rose to the challenge and worked around the clock to protect us and lead us through this public health crisis. We owe a lot to local public health leaders who had the courage to speak up and go above and beyond, in the absence of provincial political leadership. In Toronto, we’re lucky to have Dr. Eileen de Villa and her team.

Speaker, investing in public health means healthy communities. It means saving lives. Public health lowers health care costs by keeping people healthy and safe and out of the hospital. However, Premier Ford’s damaging cuts to public health weakened the system and left us far less prepared to respond to the pandemic. I urge Premier Ford to listen to local public health units who know what’s best for the communities they serve, to reverse the cuts made and to abandon all plans to merge local public health units. It was their excellent work at the local level that helped us avoid the worst-case scenario in the first wave.

We need to strengthen local public health units immediately, as we prepare for the second wave and beyond.

GUN VIOLENCE

Ms. Christine Hogarth: Last Tuesday morning, the community of south Etobicoke was shaken by a heinous act of violence. Eighty gunshots were fired and one man was hospitalized with serious injuries in a gang-related shooting which produced so many gun casings that the police ran out of evidence tags. When I visited the site of

the shooting to speak with business owners and the local BIA, I was shocked to see a daycare right across the street.

This is not an isolated incident. Unfortunately, Ontario is facing a real, growing problem with guns and gang violence. Firearm-related deaths are at record-high levels, and other types of firearm-related violence are also on the rise.

More troubling is that 80% of guns being used in crimes are obtained by illegal means, including coming from across the border. When these guns get in the hands of gangs, violence is almost certain to follow. The police are working hard to do their job, but we need to see the federal government introduce tougher penalties, including mandatory minimum sentences for gun traffickers and those people in possession of illegal firearms.

As the parliamentary assistant to the Solicitor General, I am proud of our government's work alongside our local partners to launch our multi-year Guns, Gangs and Violence Reduction Strategy, which takes a comprehensive approach to public safety, addressing prevention, intervention and enforcement.

1030

Illegal possession and use of handguns and assault weapons is a serious concern for all of us. Let's work together to reduce guns and gang violence in Ontario. We must keep all of our communities safe.

RED TAPE REDUCTION

Mr. Vincent Ke: The global pandemic has brought indescribable challenges to all businesses. In the face of uncertainty, our government took action swiftly to listen to and address those issues and concerns.

I was honoured to host an economic reopening round table with Premier Ford and the Associate Minister of Small Business and Red Tape Reduction, Minister Sarkaria. There were over 100 small business owners and industry leaders who joined our meeting. Many important issues were discussed. We had the opportunity to learn and note the various challenges businesses in our community encounter.

Our government has been focusing on unleashing the power of businesses by reducing red tape all along. At this difficult time, we are committed even more to supporting businesses through Ontario's Action Plan, helping businesses digitalize and modernize. Business owners are so grateful that their voices have been heard.

I would like to thank the Premier and Minister Sarkaria once again for attending the consultation and engaging in a fruitful discussion.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): That concludes our members' statements for this morning. I would just like to remind members again that when we are in members' statements and members are coming into the chamber, I would ask you to keep your conversations as quiet as possible so that we can hear the member who has the floor.

Point of order?

Ms. Peggy Sattler: A point of order.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): A point of order, the member for London West.

Ms. Peggy Sattler: The official—
Interjection.

Ms. Peggy Sattler: Sorry, excuse me.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): It is now time for oral questions.

QUESTION PERIOD

COVID-19 RESPONSE

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My first question is for the Premier this morning, Speaker. Our sources are telling us that, momentarily, the government is going to announce new limits on the number of people allowed indoors and outdoors in gatherings. In Toronto, Peel and Ottawa, people will be asked to limit their indoor gatherings to 10 people.

My question to the Premier is, does this limit of 10 people in an indoor space include our classrooms in Ontario?

Hon. Doug Ford: Well, to the Leader of the Opposition, I'm glad the rumours are half right. But again, you'll stay tuned at 1 o'clock and we'll talk about that then.

Our number one priority is to protect the people right across this province, especially to protect the people in the outbreak areas that we've seen, be it Ottawa, Toronto or Peel. We always go to the advice of our chief medical officer and the other chief medical officers around the province. Most importantly, we listen to the mayors, because no one understands our communities better than the mayors. When we have a request from the mayor, the local chief medical officer and the Ontario chief medical officer, we listen and we follow medical advice and science. We're always going to continue following medical advice and science.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Supplementary question?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: For months, the Premier has been insisting that having students crammed into classrooms by the dozens—up to 30 kids in a classroom—is perfectly safe. Now in Ottawa, Peel and Toronto, the government is suggesting that that's not safe, that people need to be restricted to only 10 in an indoor space. School buses, as the Premier also knows, are jam-packed, with up to 70 kids in a small space.

The Premier is now saying, as I said, that it's unsafe to do so. How can he possibly, then, justify continuing to allow, in Peel, Ottawa, Toronto and other locations, more than 10 children in a school classroom? Why is it okay to have 70 kids on a bus and 30 kids in a classroom when he's saying that it's unsafe to have 10 people in an indoor space?

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Members will please take their seats.

To reply for the government, the Minister of Education.

Hon. Stephen Lecce: Thank you to the member opposite for the question.

Just to provide some granular data on what we're doing in Ottawa and Peel and Toronto: In Toronto District School Board, 366 more educators are being hired in real time because this government has allocated \$200 million to ensure distancing in all of the schools in the province of Ontario. Peel District School Board is on track to hire an additional 58 new educators—many more to come—using federal, provincial and reserve funding. And in Ottawa-Carleton, \$33 million has been unlocked for that board to do more hiring—45 more public health nurses in each and every community.

We are taking a targeted approach, working with public health to limit the risk and increase the safety of all students in Ontario.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The final supplementary.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Well, Speaker, none of this makes much sense at all. The government's own experts have been very clear: It is impossible to practise safe social distancing when you have 20 or 30 students in a classroom. The Premier is now saying that a gathering of more than 10 indoors is a health risk, but he's still letting kids cram into crowded classrooms and crowded school buses.

Later today, I have a motion to put a concrete cap on the number of students in every single classroom.

My question to the Premier is: Will he finally do the right thing by our kids and cap the number of children in the classroom to prevent COVID-19 spread throughout not only our schools but also our families and the rest of the community?

Hon. Stephen Lecce: Mr. Speaker, our plan has been informed by medical evidence and been endorsed by the Chief Medical Officer of Health of this province.

What I can assure you is, in the context of putting students first—that is exactly what the government is doing. We have put a four-week pause on any further expansion of social circles in the province. We have committed to expanding capacity of testing, getting up to 50,000. We are taking further action to reduce the spread in those particular communities. And in our schools—a \$1.3-billion allocation supported by the doubling of public health nurses, more custodians, more educators and more testing.

In every realm, we lead the nation. But we recognize that we have to be responsive to the risk. Moms and dads are depending on us to do that, and we will be there for our schools and for our parents.

COVID-19 RESPONSE

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My next question is also for the Premier. Over the last weeks, families have had growing concerns about the increasing numbers of COVID-19 in our communities. They've been worried about the second wave at the very same time as they're ushering their children into schools with overcrowded classrooms, at the very same time as they're ushering their kids onto buses that are also jam-packed with 60 to 70 kids, at the same time as we know that they're worried about the spread

that's starting to happen in long-term care once again. The lines for testing are growing longer and longer.

The Ford government promised some time ago that they had a detailed contingency plan in place for the second wave. That's what they called it—a detailed contingency plan. They promised that detailed contingency plan again this week. My question is, where the heck is it?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Minister of Health.

Hon. Christine Elliott: I can assure the leader of the official opposition as well as all of the people of Ontario that we do have a very comprehensive fall preparedness plan to deal with a potential second wave of COVID-19, which is going to be released imminently. It's going to take into consideration the upcoming wave of COVID-19 in whatever form it's going to take, whether it's going to be a sharp peak or smaller peaks and valleys. We are preparing for the worst and we are ready for it.

We also have flu season approaching. We also have an increasing number of people coming into our hospitals because of the reductions we've needed to make in long-term-care homes to reduce transmission in those homes. We also are trying to catch up on all of the surgeries and procedures that we had to postpone during the first wave.

The preparation for the second wave is more detailed and comprehensive than the first wave. We are ready for it, and we will deal with it.

1040

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The supplementary question.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Well, Speaker, maybe the government department didn't realize that fall comes after summer. Maybe they didn't realize that. I mean, it's ridiculous to say that they're prepared when we see the lineups we're seeing right now for testing across the province. How would they not know that parents sending their kids back to school and people going back to work were going to want to see testing, to make sure they're safe and they could keep others safe?

The Hospital for Sick Children flagged this in their advice to the government months ago when they talked about the return-to-school plans, yet it looks like the government, in this case, was caught entirely off guard—or maybe they just didn't care that people were going to want testing and didn't feel like it was necessary to actually put the testing in place. You know, if the government actually had a plan, we wouldn't see lineups stretching for kilometres in many centres in our province. If the government had a plan—to quote them, a “detailed contingency plan”—then why have we been so unprepared for September?

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Stop the clock. There's some audible noise emanating from the northeast corner of the legislative chamber. I'm going to ask the Minister of Natural Resources and Forestry to come to order, the Minister of Colleges and Universities to come to order and the Minister of the Environment, Conservation and Parks to come to order. Notwithstanding that

you're wearing the masks, I can hear your voices and recognize them.

Start the clock. To respond for the government, the Minister of Health.

Hon. Christine Elliott: Through you, Speaker: I can certainly advise the leader of the official opposition that we are prepared for the fall. We have already put many measures in place. We are already increasing capacity in our hospitals. We are already prepared for the flu season. We obtained additional numbers of flu vaccines, and we are prepared for COVID-19 increases.

We have seen a 30% increase in demand for testing in the last three weeks, and in answer to the questions that have been posed by the members of the official opposition and by others in the last few days, I can advise that we have reacted immediately. In Peel, one assessment centre has increased capacity and hours, and four pop-ups are planned for the week of September 21. In Toronto, two assessment centres have increased capacity and hours. We have one pop-up planned for the week of September 21, with a 25% service increase by the end of September. In Ottawa, four assessment centres have increased capacity and hours and three pop-ups are beginning to start operations tomorrow.

We are prepared. We are taking action. We can assure the people of Ontario that we are ready for any—

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Thank you very much. The final supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: I have to say that the Minister of Health just identified the biggest problem with this Ford government: They are once again reacting to a crisis, instead of preparing and ensuring that things are in place before the crisis is upon us. That is the problem here, and that has been the problem all along.

And now what are we dealing with? Families who are stuck waiting in testing lines, literally for hours; putting kids on crowded school buses. The lack of readiness is astounding. The fact that long-term care is once again experiencing outbreaks that are leading to the people who live there losing their lives—this is not readiness, Speaker. This is reaction to a crisis that's already upon us once again.

This morning, the CBC reported that the public health units don't know where people caught COVID-19 in 54% of the cases, so that means that contact tracing is also not up to snuff for the people of Ontario.

The question for the minister—and for the Premier, frankly—is that although they claimed there was a contingency plan in place, where the heck is it and when will we see it?

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Members will please take their seats.

To the Premier to reply.

Hon. Doug Ford: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm sitting across the aisle here, listening to the Leader of the Opposition go on and on as everyone has been working their backs off. The Minister of Health has been, around the clock, standing side by side with me for over five months.

My question is—as the Leader of the Opposition was missing in action for five months, nowhere to be found, nowhere to be heard, everyone is co-operating across the country. No matter what political stripe you are, everyone's pitching in, and then we have the armchair quarterbacks over there pretending they have all the answers.

You know, Mr. Speaker, I can assure the people of Ontario, we're using every single resource, we're using every single tool at our disposal to make life a lot easier. When the Leader of the Opposition criticizes, it's not just criticizing us, it's criticizing the front-line health care workers and criticizing the doctors that helped put the plan together, the people in the grocery lines that were checking people out as you were in hiding in your basement for the last five months.

EDUCATION FUNDING

Ms. Marit Stiles: This question is for the Premier. At the start of this week, I pointed out that large class sizes, coupled with the rising COVID numbers across the province, were putting a safe return to school in jeopardy.

The minister stood here and refused again and again and again to admit that class sizes in many—most—schools in this province are exactly the same size or even larger than they were before COVID. Just three days later, we have at least 41 cases in schools and our first school closure in Renfrew county.

This afternoon, the minister and all PC MPPs will have a chance to do something about it when they debate—we all are going to debate here—the leader of the official opposition's motion to cap class sizes at a maximum of 15.

We know now that your government thinks a gathering of more than 10 indoors is a health risk. Don't our kids matter? Don't our kids matter? Will the minister join us in passing and implementing this motion today? Will the Premier join us so we can ensure that our children, their families, our communities remain safe?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): To respond, the Minister of Education.

Hon. Stephen Lecce: When we developed the plan to respond to COVID-19 for our schools, we did so listening to the public health advice every step of the way. What they have informed us throughout this pandemic, as the evidence continues to emerge on the issue of transmission for children, is that you need to have layers of prevention in place to mitigate risk. That is obviously the consensus position in the medical community and endorsed by Dr. Cohn at SickKids as well.

The message has been received loud and clear. We have introduced measures to improve the environment by improving air quality; measures to improve the cleaning of schools and buses, an additional \$100-million influx of funding to do just that in a one-time investment; doubling of public health nurses; changing to cohorting; staggering schools; and of course, taking action in the context of hiring more educators, more EAs and more ECEs.

In every realm, we lead this nation. We are fully committed to the protection of our kids, and we will continue

to be there to respond to the risk, including influenza, where this government has a dedicated \$50 million set aside to respond to that challenge.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The supplementary.

Ms. Marit Stiles: If the numbers that we're seeing every day are not a wake-up call for this government, I don't know what is. Every day this week it has increased, and they may not like the fact that we're raising these questions, but it is our job, our responsibility as legislators to do that, to bring the voices of the parents and the children and the education workers into this space. Sorry it's so inconvenient.

On Monday, the minister claimed school boards were hiring thousands of teachers and education workers. We hear it over and over. But in a school board in the minister's own backyard, it's been reported that library workers are actually being laid off. With reports of empty classrooms and overcrowded, collapsed classrooms in the same schools, it is inconceivable that any education workers are being thrown out of work.

The minister has said the government will "be responsive to the risk" and "take further action." Will he do that today and support boards to hire and keep staff and pass our motion to cap class sizes?

Hon. Stephen Lecce: The government has allocated \$200 million to hire more educators in all boards in Ontario. In York, in Peel, in Dufferin, in Durham and likewise in Toronto, we are seeing hundreds of new educators being hired. That is because this government has provided boards the financial latitude, the funding they need, to ensure that these classrooms are safe.

I will also take the opportunity to reaffirm the importance of adhering to public health advice. For staff members, when they are being asked to be tested and stay home, we encourage them to do so; for students, likewise, to adhere to public health advice. We have a duty as a province, collectively, to respond to the advice of public health and, more importantly, to follow it to a T. We encourage all staff, all students and all parents to continue to exercise heightened vigilance as we respond to this challenge.

1050

COVID-19 RESPONSE

Mr. Amarjot Sandhu: My question is to the Premier. Over the past several months, our government worked hand in hand with the Chief Medical Officer of Health and with the best medical experts. Our number one priority is the health and safety of our students, teachers and staff.

Public health units across the province have completed the hiring of over 500 additional nurses for our schools, and we are well on our way to hiring the full 625 positions. Schools are focused on hiring up to 1,300 cleaning staff and up to 2,600 additional teachers and education staff. We have put \$1.3 billion in critical supports—more than any other province in the country—for ventilation, staffing, PPE, cleaning supplies, mental health and remote learning.

Speaker, can the Premier please share with the Legislature what further measures our government is undertaking as the school year resumes?

Hon. Doug Ford: I want to thank the great member from Brampton West. Thank you for that question.

These are some of the tools that will help stop COVID right in its tracks. We heard from parents, we heard from educators that they need more help identifying symptoms and managing the cases. So we're providing the supports during COVID.

As further due diligence measures, we announced yesterday the launch of the new interactive COVID-19 screening app for students, parents and teachers. My friends, it's free, it's voluntary and it's easy to use, and it's now available on our website at ontario.ca/covid19.

I encourage that parents go on there and educators go on there. It's an excellent, excellent tool to keep our kids safe, our educators safe, and it puts the parents at ease a little bit.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The supplementary question?

Mr. Amarjot Sandhu: My supplemental question is to the Premier as well. Premier, I want to echo your sentiment: This new measure, along with our previously announced new online case tracker for our students and child care centres, are important steps as we restart schools and ensure our children are kept safe.

Our school reopening plan, supported by the Chief Medical Officer of Health, is comprehensive. It is nation-leading, fully funded and evidence-informed. We have placed our students in cohorts and staggered re-entry to our schools. We have provided clear marking in schools to reduce contact. We have increased hand hygiene routines. We require screening before entering schools, and there's ongoing work to improve air quality.

These are critical programs that our government has taken for this school year. Can the Premier share about further help our government is providing during this time?

Hon. Doug Ford: Again, thank you to the member from Brampton.

I first want to underscore the need for understanding and patience for your workers and the parents. So any employers out there, please have patience. If one of your workers comes in and their kids are sick, be understanding. We're going to get through this. I just appreciate the employers out there working side by side with their great teams.

We need parents to be able to pull their kids out of school anytime if they're showing mild symptoms. We have the money set aside to respond for the flu season. It's almost like the perfect storm. We still have the lowest cases anywhere in North America per capita, per hundred thousand people, so everyone in Ontario—and I always say, the government doesn't need the credit; we play the smallest part. It's the people out there, it's the front-line folks, the essential service people who are working day in and day out to keep our province safe.

We're going to continue working across all political stripes, federally, municipally and provincially, to make

sure we get through this pandemic as safely as possible. I just want to give a big thanks to the 14.5 million people in this province for supporting each other, their neighbours and friends and family members.

COVID-19 RESPONSE

Ms. Bhutla Karpoche: My question is to the Premier. One of my constituents, Karyn, has been going to St. Joe's for testing every two weeks so that she can visit her 97-year-old mother, who lives in a retirement home. This week, however, she went to get her test and she had to wait almost two and a half hours in the cold, despite showing up before 8 a.m. Karen is over 70 years old and she says that she has felt the chill and cold ever since.

Premier, it's only going to get colder, and the rate of increase in cases keeps growing. How many people are going to have to potentially put themselves at risk just because the Conservatives can't get a handle on testing?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The Minister of Health.

Hon. Christine Elliott: Well, as I indicated, we have seen an increase in the requests for testing, and we are preparing for that. In Toronto region, to specifically address your concern:

—Women's College Hospital has increased capacity and hours as of September 15;

—Sunnybrook hospital increased capacity and hours as of September 16;

—Michael Garron Hospital with short-term, pop-up testing as of September 17;

—Humber Finch with increased capacity and hours, September 21;

—Mount Sinai with increased capacity and hours the week of September 21;

—UHN at Toronto Western with short-term, pop-up testing as of September 22; and

—Humber Church assessment centre, a new location opening up September 28.

So we are responding to the requests for increased testing. We are preparing, of course, for colder weather, because people are able to be outside now, but that won't continue well into the future. We are preparing for future assessment centres and to make sure that people can be inside as the weather grows—

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Thank you very much.

The supplementary question.

Ms. Bhutla Karpoche: Back to the Premier: It's not just Karyn who can't get quick and safe access to testing. Yesterday, the wait time at the local testing centre was four hours long, with more than 100 people in line. The government knew people were returning to work, schools were reopening and that there was going to be an increased demand in testing. These resources should have already been in place. We warned the government that they weren't ready for a second wave.

Local public health unit testing centres have the capacity, they have the skills, they know what to do, what

they need—and what they're asking for is more resources. So when is the Premier going to step up and provide the desperately needed resources to address testing before more people get infected?

Hon. Christine Elliott: Well, I can certainly advise the member that we are prepared for an increase in the request for testing, and we are increasing our assessment centres, their times and hours and increasing locations, pop-up locations, and mobile testing units. We're also looking for other community partners that are going to be able to provide testing. This is in the works. We are working on this.

But of course, along with the testing centres, we also have to have the lab resources, because you want to have a test that can be determined within a reasonable period of time, not four days to a week. It needs to be done much faster than that, especially for people who are having their children tested for going-back-to-school purposes or for going back to work. So we are increasing that.

We have made significant strides since we first started with this. With wave 1, we started off with just Public Health Ontario doing the lab testing. We now have a response that is coordinated with university and hospital labs, also with community labs. They're also helping us. In terms of the assessment centres, we've gone from just testing in a few centres to 148 centres. We've increased with wave 1, we are increasing with wave 2, as well, to get up to 50,000 tests per day. We're already doing over 25,000 to 30,000 tests per day—

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Thank you very much. The next question.

LONG-TERM CARE

Mr. John Fraser: My question is for the Premier. We know the spread of COVID-19 is increasing in communities across Ontario, and it's rising in our long-term-care homes too. In Ottawa's West End Villa, 55 residents and staff have tested positive for COVID-19. Six residents have died. It's not the only home. Residents, families, staff and home operators are very concerned there's no plan for a second wave in Ontario's long-term-care homes. Pandemic pay ended a month ago. There has been no move to raise the wages of PSWs. There's no promised increase in the standard of care. Donna Duncan, the head of the Ontario Long Term Care Association, described the situation as "terrifying."

Speaker, through you: How is it, Premier, that residents in long-term-care homes are finding themselves in the same spot they were last March?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Minister of Long-Term Care to reply.

Hon. Merrilee Fullerton: Thank you for the question. I want to make sure that everyone here knows that out of the 22 homes that are in outbreak right now, 15 have no resident cases—none—and our attention is focused on the homes that are suffering from having a community-spread increase that is coming into the homes despite all our best efforts. We are looking at making sure that we are creating

a robust, enhanced testing system, that all our homes have the necessary PPE, that N95s are included in that equation, that our staff issues in our homes are being supported by hospitals. We will continue to issue mandatory management orders or volunteer management contracts as necessary. We are engaging our expert health advice through the Chief Medical Officer of Health, Public Health Ontario, and Ottawa Public Health. We will continue to do everything in our power to ensure the safety of residents and staff.

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The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Supplementary question.

Mr. John Fraser: Mr. Speaker, it's déjà vu. Last March, while COVID-19 was spreading, the Premier waited a month longer than British Columbia and Quebec to raise the wages of PSWs and to stop them from working in more than one home. That decision caused needless suffering in Ontario's long-term-care homes. And what it looks like to me is that there was a decision to wait for the federal government to give Ontario money, which other provinces didn't wait for. They took action. That delay came at a cost. And we find ourselves now in exactly the same spot, except for one thing: There are billions of dollars available in federal safe-restart funds and the Premier's own contingencies.

Speaker, through you, can the Premier explain to families and staff why he has failed to prepare Ontario's long-term-care homes for a second wave?

Hon. Merrilee Fullerton: Thank you for that important question.

This has been an ongoing effort—to shore up the staffing in our long-term-care homes—ever since we became a new ministry. And that demonstrates the commitment that this government has—a dedicated ministry to identify long-standing issues neglected by the previous government and supported by the opposition. When we look at the member opposite, who was the PA to the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care for many, many years—that is the reality that we are dealing with.

We understand the nature of the personal support worker issues, and I thank them from the bottom of my heart for the work that they do every day. We will continue to address the pay, the nature of their work; integrate the care that they provide with a career ladder—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The member for Ottawa South will come to order.

Minister of Long-Term Care, when the Speaker stands, the member who has the floor will take their seat.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The House will come to order.

The next question.

GREAT LAKES WATER QUALITY

Mr. Toby Barrett: This is a question to the Minister of the Environment, Conservation and Parks.

The Great Lakes supply water to our communities, sustain traditional activities of Indigenous people, support Ontario's economy and provide healthy ecosystems for recreation and tourism. North America's Great Lakes are important natural habitats for native species, and they support thousands of different plants and animals. However, these lakes are facing pollutants, excess nutrients and invasive species.

Our government is committed to restoring the Great Lakes for future generations. Can the minister share what our government is doing to protect and restore our Great Lakes?

Hon. Jeff Yurek: Thanks to the neighbouring MPP from Haldimand–Norfolk, a long-time member of this Legislature and a very strong conservationist in this province.

The Great Lakes are an important part of our province's economic prosperity and the well-being of our communities. Our government is committed to working with our partners and investing in on-the-ground projects that will improve the health of the Great Lakes so that they are safe and beautiful for everybody to enjoy.

We are funding approximately \$5.8 million this year to support more than 65 projects run by local communities, academics, Indigenous communities and various organizations across Ontario that focus on improving water quality. Supporting actions that protect and restore the Great Lakes are key commitments in our made-in-Ontario environment plan. We are fulfilling the promise that we made to the people of Ontario to protect the Great Lakes, which are so vital to our natural heritage and to the unparalleled quality of life that we enjoy in Ontario.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The supplementary question.

Mr. Toby Barrett: I want to thank the minister for his continued work to protect Ontario's water.

Not only do our Great Lakes attract millions of residents and visitors every year, they also provide safe drinking water for over 70% of the people in Ontario. Their watersheds support 4,000 species of fish, birds and other living things. However, they are facing challenges such as plastics pollution and salt pollution. We all know that restoration, conservation and protection are critical.

Minister, what investments are you making to benefit the health of our Great Lakes and the ecosystems that they support?

Hon. Jeff Yurek: Thanks again for that follow-up question. We made a commitment to the people of Ontario in our Made-in-Ontario Environment Plan to work with our partners and take real actions to continue to protect the Great Lakes. Last summer, Ontario and the Canadian government released a draft of the new Canada-Ontario Agreement on Great Lakes Water Quality and Ecosystem Health. This agreement coordinates efforts to protect Great Lakes water quality.

Building on those efforts, we are also investing up to \$1.67 million for the new Great Lakes Local Action Fund. This will provide up to \$50,000 for projects led by local groups to protect and restore coastal shorelines and near-

shore areas of the Great Lakes and the rivers and streams that feed into them.

Mr. Speaker, supporting local actions that protect and restore the Great Lakes are key commitments in our Made-in-Ontario Environment Plan to ensure water resources and ecosystems are enjoyed now and into the future.

SMALL BUSINESS

Ms. Catherine Fife: My question is to the Minister of Finance. Speaker, during yesterday's question period, the minister touted his listening skills. As a reminder, it's his job to not only listen, but also take action and listen to people like Michael Wood, the marketing director at Ottawa Special Events. He has been fighting for small businesses every day, including at our finance committee hearings this summer.

In fact, he emailed each and every one of us earlier this week. He wants action and deserves it, including providing commercial rent relief directly to tenants on a sliding scale based on revenue loss, and compelling insurance companies to honour business interruption insurance claims and provide liability coverage. In Michael's words, "Certain industries can 'pivot' while others just cannot."

Small businesses like Michael's and countless others are relying on this government to do more. Speaker, to the minister: What's next, where's the plan, and when can businesses expect the support that they deserve?

Hon. Rod Phillips: Mr. Speaker, thank you to the member, and thank you to Michael for that feedback. It gives me an opportunity to update the Legislature on the progress of the rent relief that this government, in co-operation with the federal government, has provided. These are new numbers just today, so I'm pleased to share them. Over \$296 million has been provided in support to 55,000 businesses in Ontario alone. That represents 544,792 employees who work for those businesses. That's the support that we've provided so far.

Mr. Speaker, we are also in discussions, and I was talking about this publicly, with Minister Freeland and the federal government, about a revision to that program. We believe that a better program can be put in place, and we provided those suggestions. We have provided this support along with \$10 billion of tax deferrals, along with \$355 million in tax reductions from employer health taxes.

But we continue to listen. There are important issues in front of us and we will make sure that we listen, as this government always has, to the backbone of our economy, small businesses.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Supplementary question.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Mr. Speaker, pushing debt down the road does not help businesses today. It doesn't keep them open. I'm tired of the talking points, and so are businesses. The province is staring down a serious economic crisis. People like Michael Wood and organizations like Save Small Business know this. That's why they've fought so hard for small business relief programs.

Save Small Business recently announced that they were done their advocacy. Here are some of their parting words: "But in the end, the policies we were advocating were delayed, watered down and over-complicated."

Speaker, the government should learn from those mistakes, not double down on failed policies. No one is buying what you are selling; they can't afford it. And businesses can only wait so long.

To the minister: When will this government come forward with a real made-in-Ontario plan for economic relief, and stop relying on the federal government to do your job for you?

Hon. Rod Phillips: Mr. Speaker, this government continues to listen, and it's just like the opposition to belittle a program that's supporting 544,000 jobs in this province. We will never do that. In the member's own riding last month, I had the chance to talk to Bogdan Frusina, who is a small business operator, who talked about how this government's programs have supported what they are doing, supported their ability to build their business.

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Mr. Speaker, we are listening. In fact, I made the request in this Legislature for all members of the Legislature to provide us with ideas directly. I am, of course, not surprised that dozens of my colleagues, on our side, have provided that, and I would like to thank the three members of the opposition who provided the—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The member for Waterloo will come to order. The Associate Minister for Energy will come to order. The Minister of Children, Community and Social Services will come to order.

To the Minister of Finance, to conclude his response.

Hon. Rod Phillips: Just to conclude my thanks to the three members of the opposition who provided input: The member from Mushkegowuk—James Bay did provide direct input; we appreciate that. From the riding of Sudbury, we very much appreciate it, and from the riding of Windsor—Tecumseh. I would ask the question of the rest of the members of the opposition why they didn't take the opportunity to provide that direct input into our November budget, which will support small business and which will make sure that we continue to make this—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Order. Stop the clock. We're about two thirds of the way through question period; we've got a ways to go. The House will come to order. Let's restart the clock and try again.

Next question.

EDUCATION FUNDING

Ms. Mitzie Hunter: My question is for the Minister of Education. Not surprisingly, the numbers of COVID infections in Ontario are exploding. Just yesterday, the leader of the Conservative Party of Canada, Erin O'Toole, and his family were turned away from testing in Ottawa and got tested today in Gatineau.

Just as schools are reopening, we know the demand is there. A growing number of TDSB schools have confirmed positive cases in staff, and it is a matter of time before COVID spreads within schools forcing classrooms and schools to self-isolate. This is why I received an inquiry from a concerned family who can no longer send their children to school in good faith, but are being prevented now from enrolling in virtual learning.

If and when there is an outbreak, students will need to stay home from classrooms and continue with online learning. School boards are doing all they can with everything they've got, even draining their contingency funds. Mr. Speaker, how is the minister going to ensure continuity of education while keeping our students and our communities safe?

Hon. Stephen Lecce: Speaker, it was this government that in the spring, when students were sent home—as the first province in the country that sent students home because of the pandemic—stood strongly in the defence of live, synchronous learning for students. I do not recall a solitary opposition member who stood with parents to insist that the quality and continuity of learning continued during that period. Instead, they were absolutely silent, and that is unacceptable to parents in the province who want to ensure that their child gets access to an educator, that their child has access to the curriculum. It is this government that—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Order.

I will ask the Minister of Education to wind up his response.

Hon. Stephen Lecce: Speaker, it is most regrettable when parents want their child to learn, have access to a teacher and have a community with their students that we did not have unanimity of purpose in this Legislature. There was silence by the members opposite.

Today, our government set a 75% standard of live, synchronous learning. We've mandated training for all educators. We will continue to expect the very best for all students of this province.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Supplementary question?

Ms. Mitzie Hunter: If we have been silent, you have been MIA, because the boards, the federations, everyone has been asking: Where are you, and why isn't there an actual table to deal with the integration of schools?

Mr. Speaker, enrolment in Ontario schools' classroom learning is down because the Minister of Education has not given families a reason to be confident that schools will be safe. Some of the schools with the lowest enrolment are in my riding, and they are also in the poorest neighbourhoods in our city, where school nutrition programs provide invaluable food security to students.

There is a myriad of ways in which the COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated inequality in our education system. For students who relied on these programs before, food security hasn't improved under the pandemic. In fact, it has gotten worse. This government has spent a mere 1% of all of the COVID funding that has been provided federally and provincially on education and child care.

Minister, what is your plan to keep students on the margins safe and provide for the needs of—

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Thank you very much. The Minister of Education to reply.

Hon. Stephen Lecce: Obviously, from an equity lens, we're very concerned about exacerbating any gaps within the classroom for our students. That's why, earlier in this process, Minister Smith announced an additional \$1 million for the Ontario Student Nutrition Program to ensure the continuity of food programs within our schools.

In the context of high-risk communities in Scarborough and Etobicoke and other regions of Toronto, for example, the board, working with public health and the ministry, has imposed caps to reduce the number of children in those classrooms: 15 for kindergarten to grade 3 and a 20-student cap for grades 4 to 8.

There are school boards right across the province utilizing provincial funding and hiring hundreds of teachers—in Toronto's case, redeploying hundreds of educators to the front lines. We are absolutely committed to working with all school boards. I met with the leadership of the Scarborough General Hospital, along with my caucus colleagues from Scarborough, to speak about the synergies between education and our health care capacity to respond in the scenario of outbreak.

In each and every area in our investments, we lead. We recognize there's more to do. We'll be there for our students and for our boards.

E-COMMERCE

Mr. Rudy Cuzzetto: My question is to the Associate Minister of Small Business and Red Tape Reduction. Minister, during this pandemic, thousands of small businesses across Ontario and in my riding of Mississauga-Lakeshore had to close their doors to help stop the spread of COVID-19. Unfortunately, many small businesses were not equipped to deal with the loss of physical sales, as many businesses did not have the online presence.

Can the minister tell the House what tools the government is providing to help small businesses go digital?

Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria: Thank you to the member from Mississauga-Lakeshore for that question. Through the Digital Main Street program announced this past year, we are providing \$57 million to help support small businesses to go digital. This is going to help approximately 22,900 businesses and create jobs for approximately 1,400 students. This is the single largest investment for businesses to go digital in the history of this country.

About 60% of small businesses have a website, but only 7% of businesses actually have an online payment solution. Digitally, Canadian businesses are two years behind their US counterparts.

This past May, we set a record, according to Statistics Canada, in e-commerce sales of over \$3.9 billion. It is now more important than ever to make sure our businesses can pivot and move digitally to operate in new marketplaces, and offer solutions to businesses and consumers across this province.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): And the supplementary question.

Mr. Rudy Cuzzetto: Thank you very much, Minister, for all your hard work. Can you please update the House on how our government will continue to bridge the digital divide for underserved households in Ontario and extend new digital opportunities for rural and remote communities in Ontario?

Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria: Thank you for that again. Along with the Digital Main Street program, we are working hand-in-hand along with the Minister of Infrastructure, who has released significant plans, to ensure that businesses have reliable and accessible Internet, especially in remote areas. We know that fast and reliable Internet will be critical to small businesses as they adjust to the new realities and the new marketplaces, and how they will recover in the next phase.

As many as 12% of households in Ontario are underserved or unserved. We want to create greater opportunities for small business owners, and providing reliable and fast Internet will help bridge this digital divide in Ontario.

The global marketplace is rapidly changing. In order for Ontario businesses to compete, we need to ensure they have the tools. This, along with the \$57-million investment into Digital Main Street, will ensure that our small businesses have the resources they require to ensure that they can compete in today's economy.

EDUCATION FUNDING

Ms. Suze Morrison: My question is to the Premier.

A few weeks ago, I held a virtual town hall with parents, trustees and experts about this government's back-to-school plan. During that town hall, Maseeda, a parent in Regent Park, shared her concern that this government is ignoring the advice of SickKids and health experts. Maseeda and other parents in our community are alarmed that their children are returning to class sizes of 27 or more, where it will be impossible to physically distance.

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Speaker, my riding is the most densely populated area in all of Canada and we have some of the highest rates of poverty in the country. The risk factors for my community are unbearably high. Maseeda is worried that without urgent action to cap class sizes for all schools, the health and well-being of students, staff and our community could be severely at risk.

Maseeda is asking this government to stop cutting corners and invest in smaller class sizes. Will the Premier listen?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Minister of Education.

Hon. Stephen Lecce: Thank you to the member opposite for the question. Indeed, the province is investing over \$200 million in school boards in the province of Ontario to allow them to hire more educators. That is what is happening on the ground in every single school board in Ontario that's utilizing those dollars provided by government, in addition to the \$496 million that the province unlocked in reserve funds by boards that could allow for

an additional 5,000 educators to be hired, should they choose to use those dollars. To be fair to boards, many of them have.

We are absolutely committed to following public health advice on introducing multiple layers of prevention to mitigate the spread, from hand hygiene to distancing and by hiring more educators; likewise, better cleaning practices within our schools and enhanced testing; as well as a cohorting protocol that ensures we minimize the contact of students.

We will continue to follow public health advice and, as noted, this plan has been fully endorsed by the chief medical officer of this province.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The supplementary question.

Ms. Suze Morrison: Respectfully back to the minister, that's not what's happening in my community. Kids in my community in Toronto's downtown east are being left behind by your plan.

Parents and education workers are panicking. I've also heard from teachers, including Kara, who is unbelievably stressed by the current back-to-school scheme. She's working in jammed classrooms with 27 students, with no more than 60 centimetres between desks.

I've heard from parents who are outraged that the funding formula has forced schools to redistribute classes, resulting in class sizes of over 30 students. In some cases, those are larger class sizes than before the pandemic even started.

Parents feel like this government simply does not care about the health of children, and that you don't care enough to fund a plan that's going to actually work and cap class sizes. Why won't the Premier release the funding needed to get smaller class sizes for a safe return to school?

Hon. Stephen Lecce: Mr. Speaker, it was just yesterday that the TDSB director of education, Carlene Jackson, said that any school with larger class sizes will be given extra teachers to bring numbers down, because the province of Ontario has provided them the financing and the support and the latitude to hire more educators and, ultimately, to reduce the risk.

We are doing that in every school board in the province of Ontario. Dr. Khan also said that it's important to target those higher-risk communities of transmission. That is precisely why we worked with, for example, the TDSB, Toronto Public Health, our Dr. de Villa and others to provide a plan that is very local, granular, and that reduces the number of children in those classrooms from elementary to high school.

We'll continue to follow the advice of public health and support our teachers, our front-line principals and all students as they get back to school.

FIRST RESPONDERS

Ms. Jane McKenna: My question is for the Solicitor General. The tragic death of any first responder is traumatic for their family and loved ones, and can take a toll on the mental well-being of their co-workers. Occupational

stress injuries can take a major toll on first responders as well. When they take their own lives, we know how much more needs to be done.

Back in March, I asked the Solicitor General about the government's independent review panel into the workplace culture of the Ontario Provincial Police, as well as the number of tragic officer suicides among the force. When I asked, the Solicitor General indicated that a large majority of the recommendations had been implemented, but that more work needed to be done. Can she provide an update as to the status of these recommendations?

Hon. Sylvia Jones: Thank you to the member from Burlington for this very important question. She's absolutely right: Any time a first responder takes their own life, it's a tragedy, which is why, very early on in our government's mandate, we commissioned an independent review panel to help support the Ontario Provincial Police.

When I last updated the House, I indicated that nearly two thirds of the recommendations provided by the panel were already complete, near-complete or well under way. I am pleased to share that in response to recommendations, when it comes to the pressures faced by OPP officers in response to staff shortages, we were able to announce last month the hiring of 200 additional OPP officers. These new hires build on our government's investment in new OPP psychologists and other mental health clinicians, part of a landmark \$3.8-billion investment in mental health.

We've also worked collaboratively with the OPP Association partners to launch an integrated mental health support program to assist the existing members.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The supplementary question?

Ms. Jane McKenna: I'm glad to hear that the government has been working to implement the recommendations of the independent review panel in support of the mental health and well-being of front-line officers. I'm also confident that this investment into the front line will make a difference when it comes to keeping communities safe.

As Ontario continues the fight against COVID-19 in our communities, people across Burlington and Halton region remain concerned about community safety. During these challenging times, nobody deserves to live in fear of crime impacting their lives and livelihood.

Can the Solicitor General share how the government's investment into front-line OPP officers builds on investment to protect the safety and security of people in Burlington and across Halton region?

Hon. Sylvia Jones: This work really isn't just being done in silos with the OPP or with the Solicitor General. It's pretty incredible and shows the commitment our government has that we have the very first minister responsible for mental health, announced by Premier Ford. It is an indication, frankly, of the commitment that we have as a government to make sure that we get this right, and we are steadfast in that commitment.

I'm also pleased to share that in the member's riding, in Burlington—of course, she would know—the Halton Regional Police Service is receiving nearly \$6 million in

funding through both the Community Safety and Policing Grant and proceeds of crime grant, which reinvests assets seized from criminals. This funding helps support the region's commitment to engaging the public and mobilizing community partnerships through a regional community mobilization bureau. This project supports community safety across the region, including a local situation table that contributes to mental health crisis intervention and dedicated participation in the region's community safety and well-being planning process. These are just a couple of very specific examples, but it's happening across Ontario.

EDUCATION FUNDING

Ms. Judith Monteith-Farrell: The question is for the minister. Ellen Chambers, the chair of the Lakehead District School Board, wrote to the Minister of Education. She wrote, "We are fighting a virus 10,000 times smaller than a grain of salt with an empty wallet. You have responded to the need for more funds by unlocking funds from school board reserves. While this sounds great in a sound bite, the reality of boards is far more difficult."

The Lakehead board requested the provincial government fully fund ventilation updates, health and safety equipment and proper physical distancing in classrooms and buses. Minister, when will this government finally decide to fund a safe start to school?

Hon. Stephen Lecce: Thank you to the member opposite for the question. I know there are many school boards that she represents in Thunder Bay. For example, for the district school board, they have an additional \$4.7 million that has been provided for them to hire more educators and ultimately just to ensure the greatest learning experience, the safest experience, for their kids.

There are also eight more public health nurses. We've doubled that capacity.

We've invested in Internet expansion, because we realize that they continue to have a gap in remote and northern parts of the province. We're working with the Minister of Infrastructure to ensure that more communities, more schools, are connected to the Internet, which will be very important for remote learning and for all learning in the province of Ontario. We provided an additional \$51,000 to buy over 103 more devices and an additional \$400,000 specifically for remote learning for that school board to enhance their capacity to reach as many students as possible as we get through this challenge.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The supplementary question?

Ms. Judith Monteith-Farrell: Minister, thank you for that response. Raymond Roy, chair of the Rainy River District School Board, also wrote the Minister of Education. Mr. Roy acknowledges the \$302,000 they had received but stated that it fell short of the \$1.9 million needed for a safe start to remote schools, and the \$188,000 available from their reserve was not enough.

He concluded in his letter that the extraordinary costs associated with safely reopening schools should be

covered by the province in order to respond to the unprecedented challenges of COVID-19. What is the government waiting for?

1130

Hon. Stephen Lecce: We've provided \$4.7 million more to the Lakehead District School Board, enabling them to hire more educators: \$580,000 more for education staff, \$500,000 for other priorities to respond to COVID, including \$200,000 to hire more custodians in this particular board, an additional \$200,000 for mental health staff and, of course, special education received an additional \$83,000.

What we're doing for that board and for those students is what we're doing for all students of the province: providing more resources, more staffing and, ultimately, more capacity to respond to the challenge of COVID-19.

PUBLIC TRANSIT

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The next question? The member for Perth–Wellington.

Mr. Randy Pettapiece: Thank you, Speaker.

Interjection.

Mr. Randy Pettapiece: Speaker, through you, I want to thank those who gave me that tremendous ovation. It's great to be back.

My question is to the Associate Minister of Transportation. The COVID-19 pandemic has hit municipalities hard. It has especially taken its toll on municipal transit agencies here in the province of Ontario and across Canada. As people stayed home, that meant they weren't riding local buses, and ridership declined accordingly. Although ridership is going up as the province gradually and cautiously reopens, many municipal transit agencies will need help in order to make sure that they can keep buses running for those who need them.

My question to the minister: What is the province doing to ensure that transit remains a safe and reliable option for commuters in Perth–Wellington and across Ontario?

Hon. Kinga Surma: Thank you very much to the very hard-working member from Perth–Wellington.

Since the early days of the pandemic, we have been talking with our municipal partners about how we could best support them. Earlier in the summer, we released our provincial transit guidance document that outlined best practices for transit agencies, operators as well as passengers. Later, we allocated \$50 million to transit agencies through the province's transit cleaning fund to help with the added cost of enhanced cleaning. We supported our Premier, who negotiated our Safe Restart Agreement with the federal government, which will provide up to \$2 billion to support municipal transit agencies to reduce their budgetary pressures.

We are all working together to make sure that we keep transit safe for all Ontarians.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The supplementary.

Mr. Randy Pettapiece: I want to thank the minister for that great answer. I was grateful to see that \$7.5 million of that \$2 billion was allocated to 11 different agencies in

municipalities across Perth–Wellington through the Safe Restart Agreement that you just mentioned. Whether it was the city of Stratford, who received over \$487,000, or the municipality of West Perth, who received over \$16,000, transit agencies across my riding were certainly relieved to see that some relief is on the way.

Can the minister please tell us when the municipalities can expect to receive the money, and if this \$7.5 million that is being provided will be enough for municipalities in Perth–Wellington?

Hon. Kinga Surma: Through you, Mr. Speaker: We recognize that transit agencies are seeing lower ridership and additional costs associated with enhanced cleaning. This funding is just the first step. We're working very hard right now at the ministry to sign agreements with each individual municipality so that we can get them the relief they need as soon as possible.

At the end of the fiscal year, we're going to have another phase of funding that will go out after they have provided us with additional information on their estimated COVID-19 financial pressures.

We want to make sure that, whether you're taking transit right here in Toronto or in Stratford, it is safe and reliable.

ÉDUCATION EN FRANÇAIS

FRENCH-LANGUAGE EDUCATION

M. Guy Bourgouin: Bonjour, monsieur le Président. Ma question est pour le premier ministre. Lundi dernier, le Conseil scolaire public du Grand Nord de l'Ontario a fait savoir aux parents qu'ils pourraient fermer des salles de classe pour une journée, car ils n'ont pas de suppléants. Ça veut dire que, si un enseignant tombe malade, ou si l'enfant d'une enseignante a le nez qui coule, des dizaines d'enfants ne pourront pas aller à l'école et leurs parents devront s'absenter du travail.

Pourtant, le ministre de l'Éducation nous a martelés à répétition avec l'idée que les conseils scolaires ont pu embaucher du personnel supplémentaire. Mais je crois qu'il a bel et bien oublié les conseils francophones, spécialement dans le nord de l'Ontario.

Qu'avez-vous à dire aux gens du nord de l'Ontario, aux parents et aux enfants francophones qui risquent de manquer une journée d'école car ils n'auront pas d'enseignants?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Minister of Education.

Hon. Stephen Lecce: Thank you to the member opposite for the question.

We are very much aware of a long-standing shortage of French teachers in this country. We've been working very closely with the Minister of Francophone Affairs, as well with a variety of francophone partners in the province, to ensure that we have access to French educators, working with the Ontario College of Teachers as well as with faculties of education and, likewise, with the French consul general, to see how we could further support immigration of French-speaking educators in the province of Ontario.

In the context of access to supply teachers, we have ensured that every teacher, likewise an occasional teacher in the province of Ontario, has undergone vigorous health and safety training. We've provided \$10 million to do that. We're the only province to do that ahead of the school year.

We'll continue to work closely with that school board. We're providing a variety of the French school boards in the north with new resources to do more hiring and, likewise, to ensure that those students get access to a positive education throughout COVID-19.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Thank you. That concludes our question period for this morning and for this week.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' PUBLIC BUSINESS

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I beg to inform the House that, pursuant to standing order 101(c), a change has been made to the order of precedence on the ballot list for private members' public business such that Mr. Kramp assumes ballot item number 19 and Mr. Babikian assumes ballot item number 62.

NOTICE OF DISSATISFACTION

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Pursuant to standing order 36(a), the member for Ottawa South has given notice of his dissatisfaction with the answer to his question given by the Minister of Long-Term Care concerning the second wave of COVID-19. This matter will be debated Tuesday at 6 p.m.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The government House leader has informed me that he has a point of order he'd like to raise.

Hon. Paul Calandra: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate that.

Pursuant to standing order 59, I would like to announce the business for the next week:

—Bill 182, An Act to amend the Franco-Ontarian Emblem Act, standing in the name of Ms. Kusendova from Mississauga Centre;

—government notice of motion number 88;

—government notice of motion number 89;

—Bill 202, the Soldiers' Aid Commission Act, standing in the name of Minister Smith;

—Bill 131, the Tibetan Heritage Month Act, standing in the name of Bhutita Karpoche from Parkdale-High Park; and

—a bill that will be introduced later this afternoon.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): There being no further business this morning, this House stands in recess until 1 p.m.

The House recessed from 1138 to 1300.

SUPPLEMENTARY ESTIMATES

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I'm going to recognize the President of the Treasury Board.

Hon. Peter Bethlenfalvy: Speaker, I have a message from the Honourable Elizabeth Dowdeswell, the Lieutenant Governor, signed by her own hand.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The Lieutenant Governor transmits supplementary estimates of certain sums required for the services of the province for the year ending March 31, 2021, and recommends them to the Legislative Assembly—signed by Her Honour the Lieutenant Governor.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

HELPING TENANTS AND SMALL BUSINESSES ACT, 2020

LOI DE 2020 VISANT À SOUTENIR LES LOCATAIRES ET LES PETITES ENTREPRISES

Mr. Clark moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 204, An Act to amend various Acts respecting municipal elections, to amend the Reopening Ontario (A Flexible Response to COVID-19) Act, 2020 and to provide for a temporary residential rent freeze and specified temporary protections for certain commercial tenants / Projet de loi 204, Loi modifiant diverses lois en ce qui a trait aux élections municipales, modifiant la Loi de 2020 sur la réouverture de l'Ontario (mesures adaptables en réponse à la COVID-19) et prévoyant un gel des loyers d'habitations temporaire et des protections temporaires précisées pour certains locataires commerciaux.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

First reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Would the minister care to explain his bill?

Hon. Steve Clark: The Helping Tenants and Small Businesses Act, 2020, includes a number of legislative changes that would freeze rent in 2021 for the vast majority of rent-controlled and non-rent-controlled units, as well as support small businesses by extending the ban on commercial evictions. It would also create a single register of voters that both the province and municipalities can use to deliver better election services to the people of Ontario.

We are also introducing a new offence and fine under the Reopening Ontario (A Flexible Response to COVID-19) Act, 2020 (ROA). Under the new provisions, if passed, people who organize gatherings at residential premises that exceed size limits set out in orders under the ROA will face fines ranging from a minimum of \$10,000 to a maximum of \$100,000.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Introduction of bills?

Miss Christina Maria Mitas: Thank you, Speaker. I will be submitting the Change of Name Amendment Act, 2020.

The bill amends the Change of Name Act to provide that certain offenders are ineligible to change their name. The offenders who are ineligible are those who are required to comply with Christopher's Law (Sex Offender Registry), 2000, and other criminal offenders who may be prescribed by regulation. Consequential amendments are made to Christopher's Law (Sex Offender Registry), 2000.

STATEMENTS BY THE MINISTRY AND RESPONSES

MENTAL HEALTH AND ADDICTION SERVICES SERVICES DE SANTÉ MENTALE ET DE LUTTE CONTRE LES DÉPENDANCES

Hon. Michael A. Tibollo: Good afternoon, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure to rise on behalf of our government today in support of Recovery Month in my role as Ontario's first Associate Minister for Mental Health and Addictions.

Across the province, people are struggling with challenges related to their mental health and addictions. For instance, two million people in Ontario go to their family doctor for mental health or addictions-related reasons each year. The numbers also tell us that nearly 3% of adults and 10% of high school students in Ontario reported using prescription opioids non-medically. Those numbers, for our youth, are particularly concerning because we also know that substance use causes 30% of all mental health or addictions-related emergency department visits for people between the ages of 18 and 24. We also know that many young Ontarians referred to addiction services do not complete that recommended course of treatment.

While Ontario has been fighting the battle with COVID-19, it is important to remember that before this outbreak began we were fighting another, equally important battle against the opioid crisis in this province, a battle our government has taken very seriously. We have implemented a comprehensive suite of policies and programs to address the crisis focused on appropriate prescribing and pain management, treatment for opioid use disorder, harm reduction services and supports and surveillance and reporting. We remain committed to addressing the opioid crisis and to supporting people with an opioid-use disorder to get the help that they need when they need it.

Alors que l'Ontario a combattu la COVID-19, il est important de se rappeler qu'avant que ne commence cette éclosion, nous menions une bataille tout aussi importante contre la crise des opioïdes dans cette province, une bataille que notre gouvernement a prise très au sérieux. Nous avons déployé un éventail exhaustif de politiques et

de programmes pour aborder la crise en nous concentrant sur une gestion appropriée des ordonnances et de la douleur, le traitement des problèmes de consommation d'opioïdes, les services et les soutiens en matière de réduction des méfaits, ainsi que la surveillance et le signalement des cas.

Nous demeurons déterminés à régler la crise des opioïdes et à aider les personnes aux prises avec un problème de consommation d'opioïdes à obtenir l'aide dont elles ont besoin.

We continue to connect people with drug addiction to treatment and rehabilitation supports by funding 16 consumption and treatment sites in nine communities across the province, including Toronto, Ottawa, Guelph, Hamilton, Kingston, Kitchener, London, St. Catharines, and Thunder Bay. CTSs save lives by preventing overdose-related deaths and help to connect people to primary care, treatment and rehabilitation, and mental-health and other health and social services. That is why it is important for us to pause today to mark the occasion of Recovery Month.

With so many people struggling with mental health and addictions issues, and with the stigma associated with those challenges, Recovery Month is so very valuable, because it allows us to send out a message of hope to people. The purpose of Recovery Month is for people to get out and share their positive stories, to let people who are struggling know that recovery is possible and that treatment does work, and to challenge the stigma of mental health and addictions.

Avec tant de personnes aux prises avec des problèmes de santé mentale et de dépendances dans chaque coin de la province, et avec les préjugés associés à ces problèmes, le Mois du rétablissement revêt une très grande utilité parce qu'il nous permet d'envoyer un message clair d'espoir.

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L'objectif du Mois du rétablissement est de permettre aux gens de se lever et de partager leurs histoires positives afin de laisser savoir à ceux et celles qui luttent qu'il est possible de se rétablir, que le traitement fonctionne, et de s'attaquer aux préjugés entourant la santé mentale et les dépendances.

I urge all, if you have a story to share, to have those conversations about prevention, treatment and recovery, so that together we can make a difference for those living with addiction challenges. Support from families, friends and peers is essential and often invaluable to an individual's recovery process when they are living with addiction challenges. Offering your support to someone living with mental health and addiction challenges can be one of the most important steps in the recovery process. I know that together we can help break the stigma around addiction and encourage those living with addiction challenges to seek the necessary resources and supports to help them recover.

Our government is proud to continue fulfilling our promise of making mental health and addictions a priority, and we're delivering real change to our mental health and addictions sector. Just last week, I was in Sudbury with the

Premier to announce an investment our government is making that is significant and will expand access to the virtual and online services being used by thousands of Ontarians, including virtual addiction supports and Internet-based cognitive behavioural therapy.

This investment also includes funding to support culturally sensitive services for Indigenous people of this great province. We are also proud to be investing in community-based services to support both in-person and virtual services for children and youth. In addition, funding will be going to address service gaps in the community mental health and addictions sector with a focus on COVID-19 hot spots. Funding will also be going to assist with outbreak management and congregate living sites for clients who are living with serious mental health and addiction challenges.

La semaine dernière, par exemple, je me suis rendu à Sudbury en compagnie du premier ministre pour annoncer un investissement de notre gouvernement qui élargit significativement l'accès aux services virtuels et en ligne auxquels ont recours des milliers d'Ontariennes et d'Ontariens, dont les soutiens virtuels en lutte contre les dépendances et la thérapie cognitive-comportementale sur Internet. Cet investissement comprend aussi de l'aide financière pour soutenir des services culturellement adaptés aux peuples autochtones en Ontario. Nous sommes également fiers d'investir dans ces services en milieu communautaire qui favorisent les services en personne et virtuels destinés aux enfants et aux jeunes.

De plus, le financement abordera les lacunes en matière de services dans le secteur communautaire de la santé mentale et de la lutte contre les dépendances, avec un accent particulier sur les endroits où la COVID-19 est particulièrement présente. Le financement aidera aussi à la prise en charge d'éclosions dans les lieux d'hébergement collectif pour les clients qui présentent de graves problèmes de santé mentale et de dépendance.

On top of all this, we also announced that we would be investing over \$2.9 million to fund eight research projects submitted through the Ontario Together portal focusing on mental health, ventilation, imaging and transmission to support our response to preventing, detecting and treating COVID-19. With this investment, researchers in Ontario's world-class post-secondary and health care institutions will soon be conducting extensive research that will help to inform us on how we can better support Ontarians during an outbreak of this current magnitude. From examining the effectiveness of a brand-new virtual mental health program for youth with autism to researching how we can better treat COVID-19 survivors living with lung damage and respiratory failure, these groundbreaking research projects will help save lives not just in Ontario and Canada, but the entire world.

Last week's announcement only builds on the important investments since the start of the COVID-19 outbreak here in Ontario. This outbreak is almost unprecedented in our province's and our country's history. These are truly extraordinary times. When people are experiencing something new and unfamiliar to them, that can cause

many people to experience stress and anxiety, among other mental health challenges, and our government is rising to the occasion to ensure that the supports they need are there for them. When it is on the magnitude that we see here in the province in the current outbreak, those stressors that people are dealing with cause a great deal of stress and anxiety to individuals, and it's important that we provide those supports that are necessary for these individuals.

That's why, back in April, our government announced emergency funding of up to \$12 million to immediately expand online and virtual mental health supports to improve access to services during the outbreak. We did this to help the many Ontarians who are experiencing anxiety, stress and other mental health challenges by increasing access to online and virtual supports during these unprecedented times. And there was a great uptake with respect to those services. They were used, and they continue to be used.

Just as importantly, these supports provide alternatives for Ontarians who haven't been able to access those regular in-person counselling supports because they are respecting the direction to remain at home to stop the spread of COVID-19.

Mr. Speaker, we made this investment to help people across the province get the support they need by ensuring mental health agencies have the necessary resources to hire and train more staff, and purchase necessary equipment, the most appropriate technology and additional licences. Thanks to this emergency funding, our government was proud to announce in May the launch of Internet-based cognitive behaviour therapy programs. These programs were developed in partnership with MindBeacon and Morneau Shepell, and are being provided at no out-of-pocket cost to anyone in the province of Ontario. Clients can self-refer to programs, they can be guided through their client journey to find the appropriate supports they need. Online iCBT is also supported by therapists and available in both English and French.

These programs have been helping those experiencing heightened anxiety and depression during the COVID-19 pandemic, including our front-line workers.

Because of this investment, online iCBT was also made available to front-line health care workers experiencing anxiety, burnout or post-traumatic stress disorder. Those workers requiring intensive levels of care can also be referred to virtual face-to-face care, as well as weekly online peer discussion groups and access to confidential support from a clinician in partnership with the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health, the Royal Ottawa hospital, the Ontario Shores Centre for Mental Health Sciences, the Waypoint Centre for Mental Health Care, and St. Joseph's Healthcare in Hamilton.

We recognize that our front-line workers were working long hours in stressful situations at a time when most other Ontarians were forced to stay at home and maintain physical distance. Ensuring these services were in place was just one way our government has been able to support the important work of those workers and show them our appreciation in a tangible way.

Now, Mr. Speaker, these investments are all part of our government's larger overall commitment to mental health and addictions. They all fall under the umbrella of our government's Roadmap to Wellness: A Plan to Build Ontario's Mental Health and Addictions System. This is a foundational document, never before prepared or presented by any government. This road map provides a clear path forward toward offering Ontarians easier access to higher quality services and supports in communities across the province.

The road map was developed following extensive engagement with experts, grassroots organizations, health care providers on the front lines and our first responders, as well as people with lived experiences, families and of course caregivers. These consultations were necessary to ensure that Ontario can provide a clear path forward to offer people easier access to a higher quality of care in their communities across the province of Ontario.

The new Mental Health and Addictions Centre of Excellence within Ontario Health serves as a foundation on which the Roadmap to Wellness is built and is a critical part of this plan. We're proud to have a centre of excellence focused on mental health. This centre is fulfilling the recommendations that were made in 2010 by the Select Committee on Mental Health and Addictions for which the Deputy Premier was vice-chair, and which was also established through a motion that she presented that was unanimously supported by this Legislature. This foundational document not only deals with the issues raised in 2010, but going back to 1979, and brings forward issues of access, of dealing with fragmentation, connecting the system, and providing services that are evidence-based. It is a key document and foundational to how we will move forward as a province when it comes to mental health.

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The Mental Health and Addictions Centre of Excellence is within Ontario Health, and it is providing that central focal point to ensure that we get it right, not just in one part of the province, but everywhere in the province. It has already begun the important work of standardizing and monitoring the quality and delivery of evidence-based services and clinical care across the province to provide a better and more consistent patient experience. It is also providing support and resources to Ontario health teams as they connect patients to the different types of mental health and addictions care they need and help them navigate the complex system.

Our government is committed to ensuring that the Roadmap to Wellness is a success. That's why we are investing \$3.8 billion over 10 years to create new services and expand programs. In fact, we have already started to fill urgent gaps in care that our system partners have identified, through immediate investments. We invested an additional \$174 million in annualized funding for mental health and addictions programs in 2019 and 2020, and we continue to engage with our system partners, including Indigenous communities and other communities with unique needs, to help guide the effective implementation of this plan.

The Roadmap to Wellness moves us in the right direction toward building a comprehensive and connected mental health and addictions system that works for all Ontarians across the lifespan. It is a plan that is client-centred, data-driven, evidence-based. And most of all, it's a plan that will ensure that all Ontarians are able to access high-quality services and supports where and when they need them.

Mr. Speaker, our government wants to create a mental health and addictions system that works for every person in the province of Ontario. We made a promise to the people of Ontario to address the growing frustration with capacity issues within our mental health and addictions system. Through our investments, we are helping those struggling with mental health and addictions to get the care they need in a way that is better integrated and connected to our health care system, and we continue to look at ways we can increase funding to address urgent gaps in care and wait times for mental health and addictions services, create new supports and expand programs.

Supporting people facing mental health and addictions challenges continues to be a top priority of our government and for me, as the minister responsible for mental health and addictions. The priority for me, as the Associate Minister of Mental Health and Addictions, is to ensure that the program is implemented and is working across the province.

That's why I'm so pleased to rise today to support Recovery Month. We want people struggling with addiction to have access to the right services for their needs when they need them. We want them to know that there is hope. We want them to know that recovery has changed the lives of so many people and that there are people there to support them on that journey. Only by sharing positive success stories can we give them the hope they need to take that first step to overcome the stigma and reach out for help, to find within them the courage to come forward and not feel that coming forward is somehow shameful. It's important that that hope is established, and we hope, through our plans and the work that we're doing, to do just that.

Mr. Speaker, we want all Ontarians struggling with addiction to know that their government does care, that their government is there to support them. During Recovery Month and every month of the year, we are here, and we will continue to do the work to ensure that those services are provided to those who need them, when and where they're needed.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Responses?

Ms. Bhutla Karpoche: Speaker, there is no denying that recovery plays an important role in a person's life. As we mark Recovery Month, we are highlighting and supporting Ontarians who are recovering from addiction, and showing that recovery is possible, is maintainable.

But we also have to recognize that recovery is one component of a much bigger picture, that there are many steps that come before recovery and that different people require different sets of supports and services in order to be able to embark on their journey to recovery.

An obvious one is stable, secure and affordable housing. You cannot have recovery without housing. In Toronto, we have a homelessness crisis, and this government has done absolutely nothing to support those experiencing homelessness, even during a pandemic. There were encampments across the city, including in my riding in Parkdale–High Park. The shelters are full; physical distancing is not possible. In fact, people say that they are at a higher risk for COVID-19 in shelters. They feel safer in encampments.

What is desperately needed is permanent, affordable, secure housing for all. I am so worried about the upcoming flu season and the colder weather and what that means for people. The government needs to act and act fast. To ensure recovery is sustainable, housing is absolutely important, because housing provides individuals with the stability that they need.

As well, we need to create all the other social conditions so that people can pursue recovery and stay in recovery. Research shows that you cannot force somebody into recovery. That's not effective. They must be ready and willing to commit. And what drives one person to pursue recovery is not necessarily the same for everybody else. It looks different for everybody.

The basic, simple thing we have to understand is that for recovery you need people to be alive, and right now people are dying. People are dying at an alarming rate due to overdose. Overdose deaths have been steadily climbing in Ontario since 2003, and COVID-19 has made it much worse. The minister said that the overdose crisis is an equally important public health crisis. Why is it that we don't have an equal response to this public health crisis that we're experiencing? Why are we letting so many people die? We've gone from 40 people dying a week to 55 to 80 people dying a week from overdose under this government, and yet we see a complete abandonment of people with addiction issues.

This government has capped consumption and treatment sites to 21, but has only opened 16. The minister just said that. Communities across Ontario are pleading for a site in their community: Sudbury, Oshawa, Barrie, Peterborough, Ottawa, Thunder Bay, Windsor, London—the list goes on.

Speaker, the opioid task force has also not met since the government got elected. I have to wonder where the government is receiving their advice from. Does the government even know what is happening on the ground? Do they know what front-line harm-reduction workers are experiencing?

Here, I want to take a moment to recognize the work that the front-line harm-reduction workers have been doing, because it has taken a significant toll on them. The workers were already burnt out before the pandemic and now they're being stretched even further, with no sign of movement from the provincial government to address this crisis.

Other jurisdictions, like BC, have moved along, and yet in Ontario we have done nothing. I urge the minister and I urge this government to please declare the overdose crisis

as a public health emergency and provide the funding that is needed to open overdose prevention sites across Ontario and make sure every community that needs one has one, and more.

The government should adopt a harm-reduction approach. Then do so. Some 400-plus health care providers have been asking for hydromorphone to be available in the Ontario Drug Benefit. That's a significant step towards harm reduction, and yet this government has not taken action for 18 months since that letter was written.

Addiction is a social issue, not a criminal issue, and yet we have policies that continue to criminalize addiction and those seeking recovery. Our inaction perpetuates the stigmatization of recovery. I urge this government to please do something.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Responses?

Mr. Mike Schreiner: I rise today to respond to the minister's statement on Recovery Month. I just want to say that I'm pleased that we're taking a moment to recognize the importance of addressing mental health and addictions. We simply need to provide people with the supports they need so we can tackle stigma. People need to feel pride, not shame, for overcoming addictions. We need to celebrate those who have recovered, but we also need to support those who are facing challenges.

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This means increasing investments in mental health and addictions, in particular by supporting harm reduction efforts, including safer supply and overdose prevention sites. I was pleased that the minister singled out Guelph as one of those places where we have such a site, at the Guelph Community Health Centre. Harm reduction sites save lives.

We know that during COVID we have unfortunately seen an increase in overdoses. That's exactly why the government needs to declare a public health emergency when it comes to the overdose crisis. We cannot let this month become—and quite frankly, Speaker, we cannot let these speeches become—a symbolic gesture. We need the government to act by providing funding for permanent supportive housing, by providing funding to expand harm reduction services and by providing additional funding for mental health and addictions.

According to Addictions and Mental Health Ontario, we need an immediate \$380-million annual investment as a minimum down payment on providing mental health and addictions support. If we're going to make these types of statements and these types of months meaningful, we need to make the investments to provide the supports and services people need.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Responses? The member for Scarborough–Guildwood.

Ms. Mitzie Hunter: The COVID pandemic has been an anxious time for all Ontarians. For those with addictions, it has been a particularly challenging time. The Canadian Centre on Substance Abuse and Addiction reports that the COVID-19 pandemic has had a detrimental effect on the health and well-being of substance users. As a result

of the shutdown, people have lost valuable social connections and supports and enhanced well-being. They've experienced less access to services and health care, often coupled with an increase in financial constraints. We've seen an increase in alcohol consumption in Ontario to cope with the stress, the anxiety and the isolation caused by the shutdown and ongoing uncertainty. The Canadian Mental Health Association has also reported an increase in suicidal ideation across the country. Women's shelters have seen a rise in need for services.

Sadly, this government damaged the infrastructure in place to assist Ontarians living with mental health and addictions prior to the pandemic, and the government's weak reaction and investments do not nearly meet the public need.

This government has shown disdain for Ontarians with addictions time and time again. The Premier and the Minister of Health have shown cool indifference to harm reduction by defunding safe consumption sites. The damage is done. Between March and May, Ontario saw a 25% increase in suspected overdose deaths compared to 2019. Despite requests from Toronto's medical officer of health, Eileen de Villa, the Minister of Health declined to prevent further harm by funding safe consumption sites. Once again, the federal government stepped in to fix a problem caused by provincial inaction and have funded a major safe supply program in Toronto.

Far more is needed. Ontarians living with addictions deserve dignity and compassion, which they have yet to see from this government. The abrupt ending of COVID-19 emergency benefits for those on OW and the Ontario Disability Support Program is an example of a callous withdrawal of needed funds for people who are most vulnerable and desperately need the support.

We know that the pandemic is harder for some people in certain areas that are COVID-19 hot spots, like Scarborough. This is especially true for youth and young people. The COVID-19 pandemic has been especially hard on youth who can't meet with their friends normally or who have been away from school and other routines over the last five months. The government must consult with non-profits, school boards, post-secondary institutions and youth mental health workers on the front line to determine the real and immediate needs of young people before it's too late.

We're facing a long winter ahead. Without a vaccine, we must find ways to provide hope to those suffering and families and friends providing care. This government must act now to provide the resources needed for all Ontarians through this recovery.

PETITIONS

EMPLOYMENT STANDARDS

Ms. Bhutla Karpoche: On behalf of my constituents of Parkdale–High Park, I'd like to table a petition titled, "Hands Off Our Paid Sick Days

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas" Premier Ford rolled "back workers' rights by eliminating two (2) paid sick days and by allowing employers to request a doctor's note, by eliminating equal pay for equal work, and by freezing the minimum wage at \$14 per hour;

"Whereas 1.6 million Ontarians will be forced to choose between getting paid and getting well, and risk losing their job for taking an unpaid sick day;

"Whereas the absence of paid sick days places further burden on already overcrowded doctors' offices and emergency departments, worsening hallway medicine, and puts the public's health at risk;

"Whereas the decision to eliminate two paid sick days was made without evidence and is contrary to guidelines from the Public Health Agency of Canada, the World Health Organization and the Ontario Medical Association;

"Whereas access to paid sick days reduces the duration of illness, reduces the worsening of minor conditions and is correlated with a higher return to work ... and an overall lower burden on health care resources;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to:

"Immediately reverse" the decision "to roll back employment standards that will undoubtedly hurt millions of Ontarians, and drag Ontario backwards when it comes to workers' rights and employment standards."

I think this petition is particularly important, given COVID-19, and I fully support it.

MAGNA CARTA DAY

Ms. Christine Hogarth: "Whereas the Magna Carta is a revolutionary document that influenced the English system of common law and was a precursor in the development of England's—and later, Canada's—constitutional monarchy; and

"Whereas the Magna Carta was instrumental in placing limits on the monarch's power to overrule the law and protected the rights of ordinary people; and

"Whereas the document introduced key principles that hold true in democratic societies today, including equal justice for everyone, freedom from unlawful detention, the right to a trial by jury, and rights for women; and

"Whereas it is important for the Magna Carta to be honoured and remembered as a document that changed the course of history. The fundamental traditions of equality and freedom that characterize our democratic society—particularly that nobody, not even the crown, is above the law—originated in this important document;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly as follows:

"Acknowledge the importance of this revolutionary document by proclaiming June 15 each year as Magna Carta Day in the province of Ontario."

I agree with this petition and I will sign it.

SERVICES FOR PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

Mr. Percy Hatfield: “To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas when children with developmental disabilities turn 18, support from the Ontario government drastically changes; and

“Whereas families in Windsor-Essex and across Ontario are met with continuous waiting lists and other challenges when trying to access support under the Passport Program; and

“Whereas waiting lists place enormous stress on caregivers, parents, children and entire families; and

“Whereas it is difficult to access safe and affordable housing, adequate supports and respite services without immediate access to Passport funding;

“Whereas all Ontarians living with developmental disabilities are entitled to a seamless transition of services from childhood to adulthood;

“Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

“To take immediate action to eliminate the current waiting lists for Passport funding so that people living with developmental disabilities and their families can access the support they deserve.”

I fully support this petition. I will sign it and make sure it gets to the officers at the table.

PERSONAL PROTECTIVE EQUIPMENT

Ms. Natalia Kusendova: “To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas personal protective equipment ... is integral to the ability of the province to collectively curb the spread against the COVID-19 virus and all future viral pandemics;

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“PPE is particularly important for ensuring a greater degree of health and safety for front-line workers, who are routinely at greater risk of being exposed to COVID-19. Front-line workers are less able to practise social distancing and other public health measures, and thus must rely more heavily on PPE than Ontarians who do not work on the front lines;

“Whereas personal protective equipment has typically been sourced via international supply chains where production is centred in volatile and unstable countries, leaving provincial supply in jeopardy during the COVID-19 pandemic as a result of international instability and geopolitical maneuvering;

“A similar scenario to the one Ontario found itself in at the advent of the COVID-19 pandemic must not be allowed to happen again.

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

“To immediately, through all means at the disposal of the government, work toward making the province of Ontario self-sufficient with regards to the production and

sourcing of all necessary personal protective equipment for use in the fight against COVID-19 and all future pandemics this province may come to experience;

“To continue building upon the actions undertaken by the government early in this pandemic, in order to continue positive trends taking place. Building upon the success of countless Ontario manufacturers from a number of diverse industries shifting production configurations in order to produce much-needed PPE for front-line workers will ensure that Ontario is more self-reliant in being able to protect itself in case of emergency;

“To continue to support manufacturers to address pitfalls in PPE supply in a centralized approach, as has been done by the government of Ontario under the Ontario Made/Fabriqué en Ontario campaign. Through undoubtedly much good will come out of this initiative, more work and collaboration between the government and industry partners will be crucial in ensuring the worrying shortages experienced at the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic will be avoided in future emergency scenarios.”

I fully support this petition and sign my name under it.

WATER QUALITY

Mr. Michael Mantha: I want to begin by thanking the good people of Bruce Mines, Bruce Station, Richards Landing, Dubreuilville, Wawa, Hawk Junction, Espanola, Algoma Mills, Meldrum Bay, Sheshegwaning First Nation, Silver Water, Thessalon and Blind River.

The petition reads, “Clean Water for Indigenous Communities.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas in 2019, 70 Ontario communities, almost exclusively Indigenous, do not have access to clean running water;

“Whereas more than 40 Indigenous communities in Ontario remain under long-term boil-water advisories, with some lasting longer than 20 years;

“Whereas every Ontarian has the right to access clean water, and Ontario has a responsibility to keep its water clean;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to ensure that Ontario meets its responsibilities to the environment and under the treaties by keeping Ontario’s water clean and ensuring reliable access to clean running water in Indigenous communities.”

I wholeheartedly support this petition, affix my name and present it to the Clerks’ table.

MAGNA CARTA DAY

Mrs. Nina Tangri: My petition is titled, “Magna Carta day in Ontario

“Whereas the Magna Carta is a revolutionary document that influenced the English system of common law and was a precursor in the development of England’s—and later, Canada’s—constitutional monarchy; and

“Whereas the Magna Carta was instrumental in placing limits on the monarch’s power to overrule the law and protected the rights of ordinary people; and

“Whereas the document introduced key principles that hold true in democratic societies today, including equal justice for everyone, freedom from unlawful detention, the right to a trial by jury, and rights for women; and

“Whereas it is important for the Magna Carta to be honoured and remembered as a document that changed the course of history. The fundamental traditions of equality and freedom that characterize our democratic society—particularly that nobody, not even the crown, is above the law—originated in this important document;

“Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly” of Ontario “as follows:

“Acknowledge the importance of this revolutionary document by proclaiming June 15 each year as Magna Carta Day in the province of Ontario.”

I support this petition, and I add my name to it.

LONG-TERM CARE

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: I want to extend my gratitude to Esther Ann Davies for her hard work in collecting all these signatures on the petition.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas the province of Ontario requires a minimum but no maximum temperature in long-term-care homes;

“Whereas temperatures that are too hot can cause emotional and physical distress that may contribute to a decline in a frail senior’s health;

“Whereas front-line staff in long-term-care homes also suffer when trying to provide care under these conditions with headaches, tiredness, signs of hyperthermia, which directly impacts resident/patient care;

“Whereas Ontario’s bill of rights for residents of Ontario nursing homes states ‘every resident has the right to be properly sheltered ... in a manner consistent with his or her needs’;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

“Direct the Lieutenant Governor in Council to make regulations amending O. Reg. 79/10 in the Long-Term Care Homes Act to establish a maximum temperature in Ontario’s long-term-care homes.”

I fully support this petition and deliver it to the table.

AFFORDABLE HOUSING

Ms. Bhutla Karpoche: This petition is titled “Make Affordable Housing a Priority.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas for families throughout much of Ontario, owning a home they can afford remains a dream, while renting is painfully expensive;

“Whereas consecutive Conservative and Liberal governments have sat idle, while housing costs spiralled out of control, speculators made fortunes, and too many families had to put their hopes on hold;

“Whereas every Ontarian should have access to safe, affordable housing. Whether a family wants to rent or own, live in a house, an apartment, a condominium or a co-op, they should have affordable options;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to immediately prioritize the repair of Ontario’s social housing stock, commit to building new affordable homes, crack down on housing speculators, and make rentals more affordable through rent controls and updated legislation.”

ALZHEIMER’S DISEASE

Mr. Percy Hatfield: “To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas Alzheimer’s disease and other dementias are progressive, degenerative diseases of the brain that cause thinking, memory and physical functioning to become seriously impaired; and

“Whereas there is no known cause or cure for this devastating illness; and

“Whereas Alzheimer’s disease and other dementias also take their toll on hundreds of thousands of families and care partners; and

“Whereas Alzheimer’s disease and other dementias affect more than 200,000 Ontarians today, with an annual total economic burden” now “rising to \$15.7 billion...; and

“Whereas the cost related to the health care system is in the billions and only going to increase, at a time when our health care system is already facing enormous financial challenges; and

“Whereas there is work under way to address the need, but no coordinated or comprehensive approach to tackling the issues; and

“Whereas there is an urgent need to plan and raise awareness and understanding about Alzheimer’s disease and other dementias for the sake of improving the quality of life of the people it touches;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

“To approve the development of a comprehensive Ontario dementia plan that would include the development of strategies in primary health care, in health promotion and prevention of illness, in community development, in building community capacity and care partner engagement, in caregiver support and investments in research.”

I fully agree. I’ll sign it and make sure it gets down to the table officers.

MAGNA CARTA DAY

Mr. Deepak Anand: My petition is on Magna Carta day in Ontario.

“Whereas the Magna Carta is a revolutionary document ...;

“Whereas the Magna Carta was instrumental in placing limits on the monarch’s power to overrule the law and protected the rights of ordinary people; and

“Whereas the document introduced key principles that hold true in democratic societies today, including equal justice for everyone, freedom from unlawful detention, the right to a trial by jury, and rights for women; and

“Whereas it is important for the Magna Carta to be honoured and remembered as a document that changed the course of history. The fundamental traditions of equality and freedom that characterize our democratic society—particularly that nobody, not even the crown, is above the law—originated in this important document;

“Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly as follows:

“Acknowledge the importance of this revolutionary document by proclaiming June 15 each year as Magna Carta Day in the province of Ontario.”

I fully support this petition.

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NORTHERN HEALTH TRAVEL GRANT

Mr. Michael Mantha: I want to start by thanking the good people of Kagawong, Gore Bay, Tehkummah and Spring Bay for presenting me with this petition.

“Fix the Northern Health Travel Grant.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas the Northern Health Travel Grant is supposed to even the playing field so all Ontarians can get the medical care they need, but is failing too many northern families;

“Whereas successive Conservative and Liberal governments have let northerners down by failing to make health care accessible in the north;

“Whereas not all costs are covered, and reimbursement amounts are small compared to the actual costs, northern families are forced to pay out of pocket to access health care, which is a barrier for seniors and low-income working families;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to fix the Northern Health Travel Grant so we can ensure more people get the care they need, when they need it.”

I wholeheartedly agree with this petition, affix my signature and present it to the Clerks’ table.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): The time for petitions has expired.

PRIVATE MEMBERS’ PUBLIC BUSINESS

PUBLIC HEALTH

Mr. Kevin Yarde: I move that, in the opinion of this House, the Ford government should provide immediate, urgent assistance to the Peel public health unit for increased staffing, testing, community outreach and proactive workplace inspections to combat the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Mr. Yarde has moved private member’s notice of motion number 105. Pursuant to standing order 101, the member has 12 minutes for his presentation.

Mr. Kevin Yarde: It gives me great pleasure to rise on behalf of the people of Peel, the people of Mississauga, the people of Brampton, the people of Caledon to talk about this very important issue. Before I begin, I want to give a little bit of context as to how we got to where we are right now. Since early June, Brampton has been labelled as the epicentre of early cases in Peel region, according to the medical officer of health. In Brampton, we are now passing Toronto in active cases per capita. Weeks of high infections in Brampton have also labelled us as a hot spot.

We need more testing. We are seeing long lineups, even as the daily counts continue to rise in our region. The question, Madam Speaker, is why. Well, it’s related to a number of things. It’s related to population density. It’s related to the amount of testing. Multiple factors have made Peel one of the hot spots. The sudden spike in legal gatherings—yes, it has also been frustrating. I’ve seen this. My colleagues from Brampton Centre and Brampton East have seen it as well—as well as the city of Brampton.

COVID-19 is not doing anything unexpected. It’s travelling a well-worn path. That means that there are vulnerable populations, and COVID-19 is finding them in Brampton—it is new Canadians, and there is poverty there. There are low-status, low-paying jobs and high-risk jobs that the members of my community are taking part in. There are essential workers who are risking their lives as well.

There’s also the fact that many of my residents are racialized—something that has been linked to higher rates of COVID-19 in many countries, not just here in Canada. Many in my riding work in high-risk occupations such as international trucking and manufacturing. We have taxi drivers and health care workers as well. Between mid-April and mid-July, Peel region reported that 77% of cases were in racialized residents, more than a 63% share of Peel’s total population. South Asian, Black and Latino people were the most overrepresented among those who caught the virus.

At the beginning of the summer, the city of Brampton handed out 100,000 masks as the number of new daily COVID-19 infections continued to rise.

My city of Brampton, with nearly 700,000 people, is part of Peel region, an area that now has more cases of COVID-19—we hear the stories in the news; you here about Toronto, you hear about Peel, you hear about Ottawa. In the past week, Peel’s case counts reached heights not seen since June, and about three quarters of the new infections have been diagnosed right in Brampton, according to Peel’s Associate Medical Officer of Health, Monica Hau.

Behind the spike, there are at least 55 cases connected to a major workplace outbreak, along with an increase in cases diagnosed in travellers returning primarily from international COVID-19 hot spots such as India and

Pakistan, many of whom live in large multi-generational households where the virus can easily spread.

Private social gatherings and household transmission continue to play a role in the region's epidemic as well. Andrew Healey, the interim chief of emergency at William Osler, stated that although the bulk of the recent cases in Brampton are in younger adults who are less likely to fall seriously ill, the spike is beginning to spill over into the city's hospital. "We are starting to see it creep up. We're starting to see [COVID-19] come back in our ICU and we are certainly seeing it in our emergency department."

We also had 32 travel-related cases reported in Peel between September 1 and September 7—just recently—and public health officials are bracing for more as international college and university students pour back into Brampton from abroad.

Peel was one of the last regions to move into stage 3 of Ontario's reopening plan, which allowed for the reopening of indoor dining, gyms and playgrounds.

William Osler is committed to meeting the evolving health care needs of the community, and we want to ensure that we are well prepared for the coming flu season, as well as any future waves of COVID-19. The new, dedicated COVID-19, Cold and Flu Clinic which was just announced this week, located at the Peel Memorial Centre for Integrated Health and Wellness, will make testing, assessment and care more accessible for people who develop any symptoms of COVID-19, the flu or a cold.

As we all know, school started not too long ago and students were originally supposed to begin online school, but in a letter sent to parents in Peel region, the board said that elementary students will now be starting those live classes on September 21, this Monday coming, and high school students will begin September 22.

The board now has more than 64,000 students enrolled in online classes. Concern was mounting among Peel region students and parents long before the Louise Arbour Secondary School case—that's a school in my riding where someone who had been at the school on September 10 tested positive for COVID-19. The concern was that the government did not have a plan to allow students to socially distance in the classrooms.

Both Toronto Public Health and Peel Public Health have said repeatedly that there needs to be two metres of physical distancing in all schools. They are also saying that these two regions have the highest cases, and the schools there don't have the funding to allow this for all schools—and we heard our leader mention this earlier today.

As we all know, in Peel region, our health care system is underfunded. And, unfortunately, health care workers have been severely underfunded—and undervalued—for some time. Nowhere is this more obvious than with respect to nurses. Ontario's systemic underinvestment in nurses has led to a shortage of nurses and resulted in employment patterns—part-time jobs, temporary jobs and multiple jobs—that not only hurt nurses, but hurt all of us.

We remain in the early stages of COVID-19. We know that nurses are taking on dangerous and frightening work.

Unfortunately, they are working in a health care system that has been drained and strained by austerity measures since long before COVID-19 came along. In other words, you get what you fund.

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Let's take a look at the numbers. Ontario governments have a record of under-investing in health care. Between 2011-12 and 2016-17, health care spending grew at an average annual rate of 2.2%, far below what was needed to maintain existing services. From 2018-19 to 2019-20, the increase was 4.4%, still far short of the average of 6.8% growth in spending in the 10 years prior to 2011-12.

The Ontario Hospital Association recently released a report describing how thinly resourced the hospital sector is in Ontario. The report stated that if Ontario's per capita hospital spending reached the average of Canada's other provinces, we would be spending an additional \$4 billion per year, and health spending overall would be an additional \$4.6 billion per year.

I just want to briefly talk about SARS. We can learn a lot from the SARS epidemic back in 2003, where 44 Ontarians died. Some of them were nurses. During SARS, the results of these funding cuts meant higher costs, reduced surge capacity, nurses working overtime for multiple employees and stress-related absenteeism. This is what we're seeing now with COVID-19.

In Ontario, we have entered this pandemic with a significant registered nurse shortage. The Canadian Institute for Health Information estimates that the number of registered nurses in Ontario dropped from 106,889 in 2011 to 102,000 in 2018.

I talked a little bit about testing. Increased testing is critically important, Madam Speaker, as Brampton and Peel continue to be challenged by higher numbers of COVID-19 cases. Early testing allows us to identify anyone who came in contact with infected people, so that they too can be quickly identified. However, the number of COVID-19 cases in the province has steadily increased. The higher case count has led to long lines at assessment centres, as more and more people look to confirm if they have the disease. People are standing in line for hours, being told to come back another day for testing. This is unacceptable. This shows what happens when you don't have a plan and you underfund the health care system. This year will be particularly challenging, for COVID-19 and cold and flu symptoms are very similar and testing is the only way to diagnose if a person has COVID-19 or not.

In conclusion, I want to state that the completion of phase 2 at Peel Memorial and urgent action for a third health care facility in Brampton are some of the things that we are calling for. My colleagues from Brampton Centre and Brampton East and I announced the motion in November 2019 for a new hospital and immediate expansion of Peel Memorial, but this government turned it down.

In order for us to ensure that we are safe, the government, if they are serious about making sure that people in Peel are protected, will support this motion.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Further debate?

Mrs. Robin Martin: Thank you for the opportunity to speak today; it's always a pleasure to rise in this House. And thank you to the member for Brampton North for bringing forward this motion today. It is an important one, because it really gives us the opportunity to highlight some of the very important work that has been done in recent months and some excellent examples of individuals, governments and organizations coming together to fight COVID-19.

As all members of this House are aware, the government's top priority is to protect the health and well-being of all Ontarians. Because of that, we continue to make significant new health care investments in Brampton and in the Peel region, and across the province, including of course targeted funding to manage COVID-19. Ontario's public health system has shown remarkable responsiveness to COVID-19 as the outbreak has evolved, both locally and globally—and this applies to Peel just as much as it applies to any other area or region in our province.

Before I get further into my remarks, I just want to refer back to a time—I think it was late May or early June—when we were in the process of implementing our testing strategy. Testing, of course, was and continues to be now a coordinated effort amongst the Ministry of Health, Ontario Health, Public Health Ontario, partner hospitals, laboratories and of course our local public health units, including Peel Public Health.

At that time, in my role as parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Health, I had the great pleasure and opportunity to visit one of our very first mobile testing centres. It was in Brampton, and I went out there. At the time, Brampton was facing some unique challenges with testing accessibility. That testing site was just one of many that came together as a result of significant collaboration between Peel Public Health and the central region of Ontario Health, Peel paramedic services and even the provincial transit agency, Metrolinx, which at that time provided a GO bus to serve as a mobile testing facility. I saw that GO bus. I was there.

More importantly, although I toured the facility and saw the GO bus and met the paramedics, I also had the opportunity to speak with the chief public health officer out in Peel region, Dr. Lawrence Loh—a very nice man—and the Peel paramedic chief, Peter Dundas. We really had a good conversation about some of the unique challenges facing that community in addressing COVID-19, which from my point of view was very educational. It was very educational for me because I think, by and large, we've certainly learned that our local chief medical officers of health often have a very good insight into what's important on the ground. It was a very good conversation. They know best how to meet the challenges in their communities.

There was a real sense of optimism about the integrated approach to mobile testing that we were bringing forward—it had come together in a very short period of time to support the needs of that community—and a feeling, frankly, that we would be able to overcome the challenge before all of us at the time. Sure enough, a few weeks later—I think my friend opposite mentioned this—

Peel region was able to move into stage 3 or phase 3 of the reopening.

Since that point, we have not stopped working with Peel region and with other communities across the province to ensure that we have the necessary resources and supports there to help them respond to COVID-19. Now, as we see the threat of the second wave coming, we are once again doubling down on our efforts.

Just let me pause to say that we have a great deal in our caucus—we're blessed. We have many, many strong advocates from the Peel region, particularly for health care in that region, and they've always been quite strong in advocating for it. The member for Mississauga Centre, who is herself a nurse, is a strong advocate, certainly, but we also have the member for Mississauga East—Cooksville, Kaleed Rasheed; the member for Mississauga—Erindale; the member for Mississauga—Lakeshore; the member for Mississauga—Malton; and the member for Mississauga—Streetsville. We have the Brampton West member and the minister who is from Brampton South. We have many, many advocates for the Peel region in our caucus and they're very strong in advocating for health care in Peel.

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Since 2018, provincial funding—which I think the member opposite from Brampton North mentioned—has gone up considerably. Provincial funding for Peel Public Health, for public health programs and services has increased by approximately \$9.4 million, or 17%. In total, for 2020, Peel Public Health received approximately \$64.4 million in provincial funding to support the provision of public health programs and services, which included:

—money for nurses; I think my friend opposite mentioned nurses—\$4.3 million in one-time funding to hire 64 additional school-focused nurses—he was talking about schools—to provide rapid-response support to school boards and schools in facilitating public health and preventive measures related to the COVID-19 pandemic;

—\$100,000 in one-time funding to implement the public health case and contact management solution, which is being used to manage cases and contacts of COVID-19;

—\$500,000 in one-time funding for the temporary pandemic pay initiative; and

—\$1 million in one-time capital funding to support the implementation of the Ontario Seniors Dental Care Program.

Speaker, the amounts that I just mentioned don't include any of the \$100 million of increased investment for public health under Ontario's action plan to support and enhance monitoring, testing and case and contact management. The process for all of our local public health units, including Peel Public Health, to request reimbursement for those additional one-time extraordinary costs associated with the pandemic is currently under way at this time.

I should note as well that Peel Public Health was one of the first health units in Ontario to implement the new public health case and contact management solution,

which has been a significant support to them and to health units across the province as they undertake and expand their case management and contact-tracing activities to support the response to COVID-19. I think we all know how important the case and contact tracing is.

This new system was a key pillar of our government's Case and Contact Management Strategy, which was unveiled earlier this summer and is yet another important tool which will make a big difference in the effectiveness of our case and contact management efforts going forward.

And for the benefit of those watching at home—if anybody is watching at home—another key part of that case and contact management plan was the rollout of our COVID Alert app on smart phones. The app lets users know if they may have been exposed to the virus. It's free, easy and safe to use, and easy to download. I've done it myself. It was designed to protect your privacy and the privacy of others. Most importantly, the more people who download the app, the more effective the app will be in helping us stop the spread of COVID-19. So if you don't already have it—and I'm sure most of the members in this House have already downloaded it—it can be downloaded from Apple or Google Play app stores.

But it's not just our public health units leading the charge. Our hospital partners have been on the front lines, operating COVID-19 assessment centres across the province, and that is no different in Peel region. In fact, just this week, the William Osler Health System opened a dedicated COVID-19, Cold and Flu Clinic at Peel Memorial. Residents are encouraged to attend at this new location if they have moderate symptoms, such as fever, cough, shortness of breath, a sore throat, a hoarse voice, runny nose, sneezing, nasal congestion, loss of taste or smell, nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, abdominal pain, flu-like illness, pink eye or redness of eyes, or otherwise need to see a doctor. We're encouraging people to attend.

This new site complements William Osler Health System's other two drive-through assessment centres at the South Fletcher's Sportsplex and Humber College, which will continue to focus on serving residents or anybody with no or mild flu-like symptoms, and will ensure that the community is very well-positioned to face this and future waves of COVID-19, if there are any. Let's hope this is the last one. As a government, we certainly hope so.

As a government, we'll continue working closely with our local assessment centres to increase capacity and hours of operation, including in the Peel region.

I can also share that plans are once again in place to facilitate pop-up testing locations in Brampton and Mississauga, with four of these pop-ups planned for the week of September 21. That's four pop-up centres for the week of September 21.

As always, of course, no Ontarian who is symptomatic or who is concerned that they've been exposed should be declined for a test, so funding for William Osler Health System was increased by \$17 million, a 2.9% increase, not including any funds for the COVID-19 response. We continue to work with them towards the completion of

phase 2 of Peel Memorial, which will free up capacity for acute-care beds at Brampton Civic and Etobicoke General.

Furthermore, as the Minister of Health has said many times, we'll be releasing our comprehensive fall preparedness plan very shortly, and we're looking forward to that, which will include a lot of new and innovative actions to continue the fight against COVID-19. I'm confident the member from Brampton North and all members will—

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Thank you. Further debate?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: I'm very pleased to be here this afternoon for this discussion, to support the member for Brampton North in his desperate attempt to get the provincial government, the Ford government, to pay attention to what's happening in Brampton.

I have to say that historically governments have not paid attention to Brampton in terms of their health care needs. The former Liberal government did not pay attention, and currently, the Conservative government that is now in office is not paying attention to the needs of Brampton. I can tell you that, Speaker, because I have been around for a little while, and I myself have been watching as the decisions being made by governments have short-changed Peel communities over and over again, particularly in Brampton.

It was back in 2001 that Brampton Civic was first put on the books, and by 2004 that hospital ended up going from a 716-bed hospital down to what ended up starting as a 479-bed hospital in 2007, because the Conservatives and Liberals favoured a P3 model where they could shovel money to their friends, instead of staying with the public model that put every penny of public dollars into the provision of hospital beds. There are a few more beds now than that figure, because there was a lot of pressure put on the government to ensure that there were enough beds.

But unfortunately, Brampton Civic Hospital, the day it opened, was over capacity. The day it opened, its emergency ward was overtaken because of the need in the community. Unfortunately, things have not changed. I want to say, very briefly, that New Democrats have been working hard for years and years and years to get governments of both stripes that have been in office to fix the problems in Brampton.

Here we are, talking about COVID-19. When a community is receiving about 55% of the amount of health care dollars for its residents as compared to the average of other Ontario communities, you know something is desperately wrong. This particular community welcomes about 14,000 new residents each and every year. People are pouring into the Brampton area, and yet the health care system has not kept up, so we've been in a crisis in that community for a very, very long time.

I found it interesting that the member from Eglinton–Lawrence was talking about one of the first visits she had to a testing site that was in Brampton. It was back in May, I think she said. Back in May? Well, the bottom line is that here we are months and months later, and it's still the only testing site in Brampton, notwithstanding the desperate need and, as the member for Brampton North described,

the number of people who are contracting COVID-19. I know that we'll be hearing from another member from Brampton who will be talking about some of the serious outbreaks that are happening in schools and other facilities in Brampton.

The bottom line is that this government has been responding to this crisis late. They have been late in their response. They have not been proactive whatsoever. They have been completely reactive all the way along. I think that's why we saw the Premier get a little bit testy this morning—because we are here to tell the government that they're not doing a good job when it comes to addressing these things proactively.

1420

But look, what I do know is that I have visited Brampton many, many times to advocate, as the leader of the New Democratic Party, for more health care resources, whether that is with Brampton Civic Hospital, whether that's with Peel Memorial, supporting a motion just—what is it, two years ago now?—asking for this government to step up and provide more resources, or whether that is in this context right now, which is making sure that the public health department in Peel is able to get the resources needed to meet the needs of the community.

You can't on one hand acknowledge that you have a hot spot, if you will—you have growing numbers, you have cases of COVID-19 that outpace the average in other large urban centres, as the member was saying. It's the case that in Brampton, more cases per capita are showing up than in Toronto. That is a message, that is a signal that the government has to provide more resources to Brampton or to Peel Public Health so that the communities of Brampton and Mississauga and Caledon can get the resources they need to fight COVID-19.

I have to say, it was pretty disappointing to watch year after year after year as Liberals dragged their feet and did nothing and then Conservatives were dragging their feet. And now, in the midst of a worldwide pandemic, when Brampton is at its neediest, perhaps, in terms of resources, in terms of trying to level the playing field when it comes to the health care needs of the people of Brampton, we still have a government that drags its feet and that is not on the ball when it comes to providing public health the resources they need to meet the needs of the community.

So I say to this government, please, pick up your game and start acting like a government that wants to get ahead of COVID-19, that wants to help prevent the numbers from spiralling upwards, that wants to keep kids safe at school, that wants to prevent more tragedies in long-term care. Start acting like that, and perhaps you won't have to hear the criticisms, not only of New Democrats, but of families, of children, of educators, of everybody in the education system. People are worried. You haven't done what you should have done as a government, and Brampton needs your help right now.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Further debate?

Mr. Mike Schreiner: I'm pleased to rise and speak in support of the member for Brampton North's motion to unlock funding for Peel region to tackle COVID-19.

Speaker, the evidence is clear: This virus has disproportionately affected Peel region. And it's important to note that Peel region and Brampton in particular were struggling prior to this pandemic because of chronic underfunding of health care services. That's why I've spoken out and voted in favour of previous motions to expand hospital capacity in Brampton.

Brampton city council declared a health emergency on the eve of this pandemic to try to get more health funding resources from the government. This virus preys on inequities, including inequities in health care spending, and that's why we've seen Peel region disproportionately affected by this virus—representing 22% of cases while making up less than 10% of the population. Sadly, the first health care worker who died from COVID-19 was in Brampton as well. As the mayor of Brampton has pointed out, the city of Brampton receives approximately \$1,000 less in health care funding per capita than anywhere else in Ontario. This is, frankly, unacceptable. So the writing was on the wall that Peel region would be disproportionately affected by this virus.

Speaker, I want to conclude by saying that the other inequity this virus preys on is people of colour—due to years of systemic racism.

So instead of pointing fingers, let's provide support to the community to address the inequities that exist in Peel region when it comes to health care funding and ensure that everyone in this province, regardless of where you're from, has the support and services they need.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Further debate?

Ms. Sara Singh: It's an honour to rise on behalf of the good people of Brampton Centre and also the community of Peel to speak in support of my colleague from Brampton North's motion to ask this government—to implore this government—to do the right thing and provide much-needed funding to our Peel Public Health unit.

Speaker, as we've heard, it's very clear that Peel and the city of Brampton have been disproportionately impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. Whether it's racialized workers, seniors, students—our city and our community need your help. Our chronically underfunded health care system shouldn't be a surprise to anyone in this House. As you've heard time and time again from members on this side of the House, Brampton Civic Hospital and our Peel Memorial urgent care centre are in dire need of additional funding.

Our mayor and our city council have been very clear that we need our fair share of funding in order to support our growing city and municipalities in the Peel region. When we speak to the chair of the Peel region, he's very clear that this cannot continue, that we need to invest in our community. Whether that's health care or mental health services, those investments are going to help save us money down the road. There are serious economic consequences to not investing in the health care system the way that it needs to be when we're dealing with a growing population.

Yesterday I had a meeting with the Ontario Medical Association. Many doctors and front-line physicians from

the region shared their concerns with me. To quote one doctor, “There has been a backlog of care in our community. When we add in the reality of this pandemic and its disproportionate impacts to our community, we can only imagine what the reality is going to be for people who haven’t been able to access health care services, who are now waiting even longer for mental health supports, perhaps for testing”—which is exactly what this motion is asking this government to do.

If we know that a certain region or community is a hot spot, is disproportionately impacted, why not do the proactive thing? Why not get ahead of this? Rather than chase this pandemic, why not get ahead of it and stop it by providing resources on a regional basis? If we know that the community of Peel and the city of Brampton are experiencing a surge in cases, provide their public health unit the resources they need to increase testing, to trace where this virus is spreading and to make sure that people have access to the health care supports that they need to curb the virus. It makes sense. It really behooves us all to take this approach, and invest in those communities that are being hit hardest, to ensure that they can protect their citizens. It makes economic sense to do that; it makes social sense to do that. As the OMA pointed out, there’s not only an economic consequence to people getting ill, but there are real social consequences to this virus. When you have an opportunity to prevent and mitigate some of those downstream impacts that the health care system is going to be dealing with, why not take that opportunity? That’s exactly what this motion is calling on you to do.

I’m an opposition member. You, across the way, are government members and have a majority government. You currently have the power to make these changes. You currently have the power to protect people in our communities. Use the opportunity. Use this policy window, because you will be judged based on how you react to this pandemic. You have an opportunity to do the right thing for communities. This is not impacting only the region of Peel; this is impacting people across this province. If we want to deter the spread of this virus, we need to think critically and we need to think proactively about what needs to be done to make sure that we’re protecting citizens before the second wave arrives and further outbreaks happen.

As we’re hearing, undoubtedly in all areas of our community, the virus is impacting us, whether that’s our schools, whether that’s our hospitals or whether that’s our long-term-care centres. In Brampton alone, we have 17 schools that have at least one reported case—that is shameful. So why are we not equipping the school boards, Peel Public Health and the community with the resources they need to curb the spread of this virus? Again, it’s common sense, so I would urge this government to think critically about that work that needs to happen and adopt a regional model. The OMA is calling on you to do that because it makes sense.

1430

We cannot just have a universal, one-size-fits-all approach across the province, and in communities like mine

and across the region where—we have three members here from Brampton, and countless other members from Mississauga and Brampton on the other side of the House. You have the opportunity to do the right thing. I urge all of you to act. We don’t have time for us to wait on this ticking time bomb.

Adopt proactive approaches and make sure that our communities are protected. That means investing in our public health system, ensuring that we have the resources to increase mobile testing capacity, and making sure that our school boards have the resources they need to protect our students and educators. It’s really simple, and you have the power to do it, so I urge you to do the right thing and support this motion today.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Further debate?

Ms. Mitzie Hunter: It’s really great to rise today to speak in support of this motion from the member from Brampton North.

I do want to remind the House—because the Leader of the Opposition says the former government did not invest in Brampton—that I was the Minister of Advanced Education and Skills Development when we announced the expansion of a post-secondary institution, a university, in Brampton. Sadly, the current government cancelled that plan.

I also visit Brampton very often because my parents live there, I have two brothers who live there, and other relatives and friends. So I often travel along the 410 going north. I know that the previous government expanded those highway systems, as well, in Brampton.

But this motion is about today’s urgent issue. It is about the impacts that COVID-19 is having on hot spot communities like Brampton and Scarborough, which I represent, Scarborough–Guildwood. I’ve been consistently calling on this government to make funding available to COVID-19 hot spots, because the reality is that those communities need more resources.

Four weeks ago today, I wrote a letter to the Minister of Health where I said that I believe that COVID-19 surveillance testing needs to be conducted for students, families and education staff serving schools in boards in high-risk areas, as identified by public health. Testing should take place prior to the reopening of schools and continue into the beginning of the school year to ensure a smooth and safe return to school that is sustainable, and so that we don’t see those closures of classrooms and schools that we’re starting to see now because the virus has made its way in. This government needs to listen and act.

This morning, the Minister of Health said that she is aware that there will be a second wave but not exactly how it’s going to present itself. Well, then, why not take the action now, in a proactive way—when you know that these communities like Brampton and Scarborough and others are disproportionately affected by COVID-19 and could use the investment in public health—to do the testing, to do the contact tracing and to do the containment that is required to flatten the curve of this virus so that we can all live more easily and feel safe in our communities?

These communities are disproportionately home to Black, South Asian, Arab and other racialized communities. For equity and fairness in this province, they require this investment, and I support this motion.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): The member for Brampton North has two minutes to reply.

Mr. Kevin Yarde: I want to thank the members from Guelph, Eglinton–Lawrence and Scarborough–Guildwood, the leader of the official opposition, and the member from Brampton Centre.

We heard earlier the member from Eglinton–Lawrence mention that the government has already given Peel a pretty good package; it's given them enough money already. But it's not enough to make up for the prior years. We're still seeing hallway medicine in Brampton. These callous cuts have neglected Peel's health care centre for many, many years and have left us sorely unprepared for this pandemic, so I take offence to the member saying that they've already given us enough money.

The provincial government should be following the advice of the public health experts every step of the way to prevent COVID-19 from spreading. That said, it's pretty clear that the best way to protect Brampton is to prevent COVID-19 from spreading by testing, testing, testing. The member mentioned that she went to the testing centre in Brampton—but that's the only one we've got. We need more. We need more testing; we need more centres.

In conclusion, Madam Speaker, I just want to mention some of the things that we're calling for with this motion. We're calling for Peel to receive more staff as well as more testing, more community outreach, more proactive workplace inspections to ensure compliance with labour laws, isolation housing for those exposed and wishing to self-isolate safely, and data supports like epidemiologists and analysts to identify hot spots. We're calling for communication specialists, nurses who can be deployed to do contact tracing and outbreak management, provincial support for stronger messaging and communications to ethnic and racialized communities.

Madam Speaker, we heard from the member from Brampton Centre saying that this is urgent. It is urgent. If the government is serious about preventing the spread of COVID-19, they will support my motion.

EDUCATION FUNDING

Ms. Andrea Horwath: I move the following motion: That in the opinion of this House, the Ford government should provide the funding necessary to establish the safest classroom environment possible and work with school boards, parents and educators to reduce class sizes to a maximum of 15 students during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Ms. Horwath has moved private member's notice of motion number 106. Pursuant to standing order 101, the member has 12 minutes for her presentation.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: I'm very appreciative of having a moment to speak about the situation that's unfolding before our eyes here in our province. What we know for sure is that for months and months, parents have been doing the superhuman job of juggling all kinds of different things: taking care of little ones at home, working from home at the same time, trying to help their school-age kids deal with the education requirements once schools were shut down back in March. It has been quite something else, and we want to say to parents that you've done a great job. But all anybody ever wanted was to make sure that when September came, our kids could go back to school and that they could do that safely.

Most kids are, in fact, now heading back into school, but we are also on the brink of the second wave of COVID-19, and I have to urge every member in this House to realize that it is never too late to do the right thing to protect our children and keep them safe. That's what this motion is all about. That's what we can do by passing this motion.

I know that members on all sides of the House have heard from parents who are very, very worried; have watched as parents, at the last minute, have decided not to send their kids into schools. The government has had months and months now—I mean, really, they've had all summer long—to come up with a safe back-to-school plan that parents and educators and everyone could have confidence in.

We all knew what was coming. It's no secret that the fall comes after the summer and that the second wave was predicted to be starting in the fall. There was no secret that two million kids would be returning to school come September. There was no secret that parents were looking forward to returning to work in the fall, as well, and there is no doubt that parents were also going to be in need of more child care and after-school programs as kids got back to school.

But what we've seen is a government that waited literally until the eleventh hour before revealing what the schools were going to look like when they reopened, releasing a plan or a scheme that is absolutely shocking in its negligence. Parents have been put in an impossible position as a result. What we have seen is parents really having no good choice. They either send their kids back to school into overcrowded classrooms, where no social distancing is available—or very little opportunity to properly physically distance—or keep their kids at home, isolating them from their friends and peers for even longer than necessary, taking more of a toll on their mental health and well-being.

For either one of these choices, parents were not in a good situation, and for many, many, many families, there was really no choice at all. Many parents simply had to get back to work, had to get back to putting food on the table and paying the bills, simply couldn't stay home with their kids anymore. Of course, there are also those parents who have children with compromised immune systems, and they, of course, couldn't afford to send their kids into crowded classrooms in the middle of a pandemic. No

matter how hard it is to keep them home, they had to do that.

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Instead of digging deep and spending every single minute of the last six months putting a plan together for a safe back-to-school, we saw the Premier instead on a vanity tour over the last couple of months. He drove right past businesses that are hurting, angry and feeling abandoned by the government, in order to hunt for the businesses that are friendly to his party, where he could pose for a photo op. He did not prepare for a safe school year or for the second wave of this deadly pandemic, and, of course, his back-to-school plan, as we've all seen, has been a disaster—absolutely chaotic.

The government is cutting corners—cutting corners with a bargain-basement back-to-school scheme that pinches pennies on the backs of our children. They have not put a cap on class sizes. They have not acknowledged the requirement that I think is clear to everyone now, the advice that they received from organizations like Sick Kids that they had to keep the class sizes small; that any safe return-to-school plan had to include small class sizes. But the government didn't do that. They didn't bother to do the one important thing that was necessary to keep kids in a situation where they could physically distance from each other and from other folks inside the school system.

As a result, what do we have? We literally have classrooms where there are 25, 28, 30, 32 kids in the classroom, on top of the teachers and other educators. I mean, really. Yesterday and today, our members here on the opposition bench have been bringing real-life stories of what parents are seeing in the schools as they bring their kids to school. Many parents are actually showing up, becoming completely shocked, taking their kids home and saying, "We can't put at risk our kids or our family," or the extended family. That is not a situation that parents should be in at the last minute as they take their kids to school.

We've seen photos of desks that are less than a foot apart. We've seen 30 little ones crammed into a classroom. If that's the case, that there are 30 little kids in an elementary classroom, how is it that that teacher is going to be expected to ensure that each one of those children is able to wash their hands at every opportunity that they should be, keeping their masks on, distancing? It is a task that no single teacher can do and it is a task that nobody should be asked to do in the context of COVID-19. When desks are practically touching, how can a teacher make sure that things like pencils, masks, snacks, lunches aren't being shared by kids? Physical distancing is literally impossible in these classrooms—literally impossible.

But that's not all. We also know that kids are being crammed onto school buses—crammed onto school buses. How is it that a school bus driver is going to be able to keep 65, 68, 70 kids safe as she's trying to, on the one hand, drive these kids who are jammed cheek by jowl into the seats of her bus—how is she supposed to keep them safe, keep her focus on the road, while still trying to make sure they're keeping their masks on and not creating an opportunity for the spread of the virus? Well, obviously, it

can't be done, and nobody should be asking bus drivers to be put in those situations. And, of course, bus drivers by the droves are saying, "I'm not going to put myself in that situation."

We know that bus drivers, in many cases, are older folks in the first place—retirees, in many cases—yet the government's asking them to come to work and put their own health at risk, as well as the health of their loved ones. That is absolutely not acceptable, Speaker. How can the government expect that we're going to actually prevent the spread of COVID-19 in our schools and through our buses when they are not committed to ensuring that physical distancing can take place? It increases the stress and anxiety of everyone involved. Even the children are feeling the stress and anxiety of this government's failure to keep them safe in their schools. Parents are experiencing that stress and anxiety. Education workers and teachers are feeling that stress and anxiety because the government didn't do its job, didn't ensure that we could have physical distancing in our schools.

So where are we now? Well, I have to say, we're in a situation where, once again, family members, particularly parents, are in an untenable space. If their child is not feeling well and they're expected to actually keep that child home from school—what is their choice to stay home from work with their child if they don't have sick days?

In this province, there were two measly sick days for workers, which were provided by the previous government. I mean, that wasn't enough. You can't even get over a cold in two days. You can't get over the flu in two days, let alone COVID-19. How exactly does the government expect working parents to stay home when they don't have access to even those two measly sick days anymore? Why? Because the Conservative government—Mr. Ford—came to office and actually scrapped the two measly sick days that workers had to rely on. So here we are now with no sick days for workers who don't have collective agreements that cover them at work. It is absolutely unbelievable that this government has put families and kids in this situation.

You know what, Speaker? The bottom line is, experts have said very clearly that this can be different, that we can actually provide a safer environment in our schools. They have said very clearly that anywhere from 10 to 15 kids would be the maximum amount of children that could safely physically distance in the school system. This is something that Mr. Ford should have been working on all summer long, instead of jaunting around the province—

Interjection.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: I hear you, Speaker; I appreciate that—that the Premier should have been doing as he was jaunting around the province on his vanity tour, on his campaign tour. I remember him saying, "I'm going out to campaign. The campaign is on." We were dealing with COVID-19, and the Premier announced that the campaign was on. Where are his priorities?

I can tell you, his priorities should have been with the children and the families of this province. That's where his priorities should have been. But, of course, they weren't, and instead, this bargain-basement scheme is falling apart

in front of our eyes, and the COVID-19 pandemic is actually spreading through schools. It's spreading through buses. It's spreading through communities. Numbers are up.

And so I ask the government now, at this late date, I ask the MPPs on the government side of the House: support my motion. It is never, ever too late to do the right thing to keep our kids safe. Let's pass this motion and get those class sizes down to 15. Let's hire the teachers. Let's find the adequate education spaces. Let's make sure there are more buses and more drivers on the road, so kids can get to school safely. And let's actually stop the second wave from overtaking our entire province.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Thank you. I will remind all members to direct their remarks to and through the Chair, and to refrain from using personal names. We will refer to folks by their ridings and titles.

Further debate?

Mr. John Fraser: Speaker, I'll be supporting the leader of the official opposition's motion. It's a motion we shouldn't have to be making here in this Legislature. Evidence from around the world and our own public health experts tell us that class sizes of 15 and less are best. It should be the government's goal—it's not. They ignored the advice, and we have classes of 25 and more, like my grandson's class. And now we have a situation where the Premier is sitting on billions of dollars of federal safe-start money, his own contingencies and even the money that was given to Ontario schools by the federal government—he's holding some of that back and refusing to use those resources to make every child's class smaller and safer.

Parents, grandparents, educators, principals, public health experts are all asking the government to do the right thing and make classes smaller and safer. I urge all members of this House to support this motion.

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The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Further debate?

Mr. Sam Oosterhoff: I rise today to speak in favour and in support of our government's comprehensive and evidence-based plan to safely reopen Ontario's schools.

Speaker, it is no secret that students benefit when they socialize with their peers and interact directly with their teachers. The best available medical evidence tells us that kids need to go back to school. It's why our government has released a detailed, comprehensive plan that safely reopens Ontario's schools. Our plan to reopen schools has been informed by the best medical and scientific minds in the country and signed off by Ontario's top doctor, the Chief Medical Officer of Health, Dr. David Williams.

We're proud to lead the nation in virtually every area in COVID-19-related funding—\$1.3 billion in additional funds; the highest amount of funding for cleaning in the country—and the most comprehensive masking policy. We're the only province to require masks in the classroom and on the school bus for all students and staff in grades 4 to 12.

We're hiring over 1,300 custodians. We're the only province hiring public health nurses to support student

health in our schools: 625 nurses in our schools. We're the only province dedicating funding towards student mental health; the only province with a testing strategy and dollars to back it up; the only province dedicating funding towards health and safety training for staff; the only province to provide over \$1 billion in transportation funding for the next school year, with an additional \$65 million for enhanced health and safety measures, including enhanced cleaning protocols, reducing the numbers of students on buses and PPE for school bus drivers. We are also providing \$44.5 million specifically towards the School Bus Driver Retention Program.

We are working hard to protect students in the classroom and on the school bus, and as notes that I've received from across the province testify—I hear from parents like Carly: “My daughter Ella started grade 8 this year. I was concerned with how she would feel, but I'm so relieved to see all the protocols that have been in place and are being followed. She's thrilled to be back at school again, seeing friends.” Or from Nicole, who said, “I have two boys who absolutely love to go to school and they've been waiting for so long to see their friends, meet their teachers and get back to a normal schedule. So great to see the teachers. The kids are happy and we, as parents, are thrilled to have them back in school.”

The reality is, Speaker, we are working hard to protect students in the classroom and on the school bus. We're ensuring that our hard-working drivers and monitors have the PPE and training they need to feel safe at work.

I know more of my colleagues will be speaking to additional measures that we've put in place to ensure the safety of students and staff in schools across our province.

Speaker, I want to end with a quote from Dr. David Williams, who said, “with the steps that were put in place at the schools, again in alignment with the public health measures, the masks, the hand hygiene, the surveillance, the observation, the testing, the case contact management, the idea of cohorting and distancing, all these things that have been so successful that moved Ontario collectively to where we are today.”

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Further debate?

Ms. Marit Stiles: First, I want to thank the leader of the official opposition for introducing this really important motion and for the many, many months of hard work that she and my colleagues from across province—parents, teachers, education workers and students—have put into this fight for safer, smaller classrooms.

I want to tell you that, as a parent, I want my child back in school, but I want her there safely. I know that the members opposite received a flurry of calls and emails from their constituents asking them to support this motion today, and I want to urge each and every one of them to do the right thing today and help us reduce these class sizes.

Speaker, every day this government repeats over and over a baffling array of excuses. We heard just now from the member from Niagara West. But the minister stood in this House earlier this week and said every class size in the province was reduced. That is absolute fiction. The

Minister of Health today said that physical distancing is being achieved in classrooms. It is not. Classes are too big for that. Students know it, teachers know it and other education workers know it, too. Parents and grandparents, for sure, know it.

Let me share something I received yesterday from a parent in Halton region, who pointed out that there are no planned reductions at the Halton District School Board. “Unless the minister is counting on coincidence and luck,” he said, “there is no systematic reduction in class sizes.”

Speaker, as we saw the first of our Ontario schools shut down yesterday, I want to be very clear with the members opposite: A class of 30 cannot have two metres between children in a classroom. When a couple of students in a room of 30 get COVID, that’s not just 30 students. That’s the teachers and staff in contact. That’s 30 families now isolating at home, leaving their workplaces, risking food on the table. That’s 30 students spread out on multiple buses with 60 to 70 students on each of them, many of them from multiple boards and schools.

Smaller is safer. It’s not too late to do the right thing. Please, please, join us in supporting this motion.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Further debate?

Mr. Mike Schreiner: I’m pleased to rise and speak in support of the leader of the official opposition’s motion to reduce class sizes. Based on what the government was saying over the summer and the crackdown on social gatherings announced today, I’m assuming that the government members will be speaking and voting in favour of this motion as well, because back in June, the education minister is quoted as saying, Ontario “will enter into a cautious adaptive delivery model” where classrooms will be made of “no more than 15 students” at a time.

As a matter of fact, the government’s initial plan for school reopenings encouraged school boards to “maintain a limit of 15 students in a typical classroom at one time.” But as parents, students and teachers know, that’s not what has happened. Kids are jammed into classrooms. We’re hearing stories of more than 30 students in a classroom—more than double the safe limit that SickKids recommended.

Proper education spending could have prevented this, and investing in our kids is worth it. As a matter of fact, according to the Financial Accountability Officer, the government is sitting on \$6.7 billion of unallocated funds that could be used to keep our kids safe. So I’m asking the government to use that money. Investing in our kids—the return on that investment is priceless. They deserve safe classrooms. That’s why I will be voting in favour of this motion. It’s why I’m encouraging all members of this House to vote in favour of it as well, Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Further debate?

Miss Christina Maria Mitas: The challenge we face today is reconciling two very important goals: preparing Ontario’s young people for the jobs of tomorrow and ensuring the health and safety of our children, school staff and their families today.

As a mother of two very young children—19 months, and seven months tomorrow—a teacher and a member of this government, I am acutely aware of the situation that we find ourselves in and the importance of protecting our children. I’m proud that our government has focused on safety without neglecting the importance of quality learning—the importance of which simply cannot be overstated.

Speaker, Ontario’s plan to safely reopen our publicly funded schools keeps our kids safe while getting academic learning back on track. It’s a balanced approach, one that was developed in consultation with Ontario’s Chief Medical Officer of Health, the COVID-19 command table and pediatric experts. And although this has been stated many times before, it must be stated yet again: This plan is approved by the Chief Medical Officer of Health, Ontario’s top doctor.

Our plan revolves around important safety and learning elements, and we are making significant investments into the sector to complement this plan: \$1.3 billion to assist our school boards. No other jurisdiction in Canada comes close to our investments here. Our plan leads the nation in dollars and in science, full stop. This funding supports school boards in getting what they need for a successful back-to-school experience, including lowering class sizes to facilitate physical distancing, enhanced cleaning for schools and buses, and improved ventilation, as well as the hiring of more custodians, teaching staff and school-focused personnel. We are providing these necessary investments to support our public school system during this challenging time. We’re also providing \$100 million to boards to hire more teachers, plus an additional \$100 million for board priorities, which can also go to staffing. Speaker, class sizes across our province are being reduced as thousands of educators are being hired.

We are providing these necessary investments to support our public school system because they need it, and we are here for them. We’re making these investments because it’s critically important that Ontario’s kids and their parents know that school is a safe place. We take the safety of our students, staff and families very seriously. Dr. Williams has guided this plan every step of the way.

Ontario’s plan minimizes risk while ensuring that our children are getting the world-class education that they deserve, an education that they have been missing out on. We cannot underestimate the positive effects that schooling and the school experience provide our children with. We are keeping these things top of mind, all while providing educators and educational staff, people who live and work in our communities, with a plethora of enhanced protocols and measures to ensure their peace of mind.

1500

We are here for our students, we are here for our parents and we’re here for our teachers. Our plan is the most comprehensive in the country, and we remain prepared to respond to any developments that may arise as the back-to-school process continues.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Further debate?

Ms. Catherine Fife: This debate actually happens just as we've learned in Waterloo that we have our first case of COVID-19 in an elementary school. The Waterloo Catholic District School Board is reporting through public health that this individual is a student and that the entire class will be closed down, including some of the kids who were on a bus as well. So it has weight; it has weight here.

I want to bring the voice of the chair of the school board to this Legislature. Myself and the member from Kitchener Centre, MPP Lindo, have written to the minister and shared, but I'm going to do it here, because we still haven't heard back. This is Jayne Herring, the Chair of the Waterloo District School Board:

"We ... urge you to follow the guidance of the SickKids report which highlights the importance of small class sizes to allow for physical distancing in schools. As a growing board, we do not have surplus space in our schools, nor do we have sufficient reserves to create smaller class sizes. We require funding from the province to hire more teachers and support staff, to investigate renting space in the community and to use those spaces. During this pandemic, smaller class sizes will provide an important layer of protection to elementary students. It will also ease the stress and anxiety of many of our families and staff knowing that every safety precaution possible" has taken place.

"We also cannot underscore enough how important a safe school reopening will be to minimize the spread of COVID-19 in the community."

The minister will note that this letter is sitting on your desk.

I also want to say, the businesses that came to our committee all summer literally begged this government to get this right—to open our schools safely, to invest the money. Think of this investment not only in the health and safety of our students but in the health and safety and viability of an economic recovery. To say that it is disappointing that we have to do this motion today is a true reflection of a government that is only reacting to and not planning for COVID-19.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Further debate?

Ms. Mitzie Hunter: I'd like to say that I'm happy today to rise in support of this motion, but I am not. I, like so many others in this province, cannot believe that we are still here, pleading with this government to implement a clear plan to protect our students, our educators and our communities. It seems so obvious. The government says that they make decisions based on the best public health advice possible, but they're applying their own rules sluggishly and inconsistently.

The Premier just stood in front of the people of Ontario and told them that they can no longer gather indoors with more than 10 people; yet Ontario school buses and classrooms are packed with students who cannot physically distance from each other or from education workers.

In my riding of Scarborough–Guildwood, many parents are choosing the virtual options because they have to, to keep themselves and their families safe. I've heard that

classrooms are collapsing due to low enrolment. They simply don't have the numbers to justify single-grade classes, which means split-grade classes as well as educators with split attention.

I'm supporting this motion today not just because it's the right policy to keep our kids safe, but because it will protect the quality of education for our students. With smaller class sizes, the second wave of COVID will be easier to manage, and students will learn better.

The FAO report released last week compared the provincial and federal spending on COVID-19. It clearly shows that the Ontario government is sitting on billions of dollars, including \$3.5 billion in cash that needs to be allocated. We have the funds to do it. Let's get the will and do the right thing by our students and by educators in this province and be principled about our vote today.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Further debate?

Ms. Christine Hogarth: Speaker, children belong in our schools. Children deserve to be with their friends. They deserve to be with their teachers. And they deserve a great education in a safe manner. As a stepmother it is what I want for my children, and as an aunt it's what I want for my nephew.

My stepdaughter is going into grade 11, and she's very excited to see her friends and teachers again. My nephew is nine, so he really wasn't all that excited to go back to school, until he found out he doesn't have to sing. He hates singing, so now he has a little smile on his face.

I'm proud that our government has put forth a strong and comprehensive plan to safely reopen Ontario schools, developed in consultation with the COVID-19 command table, pediatric experts and Dr. David Williams, the Chief Medical Officer of Health. We are committed to achieving the safest classroom environment possible. Leading medical experts have advised us that multiple layers of prevention, such as masking, hand hygiene and cohorting, will allow our schools to reopen safely.

We are investing \$1.3 billion to complement this plan, including investments to lower class sizes.

We're providing \$100 million to boards to hire more teachers, plus an additional \$100 million for board priorities, which can go towards staffing.

Thousands of educators are being hired, and class sizes across the province are being reduced.

We have also provided boards with flexibility in delivering their local reopening plans, given the variance in local public health situations on the ground.

School boards are adopting timetabling methods that emphasize cohorting of students as much as possible to limit the number of direct and indirect student-to-student contacts.

We have provided guidance to boards to ensure that as much distancing as possible between students, between students and staff and between staff members should always be promoted.

Physical distancing measures are being supplemented with other public health measures, supported by health and safety strategies such as screening, adapted school

environment, cohorting, hand hygiene, enhanced cleaning and masking.

I would also like to note that in terms of masking, we have the most comprehensive masking policy in the nation. We are the only province to mandate masks in classrooms at all times. Students in grades 4 to 12 will be required to wear a mask on school property, both indoors as well as outdoors, when physical distance cannot be maintained. For students in kindergarten to grade 3, the use of masks will be optional, although it will be encouraged, and will be made at the discretion of the parents, based on their child's ability to safely wear a mask. These decisions were made in consultation with leading health officials.

Through you, Madam Speaker, I ask the opposition to remember that these are kids and they shouldn't be frightened by rhetoric. They should be in school, if able. They need to be learning, and they need to be with their friends.

No matter what members across the aisle will say, our plan is strong, our plan is comprehensive, and it's based on science and the advice of medical experts. Our plan is balanced and comprehensive, and it puts the health and safety of our students, our educators, our staff and our families above all else.

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): A reminder to all members: Whether you are masked or not, we can still hear the heckling, which is not acceptable and not helpful in the debate. I would ask all members to please come to order. Thank you.

Further debate?

Mr. Tom Rakocevic: I have a son and his name is Aleksandar. He turned two in July. When he turned one, I was having a conversation with another parent and we discussed children catching colds. At that age, my son had not yet caught a cold. My friend looked at me with sympathetic eyes and a knowing smile and said, "Wait until he enters daycare. Wait until he goes to school. Then you'll know why they call it 'the common cold.' Your whole family will be sharing it." Of course, that was pre-COVID-19.

Speaker, it's tough to get children to follow the advice of the medical officer of health, so it's up to us as parents, as educators, as government, as a society, to keep our children safe. If class is back on, then we must keep the class sizes small.

Today we are debating an important motion by the NDP leader to cap all class sizes at 15 or less and provide the necessary funding to do so. I will be supporting this motion.

Dr. Ronald Cohn, the president and CEO of SickKids hospital, has stated that he could not support a plan in which class sizes do not allow for physical distancing. In fact, SickKids released a report this week saying that it would be impossible to maintain physical distancing in classrooms with more than 15 students.

My community is in northwest Toronto and it has been one of the hardest hit by this pandemic. My staff and I have

been calling school communities throughout my riding this week, and I can tell you that they are rightfully concerned.

1510

Today, the Premier announced that he would be limiting indoor gatherings to 10 adults in certain regions, while classrooms there will be packed with 20-plus students. I'm calling on this government to be consistent and support this motion to provide the necessary funding to cap class sizes for all schools and keep our children safe.

Interjections.

Mr. Tom Rakocevic: Thank you. By keeping our children safe, we are protecting everyone. If you don't get the school plan right, then everything else could unravel. The people of Ontario are counting on us.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Further debate?

Mrs. Robin Martin: Speaker, I think we can all agree that children belong in school and they need to interact with their teachers and fellow students. They need to be in class, whether physically or online, to receive the education that children deserve. Parents I talk to are kind of concerned about the growing learning gaps due to the pandemic and their own ability to get back to work. Ontario's parents and Ontario's children deserve better than the fearmongering and anxiety-raising hysteria which is the contribution of the members opposite, who are fixated on a magic number.

The health and safety of children is our top priority. That's why the government has been working and consulting with experts all along the way. The Chief Medical Officer of Health of Ontario and leading medical experts, including SickKids, have advised us that no one specific measure will make children safe. No specific class size is listed in this SickKids report, and no one thing will prevent infections in schools; rather, it's a bundle of things.

Multiple layers of prevention, such as masking, hand hygiene and cohorting, will allow the schools to remain safely open. We have the smallest class sizes for grades 1 to 3 across the country. We're providing \$100 million to boards to hire teachers, plus an additional \$100 million for boards to hire.

Contrary to the comments from the members opposite, the Premier is not sitting on money he has received from the federal government. When money is received, we're putting it out there for the programs. The monies you referred to won't be received until January. That's when more is supposed to come, so stay tuned.

Thousands of educators are being hired. We have to wait, obviously, as they are hiring them, but obviously our plan is the strongest in Canada, and I can tell you that we are fiercely proud of our province and of our collective efforts over the past few months. We can't let up. We have to remain vigilant, but I know we will overcome any challenge working together.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Further debate? I recognize the member for York South-Weston.

Mr. Faisal Hassan: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): The government side will come to order. Thank you.

The member may continue.

Mr. Faisal Hassan: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I am pleased to speak to this motion that my leader, the official opposition leader, tabled, and to highlight some of the many voices of parents and families who have been contacting my office with so many fears and concerns about the well-being of their children in crowded classrooms.

Domenica Mindrinos is one of them, a local resident and parent of a child going to grade school. She wrote to me and states, “Knowing that York South–Weston was declared a hot spot back in March, I felt uneasy about having children back in school at maximum capacity. I want my child to be safe in school and to practise the public health guidelines of social distancing. This cannot be done without capped class sizes. I live in an area of high risk, but my child has 24 students in the class. With the second wave coming, parents need to know the government is committed at capping class sizes.”

York South–Weston resident and secondary school teacher Sarah Vance has this to say, as well: “Science has shown us that we need to keep two metres apart for safe social distancing. Our schools are not built to have desks two metres apart with 30 kids in the class.”

York South–Weston already faces some of the highest COVID rates, and we still await local COVID testing for residents that I have been requesting for months now. Yesterday I asked the Premier to explain the faulty data collection that determines some of the schools “high-risk” in the same neighbourhoods that “non-risk” schools have higher COVID cases.

Clearly, this government is not prepared or organized and needs immediately to implement a 15-student cap by supporting this motion. I’m going to support this motion.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Further debate?

Ms. Judith Monteith-Farrell: I’m happy to be speaking to our leader’s motion 106 that would mandate a cap of 15 students in the classroom. We, as legislators, should all want what is best for the children of this province. I want to thank all the education workers and administrators who are doing this important work in my riding of Thunder Bay–Atikokan. They are trying their best to make this a great school year.

When speaking to parents in our area, those who sent their children to school and those who didn’t, they all agree that if class sizes were smaller and all the precautions were in place, they would feel more confident that their children would be safe. They wonder why this was not done and worry, and hope for the best.

It is early days, but the feedback is already coming into my office, and in many cases problems are being worked on as we speak. What makes parents nervous is the plan was not in place until late August. Children with special needs were thought about last. Online learning classes have very large classes. My granddaughter, in grade 2, has over 40 children in her virtual classroom with one teacher.

Parents are nervous about what is happening in the classroom. Parents with children in online classes see gaps and worry about the amount of screen time that there is. It is anything but smooth sailing.

Remote and rural students again are being forced into what could be unsafe conditions, with long, crowded bus rides, because online learning is not available to them. Lack of reliable, affordable broadband is making things much worse, and the people of Oliver Paipoonge have a petition with many signatures on it because they’re frustrated and angry that their families don’t have choices.

Capping class size at 15 would have been a good place to start a plan many months ago. Then, we could build a safe plan around that number. Not making our children’s safety a priority is not good enough.

It is not too late to do the right thing. I hope you support this motion.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Further debate?

Mr. Joel Harden: I want to thank our leader, Andrea Horwath, for putting this motion before us, I want to thank all my colleagues on the opposition benches who are going to be supporting this motion, and I hope to see some of the folks on the other side do it. But I must admit, given feedback I’ve been hearing from home—and I want to thank all the educators, all the parents, all the staff, who have done so—I’m coming to one conclusion about this debate, Speaker: that there are washing machines in this province that can’t match the spin cycle that this government has on class sizes. And do you know who suffers? Not them, Speaker, not them; the people who are going to suffer are the people crowded in a room—80 centimetres is what I’m being told is the room that kids have to put all their belongings under their desks right now, to stay apart from each other in grades 7 and 8; 80 centimetres for boots in the winter time, for lunches, for backpacks. Think about what you’re doing to children and staff in the public education system. But as I look at their faces, Speaker, through you, they don’t care.

And the reckoning is coming. A reckoning is coming; you will be remembered for how you failed staff, children and families who care about public education. This will be on you—

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Order.

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): The government members will come to order.

Mr. Sam Oosterhoff: Trying to scare kids.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): The member from Niagara West will come to order.

I am waiting for the room to be quiet so we can continue. There is business before the House, and the business is not heckling when you have the opportunity.

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Members for Ottawa Centre and Eglinton–Lawrence, I’d like to continue.

The member for Hamilton Centre has two minutes to reply.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: I have to first of all thank all of the members on the opposition benches who have said that they are supporting this motion; I'm grateful for that. I have to say, I'm pretty shocked by what we heard from the government bench, and to see MPPs in this House using language like "hysteria" and "fearmongering."

I just want to let them hear something from what a parent has to say, and I'm quoting from an article in a newspaper. Here's what this parent says: "I think there's a huge disconnect between the messaging coming from the government and the reality that parents are experiencing," said parent Laura Boudreau, who on Friday of last week was told her child would be going back to a class of 15 students, and then on Monday night she and her husband received an email saying that their son, in fact, was going into a kindergarten class with a total of 29 students.

1520

Here's what she says: "I was beside myself. I didn't know what to do. We ran through all the options we could think of: should he stay home? Should he go to school? Can we go to private school? Should we have a learning pause?" This is what she was grappling with the day before her son went to school.

"We're playing pandemic roulette with our children" is what this mother said about the government's back-to-school plan.

I have to say, it is really horrifying to hear the members on the government bench not acknowledge that their government has cherry-picked recommendations from various experts to come up with this horrifying, terrible plan that is putting our children at risk each and every day. I have to say, I was shocked to not see anybody on that bench acknowledge the lack of transparency that has been unfolding since day one of COVID-19 in our province. Who is at the command table? Where is the advice coming from? Who is the government cherry-picking its advice from? Certainly not parents, certainly not educators and certainly not people on this side of the bench, who care about the safety of our kids.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Orders of the day.

MAGNA CARTA DAY ACT (IN MEMORY
OF JULIA MUNRO, MPP), 2020

LOI DE 2020 SUR LE JOUR DE LA GRANDE
CHARTRE (À LA MÉMOIRE DE JULIA
MUNRO, DÉPUTÉE PROVINCIALE)

Ms. McKenna moved second reading of the following bill:

Bill 201, An Act to proclaim Magna Carta Day / Projet de loi 201, Loi proclamant le Jour de la Grande Charte.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Pursuant to standing order 101, the member has 12 minutes for her presentation.

Ms. Jane McKenna: First of all, I would just like to say, because of COVID-19, Julia's husband, John, and her daughter, Genevieve, couldn't be here, but they are watching from home.

Julia Munro was inspired. She had just purchased a reproduction of the Magna Carta at an auction and it gave her an idea. As a long-time teacher, she saw an opportunity to raise awareness through a piece of legislation. In her words, "People don't know a lot about it. To me, that's just all the more reason to bring awareness to it." That's why, on April 2, 2015, York-Simcoe MPP Julia Munro stood up in this place and said, "I'm excited today to debate my private member's bill, Bill 23, the Magna Carta Day Act, which proclaims June 15 each year as Magna Carta Day."

Today, Speaker, I'm honoured to continue where MPP Munro left off, to debate my private member's bill, Bill 201, the Magna Carta Day Act (In Memory of Julia Munro, MPP). I want to begin by giving you some legislative history on Julia's Magna Carta Day Act. She first introduced it on July 23, 2014. She introduced it again on February 28, 2017, and again on March 20, 2018. It was her last piece of legislation. All three times, the bill passed first and second reading with all-party support. Six years later, I'm introducing her bill again, this time in her memory as the longest-serving female member of the Ontario Legislature.

Julia Ann Louise Campbell was born in Hamilton and raised in Toronto. She received her Bachelor of Arts degree from the University of Toronto. She taught high school history in Markham and Newmarket for 24 years. An interesting bit of trivia: She taught Barenaked Ladies drummer Tyler Stewart at Huron Heights Secondary School.

Before the 1995 provincial election, Julia decided, in her words, that she was tired of sitting around the kitchen table complaining about politics and decided to get involved. She was elected to the Ontario Legislature in 1995, during the Mike Harris sweep, defeating New Democrat Larry O'Connor in the riding of Durham-York, getting 61.8% of all votes cast. She was re-elected in 1999, 2003, 2007, 2011 and 2014.

In government, Julia Munro served as parliamentary assistant to the Premier, government whip, parliamentary assistant to the Ministry of Transportation, Chair of Management Board and parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Culture. She lived on a farm near Sutton with her husband, John, and daughter, Genevieve, and she loved—and I mean she loved—dogs. She was a breeder of standard poodles, borzois and pointers. Many of us referred to her as Lady Munro because she was an inspiration and role model for many, many women.

Julia had great courage and was known for her sincerity and always keeping the public good foremost in her mind. As a politician, she was respected across party lines. She was passionate about history, the Constitution and proper governance. This is why recognizing the importance of the Magna Carta and our democracy meant so much to her. She was respectful and compassionate. She cared deeply about the people she served. Most of all, Julia Munro was kind.

I'm sure during our debate today we'll hear many wonderful memories of our friend and colleague Julia Munro. But I do want to acknowledge the support I've received in moving this bill forward from our Minister of Heritage, Sport, Tourism and Culture Industries, Lisa MacLeod. Minister MacLeod was unable to be here today, but I know she considered Julia a friend and a mentor, and was grateful to have known and learned from her as a colleague.

My friend the NDP member from Windsor–Tecumseh—who, by the way, always has one of the best Christmas cards around—said during debate on the bill back in 2017, “We in this chamber are here because we are able to stand on the shoulders of those who came before us.... We are here because of established and accepted rules and traditions, and these rules and traditions are protected by law.”

American author Diana Gabaldon, known for the *Outlander* novel series, once said, “Things you cherish and hold dear are like pearls on a string. Cut the knot and they scatter across the floor.” Our parliamentary democracy, like a string of pearls, depends on a strong connection, a foundation from which everything is built upon. Magna Carta Libertatum, or more simply, the Great Charter of Freedoms, has been described as the greatest constitutional document of all time and as England's greatest export. But the Magna Carta came about through a mediated settlement.

King John of England had just lost a battle. He needed money to reclaim lost land. To raise money, he increased taxes and created new ones: income taxes, import and export taxes, inheritance and estate taxes, even a tax on widows that wanted to remain single. Then after a series of bad harvests, which resulted in increased demand for food and high inflation, the barons, the 1%, revolted, and England was on the brink of civil war.

On one side, there was a very unpopular king, and on the other, landlords that he was at war with over how much money he wanted from them. In the middle was Archbishop Langton of Canterbury, who acted as the mediator. They met at a neutral site: Runnymede, near Windsor.

Let's get one thing straight: King John didn't come to the table willingly. In fact, the barons actually chased him and captured him. On June 15, 1215, he was forced to sign a document that put limits on his powers and guaranteed various rights.

The key principles of the Magna Carta include that nobody is above the law of the land; freedom from unlawful detention without cause or evidence; trial by jury was established to settle disputes between barons and the crown; and—a major first step in women's rights—a woman could not be forced to marry and give up her property.

Now, King John wasn't really interested in giving up power, and as MPP Munro said when she first introduced the bill in 2015, he felt that he could sign it and then wiggle around it. But history turned out differently. The Magna Carta also inspired later charters: in 1217, the Charter of the Forest, which set precedents for the management of

shared resources; and the 1258 Provisions of Oxford, which led to the development of Parliament.

The principles of Magna Carta are engrained with the British common law system and are reflected in the Canadian Constitution and our Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

1530

During the April 2, 2015, debate, the NDP member for the then riding of Timmins–James Bay and the current opposition House leader said, “What's interesting is, some of the kings that we remember as being the better ones actually took the heart of Magna Carta and brought it further.... They started to understand, as a monarchy, that they had to move in a different direction.”

During that same debate, the NDP member for Hamilton East–Stoney Creek said, “The Magna Carta is part of Canada's cultural and political heritage.” It has “inspired the truly oppressed around the world. For eight centuries, the Magna Carta has fired the hearts and minds of those who seek justice in the face of tyranny and exploitation.”

During the March 20, 2018, debate, the NDP member for Oshawa said, “The Magna Carta stands as a written flashpoint that has lit the fires of challenge and justice, inspiring the truly oppressed around the world. The Magna Carta represents equality before the law, trial by peers, immunity from illegal imprisonment and taxation only by the consent of the citizenry.”

During the same debate, the NDP member for Toronto–Danforth said, “Nelson Mandela cited the Magna Carta in his defence at the Rivonia trial. He lived in an unjust society under a tyrannical government that denied the rule of law by denying the equality of the people it was meant to serve. Apartheid in South Africa denied the promises of the Magna Carta.”

Speaker, before I share details of the support I received from various members of Ontario's legal community, I want to go back to Monday, August 11, 2008, to the Standing Committee on the Legislative Assembly that was discussing proposed changes to the standing orders. At about 9:15 a.m. on that day, there was some discussion about e-petitions, and the then NDP member from Welland, Peter Kormos, said, “The right to petition goes back to Magna Carta. It was the hard-earned right to petition the king, and it was an historical struggle. So that petition, the right to petition the king, is a Magna Carta-based right.” I will always remember Peter for his ability to fight for the underdog, as someone who fought for change and, if nothing else, drew attention to those things which he felt strongly about.

In preparation for today's debate, I also reached out to some distinguished members of Ontario's legal community for their thoughts in declaring June 15 Magna Carta Day. Aarondeep Bains, president of the South Asian Bar Association of Toronto, voiced his support, saying, “The rule of law is a critical aspect of our legal system and I am happy to celebrate one of its foundation stones.”

Joanna Baron, executive director of the Canadian Constitution Foundation, said: “The Magna Carta represents the bedrock of the principle of the rule of law and the

individual sphere of liberty against arbitrary power. The Canadian Constitution Foundation celebrates the life of Ms. Munro and applauds the introduction of the Magna Carta Day Act as an important recognition for all Ontarians.”

They say that life can only be understood backward; it must be lived forward. Magna Carta was the foundation. It started off what we enjoy today: the rules that we abide by in this House, the way we treat each other, the role of the government and the role of the opposition. We take a lot for granted with our parliamentary democracy that we inherited from the people who came before us, and who fought hard to preserve it.

MPP Munro introduced this Magna Carta bill three times. After today, this bill has been debated four times and considered by three different legislative committees. I leave you with a few words from our late colleague: “The ideas contained within the Magna Carta evolved over the centuries.... It signifies that no one, not even the crown, is above the law. That is such an important concept.”

Applause.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Order.

Further debate?

Mr. Percy Hatfield: Well, thank you, Speaker, and I thank my colleagues for the applause as I stood to speak this afternoon. It’s always a pleasure to stand in this House and represent the good people in my riding of Windsor–Tecumseh. We’re discussing the Magna Carta this afternoon, and I’m at a disadvantage, because it has all been pretty much said at this point. It’s 805 years and the last 12 minutes.

The facts are on the table. Yes, they did meet at Runnymede on the Thames, near Windsor. And how appropriate is that? Here I am, from Windsor, speaking to this bill here in the House today. I guess had it been in Ontario, perhaps the King and the barons would have had their showdown in Tecumseh, or maybe in Chatham along the Thames.

There were 25 barons, they were leading a demand for change, and you may or may not know that one of them was named Percy. I’m not making this up. That’s right. Historians describe him as a shadowy figure who stood out less vividly than some of the northern lords with whom he was associated. So not much has changed, as I stand in the shadows of the gentlemen from Temiskaming–Cochrane, Timmins, Algoma–Manitoulin, Mushkegowuk–James Bay, Kiiwetinoong and Sudbury, and, of course, my friend the lady from the great riding of Nickel Belt.

By the way, I say to my friend the chief government whip from Whitby, you may be interested in knowing this: Percy died in 1244 and is buried at Whitby Abbey. Now, that’s interesting. I mean, that’s six degrees of separation here, Speaker, because Whitby Abbey is in the Diocese of York, and, as you know, Julia Munro, of whom I’ll have more to say in a moment, represented York–Simcoe before the Minister of Transportation.

Now, the paperwork the barons and the King were working on coming to terms with, it wasn’t perfect. It needed revisions. Some might call them “reasoned amendments.” Speaker, 805 years ago, the need for reasoned

amendments was recognized as a foundation of democracy. The Magna Carta, the foundation of accountability and democracy, the iconic document described by some as England’s greatest export, required reasoned amendments, and here we are in this chamber this week removing the ability of the opposition to introduce reasoned amendments—six degrees of separation, Speaker.

I’ll turn now to Julia Munro, affectionately known around here by many of us as Lady Munro, who tried a couple of times before she retired, as Ontario’s longest-serving female MPP, to pass a similar bill recognizing Magna Carta Day. The Liberals didn’t deem it of significant merit at the time, so it wasn’t called for third reading. The Magna Carta gave us a right to a trial by jury, so my cheap shot of the day is, I guess you could say the voters, acting as a jury, passed sentence on the Liberals with the results of the last Ontario election. Julia Munro served this House, as we’ve been told, as a Deputy Speaker, as a party whip, parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Culture, she chaired the Management Board of Cabinet and served as the parliamentary assistant to Premier Mike Harris.

I remember, in opposition our desks weren’t that far apart and Julia used to get really upset every time the Liberals introduced time allocation to a bill, just like a lot of my colleagues on the other side of the House that were here in those days may well remember. Time allocation: I can just imagine, had she not retired and been here in this session of Parliament, what she would be saying in caucus about the over-abuse of time allocation. I’m proud to have known her and to be considered a friend, and I congratulate the member from Burlington for keeping her memory alive by introducing this bill.

Speaker, much has been written about the Magna Carta. My favourite is a poem by Marriott Edgar. Now, it’s much too long to read all of it here today, but I’ve edited it down for your consideration:

Some say it were wrong of the Barons
Their will on the King so to thrust,
But you’ll see if you look at both sides of the case
That they had to do something, or bust.

...

He squandered the ratepayers’ money,
And their cattle and corn did he take,
‘Til there wasn’t a morsel of bread in the land,
And folk had to manage on cake.

1540

Speaker, eventually the barons confront the King to demand changes, and Edgar gives us this memorial stanza:

The King starts to shilly and shally,
He sits and he haws and hums,
’Til the Barons in rage started gnashing their teeth,
And them with no teeth gnashed their gums.

Speaker, the poem eventually takes us to Runnymede near Windsor and the final showdown:

“You’d best sign at once,” said Fitzwalter,
 “If you don’t, I’ll tell thee for a start
 “The next coronation will happen quite soon,
 And you won’t be there to take part.”

This poem ends, Speaker:

And it’s through that there Magna Charter,
 As were signed by the Barons of old,
 That in England today we can do what we like,
 So long as we do what we’re told.

So Julia—Lady Munro—as we’ve heard, was a highly regarded teacher who didn’t always stand by and do what she was told. So I can imagine, again in caucus today, as an educator in caucus, when you’re talking about what I would say is a flawed back-to-school plan because it keeps changing on a daily basis, what she would be saying to her government colleagues about that plan, and I think she would be doing everything she could to stand up and protect the students, the educators and the system as a whole.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Further debate?

Hon. Caroline Mulroney: It is a privilege to rise in this House today to speak in support of An Act to proclaim Magna Carta Day and to pay tribute to the late Julia Munro.

This bill, as we heard today, was of great importance to Julia. She introduced it many times into this House, and I can tell you that it remains of great importance for the members of her family. Only a few months ago, I ran into John Munro, and he clearly shares the passion that Julia had for having this bill passed. While I’m very disappointed that because of the pandemic John and Genevieve could not be here with us today to see the members of this House debate this bill and pay tribute to Julia, I’m happy that they’re home watching it. I know that this is an important day for their family.

Lady Munro, as she was known, worked tirelessly over the 23 years she sat in this place and is the longest-serving female MPP in Ontario’s history. Lady Munro was called “Lady Munro” because of the dignified and distinguished way in which she comported herself. She was an inspiration, as we’ve heard today, and a role model for many women, but I know from the people I’ve spoken to in York–Simcoe that she was an inspiration and a role model for men and women alike.

We also heard that she ran in 1995 because she was tired of sitting around the kitchen table talking about issues and wanted to get involved. Julia had been involved in her community many times, fighting for issues of local importance quite successfully, but we are all so lucky and grateful that she took her fight to Queen’s Park.

She held several key positions on both sides of the House, from chief government whip to parliamentary

assistant to opposition critic to Deputy Chair of the Committee of the Whole House. But above all else, Julia Munro was the MPP for York–Simcoe.

I can tell you—and it has been repeated to me many times—that I have very big shoes to fill, and while she was small in stature, she left behind a significant legacy. She was elected to this House six times, a remarkable record, and even with all of those victories, she never once took her constituents for granted. For more than two decades, Julia advocated for her constituents with sincerity and vigour, knowing fully that being able to do so was a privilege.

Julia used to speak to me about the importance of knowing one’s core principles, and I’m sure that members who were in caucus with Julia probably heard that on many occasions. You have to know your principles and you should never, ever stray from them. In one of her last interviews as an MPP, she said, “It’s the people you represent and what matters most to them that should always be first and foremost.” Her sense of accountability to her constituents is something that every legislator—those of us here today, and those who will follow us—can learn from.

Before entering politics, Julia was a high school teacher for more than two decades. She understood the importance of knowing our history, and that’s what makes the Magna Carta Day Act, introduced by the member for Burlington, a fitting tribute for Julia. Julia had introduced this bill because she believed that a healthy democracy depended on our ability to understand its foundations. Julia used to have a licence plate holder that had the saying, “It’s our democracy. Don’t waste it.” Julia believed that our democracy is, she used to say, “unique and precious.” That was her core principle, and that’s why it’s important that we recognize it as such.

In closing, as both a recognition of the foundation of our form of government and as a tribute to my predecessor, I urge all members of this House to support this bill.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Further debate?

Hon. Doug Downey: The Magna Carta and Julia Munro: to paraphrase Julie Andrews in *The Sound of Music*, two of my favourite things. She was a wonderful woman, and it evokes that image of her for me. You can research and analyze the Magna Carta, so I’m not going to spend my limited time on that. I’d rather take a moment to share my thoughts on Julia Munro. I’m thrilled that John and Genevieve are watching. Her tenure as an MPP and her legacy making an impact is more than impressive. Again, you can look up some of those things.

I want to talk about the pre-elected Julia. It speaks to the essence of who I knew her to be. Julia was president of the Durham–York riding association, the provincial association, in 1992. The federal and provincial boundaries then weren’t aligned, and so there were some interesting politics and rivalry in some areas. Federally, it was York–Simcoe, but provincially it was Durham–York. I was on the far end of the York–Simcoe riding federally, and she was on the other end of York–Simcoe. This was

in 1993. John Cole was the MP. To put it lightly, the federal election led to a time of rebuilding for Conservatives. But instead of competing, it was Julia who, in her nature, encouraged a 23-year-old to become a riding president federally, and she promised to stay on the board even though she had provincial duties.

Her encouragement and grace are part of how I learned that politics could be done in a different way, and you can still get things done. That is very much why she's Lady Munro: because she had that grace about her, and she had the ability to get things done without compromising principles.

Of course, Julia ran in 1995, but she worked at it. It wasn't handed to her. Even after she finished teaching for 24 years, she kept teaching. She taught people around her. She taught history, and then she made history. She accepted anyone who wanted to help. She gave responsibility to people based on capacity and eagerness and no other measure. I have fond memories of doing politics with Genevieve and Maida Pallett and John-Paul Dowson and so many others that Julia encouraged to get involved.

But I would be remiss if I didn't point out that right from the start, her husband, John, was always there. You'd walk into a room, you could scan around—now, he's tall, so it's easier—and there's John supporting Julia at every single event. So in my mind, this bill is in memory of Julia, but it also reflects the support of John. This bill is a perfect testament to Julia Munro, because her legacy will be enduring, like the Magna Carta has been for so many.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Further debate?

Mr. John Vanthof: It's always an honour to be able to speak in this House on behalf of the good people of Timiskaming-Cochrane and on behalf of my party, and today, on Magna Carta Day, in memory of Julia Munro.

I'm not going to spend a lot of time talking about the Magna Carta in history, because if any of my history teachers are watching, they would be shocked and appalled; some of them are still wondering how I ever got here. But I cherish the ability to talk about Julia Munro, because when I got here, we shared the back lobby.

1550

Julia Munro wasn't called Lady Munro in our caucus. We didn't have the same relationship, but she was a lady to everyone. I can't emphasize that enough.

On several occasions, we would be sitting in the back and I'd be having a coffee, and I found out she loved dogs. I found out she loved farming, and if someone loves farming, then they're in, in my books.

Something very personal: She told me that once they were looking for a farm, and they came to look at a farm in what is now my riding. She was telling me about it and how they went to look, and I was very interested. But what she was saying and what I was thinking weren't exactly the same thing, because she was talking and I was thinking: If they had bought a farm there and I was ever going to run in politics, how could I ever run against somebody like Julia Munro?

Don't get me wrong: I disagree with her on policy, on several issues. But the one thing that she—the word

escapes me, but when people look at us from the outside, they shake their heads. When I looked at question period before I got elected, I shook my head. Sometimes here, I still shake my head. And I'm sure people shake their head at me too. But when you talked to Julia Munro, that's the kind of person—and I've had lots of conversations with people on all sides, but Julia was emblematic for me. We were elected in a minority Parliament. Minority Parliaments are very tense. I think they're actually a better government, but they're very tense. But when you talked to Julia, you could disagree vehemently on something and then sit in the back and have a great discussion about breeding animals. It's a testament to her.

Whoever had the opportunity to be taught history from a classy lady like Julia Munro, I think that was a great opportunity. The fact that she had the Magna Carta framed behind her desk is emblematic. And I hope that on this attempt, this actually becomes law, because I couldn't picture a better honour to be given to someone like Magna Carta Day on behalf of Lady Julia Munro.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Further debate?

Hon. Ernie Hardeman: I'm pleased today to rise to speak to the Magna Carta Day Act, which not only recognizes the importance of this more-than-800-year-old document, but it's also in memory of my dear friend Julia Munro, Ontario's longest-serving female MPP, who entered this Legislature—and I don't want to date myself—at the same time I did.

I want to say, Julia introduced this Magna Carta bill twice—three times; not twice, but three times—and got it through second reading all three times. Obviously, Madam Speaker, that shows the commitment she had and the importance she saw in bringing this forward to make sure that it remained part of our history. That's why, also, I'm so honoured to be speaking today to honour her for her passion on this Magna Carta bill and to give it the recognition it deserves here today.

Centuries from the signing of the Magna Carta by King John on the fields of medieval England, we can still see the powerful influence of this royal charter on Canada's—and the Commonwealth's—constitutional, political, legal and democratic systems. It provided the very foundation for our inheritance of common law and constitutional monarchy from Britain, and its crucial principles of individual rights, equality and liberties greatly informed the development and implementations of Canada's own Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

Clearly, the ongoing importance of the Magna Carta on our province, our country and the world cannot be overstated. By proclaiming June 15 of each year as Magna Carta Day in Ontario—the date on which King John originally placed his seal on the parchment—we can not only recognize this monumental text, but remember the tremendous service of the late Julia Munro to our province, and the lasting influence she had on us as MPPs in this Legislature and on Ontario.

I appreciate the chance to speak to this proposed bill, and obviously I don't get a long time to do it. I hope that

all of Julia's contributions here will be remembered and celebrated each year, not only for the Magna Carta bill, but for all her achievements.

I look forward to celebrating Magna Carta Day for many years to come.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Further debate?

Mr. Toby Barrett: I'm honoured to be asked to address Jane McKenna's Magna Carta Day Act to pay tribute to my former colleague MPP Julia Munro, who originated the legislation. I have so many memories of Julia—the class of 1995 and a fellow Common Sense Revolutionary—it was really sad to attend the funeral of a colleague.

It is particularly significant to do this today. As the Clerks' table would know, today is the 228th anniversary of this House, when the first meeting was held under John Graves Simcoe of this democratic institution.

I just want to mention, and I know we've got another speaker, the village of Langton in my riding took on special significance, celebrating the 800th anniversary of the Magna Carta three years ago. The Magna Carta was designed by the village's namesake, Stephen Langton, the Archbishop of Canterbury. A special mass was held which I attended. If you ever get down my way, there's a beautiful church, Sacred Heart Church, and there's a stunning stained glass window at the entrance to the church depicting Langton—this was in the village of Langton—presenting the Magna Carta to King John. That tells the story right there.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Further debate?

Mrs. Gila Martow: I'll just say that it was a pleasure and an honour to serve with Lady Munro. When I first got elected, I sat beside her. One day, I showed her a picture of my late mother, and we had a good laugh, because there was a remarkable similarity: same grey, short, cute haircut, same pretty face. Of course, she was a lot taller than my mom. My mother was a history buff, a college professor; I wish they could have known each other.

I want to thank my colleagues for supporting this. I think it's a great tribute to Lady Munro. I look forward to the first Magna Carta Day in Ontario, celebrated with Julia Munro's wonderful husband, John, and her beautiful daughter, Genevieve.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Further debate? Further debate? Further debate?

Seeing none, I return to the member from Burlington for her two-minute reply.

Ms. Jane McKenna: First and foremost, I want to thank John and Genevieve. Thank you for sharing your beloved mother and wife with us. I sat with your mom and your wife when I first got in here, and the first thing that Julia said to me was, "Democracy is for debate, not disrespect." I learned so much from her, sitting here. I say she was a stateswoman all the time. She taught and continued teaching even long after being in here, and was a great mentor for myself. It was a privilege to be part of this today. I want to thank everybody who spoke here

today. It means everything for John and Genevieve, and it's just a wonderful tribute to Lady Munro.

For this, Lady Munro, thank you. This is for you today. Thank you so much for all that you've done for everybody here.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): The time provided for private members' public business has expired.

PUBLIC HEALTH

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): We will deal first with ballot item number 8, standing in the name of Mr. Yarde.

Mr. Yarde has moved private member's notice of motion number 105. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? I heard a no.

All those in favour of the motion will please say "aye."

All those opposed to the motion will please say "nay."

In my opinion, the ayes have it.

We will deal with this vote after we have finished other business.

EDUCATION FUNDING

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Ms. Horwath has moved private member's notice of motion number 106. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? I heard a no.

All those in favour of the motion will please say "aye."

All those opposed to the motion will please say "nay."

In my opinion, the nays have it.

We will deal with this vote after we finish the other business.

MAGNA CARTA DAY ACT (IN MEMORY OF JULIA MUNRO, MPP), 2020

LOI DE 2020 SUR LE JOUR DE LA GRANDE CHARTE (À LA MÉMOIRE DE JULIA MUNRO, DÉPUTÉE PROVINCIALE)

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Ms. McKenna has moved second reading of Bill 201, An Act to proclaim Magna Carta Day. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? I declare the motion carried.

Second reading agreed to.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Which committee?

Ms. Jane McKenna: Regs and private bills.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Is the majority in favour of this bill being referred to the Standing Committee on Regulations and Private Bills? Okay.

PUBLIC HEALTH

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): We have a recorded vote on private member's notice of motion number 105. The bells will ring for 30 minutes, during

which time members may cast their votes. Prepare the lobbies.

The division bells rang from 1603 to 1633.

The Clerk of the Assembly (Mr. Todd Decker): The ayes are 81; the nays are 0.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): I declare the motion carried.

Motion agreed to.

EDUCATION FUNDING

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): We have a recorded vote on private member's notice of motion number 106. The bells will ring for 30 minutes, during which time members may cast their votes. Prepare the lobbies.

The division bells rang from 1635 to 1705.

The Clerk of the Assembly (Mr. Todd Decker): The ayes are 29; the nays are 54.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): I declare the motion lost.

Motion negatived.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

LEGISLATIVE REFORM

Resuming the debate adjourned on September 16, 2020, on the amendment to the motion, as amended, regarding amendments to the standing orders.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): I recognize the member from Davenport.

Ms. Marit Stiles: I'm going to pick up on the debate now on behalf of my constituents of the great riding of Davenport. Just for those tuning in now, this is a debate on government motion 88, which changes the standing orders of this Legislature. In some ways, as I was explaining yesterday, it actually really waters down in particular the tools that we have in opposition, but that all MPPs in this House have to bring the voices of their constituents and stakeholders, and ensure that there is real, meaningful debate and discussion of legislation in this House.

I was expressing some of the reasons why I have concerns, why some of my constituents certainly have concerns, and I was going to just raise a few little examples here of the kinds of legislation where we have in the past used a reasoned amendment, for example, to allow for some time to actually connect with stakeholders, engage with our communities. I'm fortunate; my riding is here in the city of Toronto. It's easy for me to get out there and maybe even make a few calls at the last minute to people. But many of my colleagues are in other parts of the province. It takes them time to get home. They need to have more than one evening's notice to be able to come back and have a meaningful debate on an issue.

So Bill 195, the so-called reopening Ontario act, a bill where there were many civil liberties concerns; another one that, of course, I wanted to point out was Bill 197,

which, in my riding, was really a big concern to many and continues to be. I will remind everyone that in that omnibus legislation there were changes to environmental assessments. Then, after the fact, Ontario's Auditor General actually stated that the Ford government was not compliant by failing to post the changes in Bill 197 on the Environmental Registry for the full 30 days that should have been allowed to have public consultation. So not only would it be rushed through even more under these changes to the standing orders, but it would—in fact, it already contravened the Environmental Registry.

Anyways, I'm not going to share too many more examples of that, but it gives you a sense of the kinds of legislation that really impact people's day-to-day lives, that have far-reaching implications, that we need to be able to have just the notice, really. And that's what we're asking for, at least 48 hours' notice. That's the amendment we've presented; 48 hours between the introduction of a bill and the ability that we have to actually debate it.

1710

The member from Windsor West and the member from Hamilton Mountain yesterday spoke really eloquently, I thought, about our role and our privilege in being elected to this place. This government has taken for granted, I think it's fair to say, the people of this province. They need to stop and reflect on who it is that put them here and who they represent because, as government, it is everyone—not just the people who they agree with or who agree with them, but everyone—and to give voice to those people who actually care about the issues, whether or not you agree with them, and provide opportunity for reasonable debate and amendments to be considered.

Finally, I want to reflect for a moment on what this motion doesn't do. It doesn't address the many urgent issues that my community is facing. It doesn't cap class sizes and, unfortunately, the government just defeated our motion to cap class sizes at 15 on the very day that they moved forward in reducing the number of people who can meet indoors to 10, in many parts of this province. But for some reason, our children don't rank as people, I guess, in our schools, or our education workers. There's a different set of rules and standards for them. It's very, very unfortunate.

It doesn't provide additional and urgent support for our small businesses, which, I can tell you, in my community, like in communities across this province, are really struggling. The eviction notices and the closed signs are going up every day, and it is not ending any time soon. Certainly, if we don't get those restrictions around class sizes dealt with and we don't get safe spaces for our students in schools, and the ability to physically distance on buses and in school classrooms, then we're heading in the very wrong direction and it will continue to impact our communities and small businesses.

It doesn't help our desperately damaged tourism industry, and I had the great pleasure of meeting with many representatives of the tourism industry the other day, many of whom work and live in my community. We know it's a massive industry and has huge economic implications beyond the actual industry—far-reaching.

It doesn't help the single mom who has lost her job or who has no other opportunities right now and who is evicted from her apartment because she lost her job. It doesn't help the many, many people on ODSP and Ontario Works, who show up in absolute droves at community dinners—not so much right now, although the lineups at the food banks are really extraordinary. But if I think of those folks who I would go and help serve community dinners to on weekends in churches and stuff in my community, who come at the end of the month—actually, almost midway through the month—with containers so they can fill up the containers, because their ODSP or OW cheques will not last them the month. It's sobering, is what that is.

It doesn't help our schools that are crumbling. It doesn't help our long-term-care residents and the workers who care for them and who have paid such a price in this pandemic, and who don't have the answers yet about how this government so brutally let them down. So unfortunately, Madam Speaker, I wish that there was something else we were debating here today other than something that will continue to weaken our democracy, especially at this time.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Further debate?

Mrs. Nina Tangri: I'm very pleased to stand and speak in support of the motion before us today updating the assembly's standing orders.

The proceedings within this chamber, the operations of government as a whole and Parliament as an institution are deeply valued and guided by years and years of rule and tradition—not just from Ontario's Parliament, but British Parliament before that. I value these traditions; I really do. The weight of hundreds of years of parliamentary proceedings and traditions reminds me what an honour it is to be here as a representative of the Ontario people each and every day. I hope that no matter which side of the aisle we are all on, we can all agree on that.

Some of these traditions are ceremonial. The Speaker's procession starts the parliamentary day, dating back to England hundreds of years ago. The black tricorne hats the Speaker and our Clerk and table Clerks wear date back to the 17th and 18th centuries. The use of a mace dates back to the 14th century in Britain, but today symbolizes your authority, Speaker, to oversee this Legislature. These are the types of things we're not proposing to change.

What we are proposing is to update some of the rules that govern House business. Doing so will strengthen and improve our democracy, solidify temporary provisions and increase the prominence of private members' public business. These will not be the first changes to the standing orders in this session of Parliament. We passed changes in the last fall session to empower independent members, enhance debate and allow the accommodation and full participation of MPPs with disabilities.

The changes in the motion before us today will similarly improve the way the House operates. The proposed changes will, specifically, enhance debate and allow more time for it, improve the prominence of private members'

public business and create provisions for debates on issues of significant provincial importance.

I'll begin with private members' public business. The proposed changes will elevate the importance of private members' public business by changing the House schedule under standing order 9(a). Private members' public business, currently scheduled to be debated back to back to back on a Thursday afternoon, as we have just seen today, will instead be spread over three days: Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday, with one item being debated each day at 6 p.m. Grouping PMBs together meant that if a member wasn't present for debate that afternoon, they missed the entire week's PMBs. Debating a PMB each day will ensure that as many members are able to participate in this important aspect of the Legislature's operations as possible.

Private members' bills are the opportunity that each elected representative has to put forward a potential law or champion an interest near and dear to their hearts, and their importance cannot be underestimated. This change will elevate this type of business to the same status as other parliamentary business, where it rightfully belongs.

The change is also important in terms of engaging stakeholders and members of our communities. It is typical for a member debating a PMB to bring stakeholders and community members to the Legislature during the debate to watch the proceedings. But for many, coming to Toronto in the middle of the day is not an option. This change will enable greater participation in the legislative process and provide predictability.

Does beginning debate at 6 o'clock mean that we could be extending our work day? Absolutely, it does. Our government has shown time and time again that we will work at any and all hours of the day for the sake of our communities and the people of Ontario, and I hope that members opposite are willing to do the same. But should a member not be here that evening, they will have an opportunity to vote on an item requiring a recorded division during deferred votes the next sessional day.

While we continued sitting over the summer, passing legislation to protect and support the people of Ontario through the COVID-19 pandemic, this did not include private members' public business. As a result, we are now behind on approximately 27 PMBs that would have already otherwise been brought for debate. By temporarily expanding the PMB schedule to include a fourth item on Monday mornings at 9 o'clock, we will make significant progress in catching up to where we would have been in the spring of 2021. Private members' public business is important, and this change will ensure that every member gets their opportunity.

Another aspect of these proposed changes is to ensure the flow of legislative business. We are proposing changes to enhance debate and enhance accountability and scrutiny, which I will get to shortly. We are also proposing to remove reasoned amendments.

Reasoned amendments, as some of my colleagues have stated, have become somewhat routine in this Parliament. In the 36th and 37th Parliaments, they weren't used at all;

in the 38th Parliament, they were used only once; in the 39th Parliament, they were used seven times; in the 40th Parliament, a minority Parliament, they weren't even used; and in the last Parliament, reasoned amendments were used six times. But, in this Parliament, Speaker, they were used 26 times—26 times.

1720

Bills will still have to be introduced the day before they are debated, they can be amended at committee, and another aspect of debate we are proposing to introduce is report-stage debate, creating further opportunity for debate in the Legislature.

Currently, when a bill is reported back to the House from a committee, it can be voted on, but it cannot be debated. We are proposing that any 12 members may stand up to request that a debate happen on a bill as it is reported back from committee prior to a vote on it. This debate can be up to 30 minutes in length, with six minutes allocated to the independent members and the remaining time split equally amongst the recognized parties. This is constructive time that can be used to discuss the bill further, especially as it pertains to changes made at the committee stage. But reasoned amendments are not productive. They're put forward before the bill is even considered, and simply stall legislative business for the purpose of stalling.

One of the key priorities as it pertains to the Legislature for the House leader and the Premier was making sure that question period continued, so that important questions could be asked of our government and to ensure we were held to account for the actions we were taking and the measures we were proposing. That's true accountability and true leadership.

We would like to further strengthen the role of the opposition during question period by providing two of the government's question period questions to the independent members. These changes will improve our question period and strengthen it further.

We are proposing other changes to support our independent members too. Namely, we would like to make temporary provisions allowing independent members to substitute for each other on committee permanent. Just as MPPs from a recognized party can, independent members can substitute for each other at committee; however, the ability is only temporary for the 42nd Parliament—

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Sorry to interrupt the member, but, pursuant to standing order 50(c), I am now required to interrupt the proceedings and announce there has been six and a half hours of debate on the motion for second reading of this motion. This debate will, therefore, be deemed adjourned unless the government House leader directs that the debate continue.

Hon. Paul Calandra: I'm enjoying the speech so much that I wish for the debate to continue.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): I return to the member for Mississauga–Streetsville, if she'd like to continue.

Mrs. Nina Tangri: As I was saying—the proposed changes to support our independent members that would now allow them to substitute for each other on committee

permanent. Making this permanent will allow independent members, of their own accord, to arrange substitutions with other independent members. Currently, almost 10% of our MPPs are classified as independent members. We believe that the role they play is just as important as that of the recognized opposition party and that they should be able to participate in House business the same.

On the topic of predictability and flow of House business, we would like to allow the deferral of closure votes so that the schedule of the House can be more predictable and so more members can have the opportunity to vote. Currently, votes on closure must happen immediately when they are requested by a member. Under the proposed changes, these votes, like most others, could be deferred to the following day and be taken up at deferred votes. Making this change will make the flow of business more predictable and better allow all members the opportunity to vote on all legislative business.

Currently, closure votes may happen with little or no warning, at any time of day, and members have 30 minutes in order to vote. If these votes were deferred, like many others can be, members can plan other business and commit to other obligations without the fear of missing a vote in which they wanted to participate. We have all been in meetings and had to run to the chamber because the bells have been ringing. This is not productive. The changes will ensure that as many members can participate in votes as possible.

While we have the ability to debate bills and motions, as we all know and have done countless times, we don't have a tool to hold longer debates on a substantially important issue without a vote at the end. Sometimes, where there is need for recognition of an issue or event of significance, all sides can come to an agreement for a moment of silence or to set aside time to debate a motion on a subject, but these debates take place within the regular flow of business and are not particularly notable or noticed. This type of debate would be up to four hours in length. It could occur during the regular day, though will usually occur in the evening, after the House would normally adjourn. The debate could be triggered by a minister, upon consultation with the House leaders of the recognized parties, and members could debate in rotation, making speeches up to 10 minutes in length. Importantly, there is no vote or division at the end of a take-note debate. It is a tool to allow for an open, thoughtful and constructive debate on a matter of significance.

Over the past several years, we can see many opportunities for such tools to be used; of course, currently and top of mind, the COVID-19 pandemic. Take-note debates have been held in the House of Commons on such items as the international campaign against terror in 2001, Iraq in 2003, mad cow disease in 2004 and Canada's deployment to Afghanistan in 2005. In 1994, when it was first introduced, the government used this debate to consult members on the future of peacekeeping in the former Yugoslavia.

As I described earlier, we were able to pass changes to the standing orders last fall that have led to significant improvements in the way the House has operated. But

there are a few loose ends that need tightening up, and that's why we're making the changes.

Beginning in February, the House was subject to revised standing orders, including rules for a 10-minute question-and-answer period following a member's speech. Under the current rules, a speech of any length is followed up by 10 minutes of question and answer. What we now see is that this rule was inflexible. If a member makes a speech for one minute, three minutes, 15 seconds even, they can receive up to 10 minutes of questioning from other members.

Under the proposed rule, if a member makes a speech shorter than 10 minutes, their Q&A period will be reduced to five minutes. I much prefer question and answer over the old format of business and I believe most of us find this time productive. It is a good system, but requires an adjustment for short speeches to make it more practical and equitable.

A separate provision was included in the last standing orders to prevent a bill from being called for debate in the morning, afternoon and night sitting of a single day. The language used contained a loophole that would allow this to be done in some specific cases. We are closing this loophole.

We are also recognizing the modernization of the House, especially in the past two decades, and are revising standing orders 117 and 138(d). Currently, standing order 117 requires the Clerk to physically post a list of members serving on each standing and select committee. The reality is, this physically posted list was very rarely, if ever, consulted. The information is available on the assembly's Internet and intranet sites, and is available through our caucus and whips' offices. It is no longer necessary. Standing order 138(d) similarly requires the Clerk of the House to "appoint a Clerk whose duty it shall be under the Clerk's direction ... to post on all notice boards a notice of all committee meetings for the following week." In both cases, the requirements for physical postings will be replaced with the requirement of publishing.

Speaker, like previous changes, these are changes to the way we do business that make sense. They increase the importance of our private members' business; allow for increased, more thoughtful debate and accountability by members of the opposition; recognize and enhance the increasingly important role of independent members; and make sure that the House is operating in a sensible and thoughtful way, as it should be.

1730

The last changes passed with the support of the independent members, and it would be great to see these changes pass with support from across the aisle, too, because these changes work for all of us. We want to work with members of the opposition and the independent members, especially when it comes to the business of the House. The past few months have proven that we can do things collaboratively, and I implore all of us to keep things this way.

I am supporting this motion and encourage others to do the same. Thank you to the government House leader for bringing this forward.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Further debate?

Ms. Doly Begum: I rise today to speak on behalf of my incredible constituents in Scarborough Southwest, who have entrusted me to represent their voices, to bring their voices in this Legislature. I have over 110,000 people who believe in democracy, who believe in being heard, and through the various procedures in this Legislature, that is how we make sure that our constituents are being heard.

Over the last few days, we have heard government members talk about reasoned amendments. It's truly incredible to talk about the standing orders. As for myself, I step back a little bit and wonder how someone who looks like me is standing here, representing the good people of Scarborough Southwest, because if you look at the portraits in this building, they don't usually look like me. There are a lot of people I represent in Scarborough who don't look like the people in the portraits and the majority of members in this House. But history is changing, and we are part of that history. What happens today, what happens tomorrow, what happens to this government, and the decisions that this government makes with the standing orders will be part of history. It will determine how these voices of people—the marginalized communities in Scarborough and the many, many groups of people across this province—are heard.

I think of the incredible people of my community who are struggling right now. They're working so hard and yet they're struggling. I want to focus on this because I think it really relates to what we're debating right now and what's missing from this bill. I want to share some stories. When I told them that I'm going back in the House and that we'll be debating the standing order changes—well, first, they said, "Didn't you just do that a few months back?" As the deputy whip for the official opposition, I get to share a lot of these new experiences I'm having in this House—because it's very new for me, for my family, for many of the constituents I represent. It's almost unreal. So I share a lot of these experiences. When I told them about the standing orders, these rules that guide us, how we operate in this House, and what it means—because the true essence of democracy, the real way we can trust government is wrapped around the way the House operates, because that's the only way we can ensure that all the members in this House are bringing in the true concerns, the voices of the hundreds of thousands of people we represent.

Over the last seven months or so—and I can't believe it has been over seven months, thinking about COVID-19—we have heard so many concerns. The fact that we're not debating issues like pandemic pay, the fact that we're not debating class sizes—we just had the vote. It was mind-boggling that we just voted and the government voted against reducing class sizes, something that is so essential—and we are hearing over and over from so many parents, and I just want to share a few stories from so many constituents.

Over the last six or seven months, I made a promise to myself: We're going to make sure that we're being

effective. We're going to work with this government, because these are unprecedented times. We have to make sure that we are supporting the government when they are taking good steps. As opposition members, we are going to point out the gaps and propose solutions so that they can do a better job. Isn't that what opposition means? Isn't that really the whole point of having Parliament and opposition members? Isn't that a pillar of democracy? If we are limiting the time that we have for opposition members to propose reasoned amendments, for example, for any bills that government brings forward, aren't we limiting democracy?

When I cannot share stories—for example, I have one constituent whose wife is a teacher, and he wrote to me recently about ventilation. We have heard the government talk a lot about spending money for ventilation, and we're pointing out that no, you haven't done a good job. Yes, we know that the Liberal government had made a huge, huge backlog in repair, and it's across the province, but my community is suffering. We have schools where the repair cost is almost the same as building a new school.

This constituent wrote to me and said, "My wife was in her classroom a few times this week trying to set it up. The classroom's two windows only open up a few inches so it was very hot even without children in the room. After spending the first day moving desks around trying to find an optimum set-up, she found, on the second day, that her 21 students can only be accommodated with a spacing of less than 80 centimetres. That's not even one metre, when the minimum recommended distance between people is two metres. In other words, it is impossible to safely put the children in there at the recommended distances.

"Also, the children are supposed to bring in their own water bottles. Kids drink a lot of water. All drinking fountains and filling stations have been disabled and the sink in the classroom is unsuitable for drinking. So there is no potable water in the building." I don't even know what to feel for these kids who are going back to these classrooms.

I have another constituent who shared, "How are kids supposed to access books with all TDSB libraries closed? Our teacher asked us to send books with the kids, but we don't keep a large collection as we use the library. Local library selection is super-limited as well now with long wait-lists on children's books. How will the new coding requirement be executed with no library access and no librarians in school?"

I'll end with one more example about education. This one is about kids who are just finishing up and are about to graduate. "How will they ensure that grade 12 students in designated and non-designated boards will be able to take the required academic courses in calculus and vectors, advanced functions, English, physics, chemistry, biology, computer science etc. so that they are eligible to apply to health sciences, software engineering, biomedical engineering, computer science etc. at universities, for example the University of Waterloo, McMaster, U of T, York etc.? Also if students currently in grade 11 aren't allowed to take these or similar courses now, they can't take them in

grade 12 either. The registration for university applications will be starting soon, and" for the last one, "pre-COVID, the deadline was in January."

Madam Speaker, I share this because I'm really concerned that when this bill passes and the standing orders change, if we're not allowed to propose reasoned amendments, which is where we would bring in these stories, we would not be able to share many of the stories that our constituents bring forward.

It's really troubling to hear government members today talk about how we in the opposition have brought so many reasoned amendments and how problematic that is, so what we did was we actually went back to some of the government members' Hansard records and the things that they have spoken about. For ministers who were once sitting on this side of the House, we looked at what they said about reasoned amendments.

Madam Speaker, if you'll bear with me, I would like to share first from the Minister of Economic Development, Job Creation and Trade. This is what he said in 2017, on May 18, about reasoned amendments: "We have filed a reasoned amendment to do just what it sounds like—to be reasonable in the amount of time given and to be reasonable in the response. This is too important to get wrong."

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I agree with him. Everything that we do in this House, the decisions that we make about the people of this province are way too important to get wrong—and that's what's happening right now.

I want to quote another one from the minister from 2017:

"The Ontario PC caucus is extremely disappointed with this government's decision to introduce yet another omnibus bill—Bill 177—in a bid to ram through unrelated legislation without proper debate and consideration in the Legislature in order to score political points against their opponents.

"Again, what I mean by 'ram through' is, very few people on this side of the Legislature were allowed any opportunity to speak. They were not given a chance to speak to this. This government imposed closure. They imposed time allocation. They rammed this through without any opportunity."

This is coming from Minister Fedeli, Minister of Economic Development, Job Creation and Trade. It's really incredible. Folks, everyone watching, this is out there; it's on record. It's just that times have changed. In two years, times will change again. People are watching. We can all shift these seats, and the fact that we have the privilege of standing here—these seats do not belong to us; they belong to the people of this province. They trusted us with their vote so that we can represent their voices and be in these seats. What we say here matters. What we do here matters.

I want to take another quote from the Minister of Government and Consumer Services from 2018:

"Today we can expect a tired, out-of-touch government"—she was talking about the Liberal government,

which was very out of touch—“to make a lot of excuses. Speaker, I expect them to reiterate the Premier’s accusation that our reasoned amendment last week was a stall tactic, but honestly, we had not been briefed and we had not been given time to ask our questions. There is a very good reason why that reasoned amendment came to the House. I have to tell the people watching today that this tired, old government will try to spin what’s happening right now into some sort of justification of their complete disregard for a legislative process. But nothing could be further from the truth.”

That’s coming from the Conservative Minister of Government and Consumer Services and the former Minister of Education. This is incredible. Being the deputy whip for the official opposition, I have been sitting in the House team meetings, and it’s incredible, because we just don’t have enough information—just like the minister is talking about what the Liberals did to them. I am speechless. How can you function as a democracy, how are you actually bringing in the voices of the people if you’re not even sharing information with members in the House or the people you represent?

I want to tell you about the amount of people who have reached out, the amount of educators who have reached out, who don’t know what’s happening, who don’t have enough information, who don’t have enough clarity. These people want to know what’s going on with the funding, for example. One constituent wrote to me, and this constituent is concerned about the lack of funding for students with disabilities. They’re in the dark because they don’t have enough information about what’s happening with the legislation that is being passed.

What the standing orders changes will do is that they will allow you to ram through exactly what the Minister of Economic Development, Job Creation and Trade was speaking against when he was sitting in the opposition seats. What the changes will do is take away that opportunity from members on this side to debate and bring in these concerns.

I want to take a moment to share what’s happening with students with disabilities, because this constituent is concerned. Families lost therapy that was provided to them through the school system, so what they’re doing now is buying private services. Upon learning from the accountability officer that about \$6.7 billion—the government is sitting on \$6.7 billion; it’s just sitting there—they wondered why they were told that there was not enough money for everyone. This family asked: Who are they if not part of everyone? Madam Speaker, I had no answer for them. It’s heartbreaking. It’s heartbreaking to see these questions, to get these messages and emails and correspondence from these constituents and not have a response, because these people are hurting.

We have so many tenants who are struggling right now. We have a Landlord and Tenant Board that is processing these applications without enough people to process applications. We have small landlords that are struggling to get a hearing because there are thousands and thousands of people waiting.

All these decisions were made in the past few weeks, and they were rammed through. But now the government wants to make it even faster. They want to make it even faster and take away—and the reason I’m mostly focusing on reasoned amendments is because that was one opportunity for opposition to bring in some ways to make sure that we get it right, to make sure that we bring in changes that help people with all these different issues that people are facing right now.

With the Landlord and Tenant Board, we have over 5,000 applications right now. Recently, I talked to one small landlord who’s still figuring out what to do because she can’t keep up with her mortgage. She is a single mother. That’s part of her income. She can’t keep up.

I have four buildings where people are threatened by the management, where they don’t know what’s going to happen because they have months and months of outstanding rents that they have to pay, and they can’t figure out what to do because this government made it okay to evict people during a pandemic.

Now, if they ram through legislation even faster without giving the opportunity to the opposition to actually hear the other side, which is part of democracy, it will be impossible to even bring in these concerns. It should be criminal to do something like this. Some of the reasoned amendments they pointed out—and I want to highlight some of the reasoned amendments that were brought forward by the official opposition, by the NDP, over the last two years—

Mr. Sheref Sabawy: Point of order.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Have a seat, please.

I recognize the member from Mississauga—Erin Mills on a point of order.

Mr. Sheref Sabawy: I think using the language of criminalizing what we are trying to do is not acceptable. I ask the member to withdraw that.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Thank you. I will remind the member that the language needs to be parliamentary. We’ll be able to continue debate, certainly, on this motion, and she can keep it germane to the topic as well.

Ms. Doly Begum: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

I want to remind the House of one of the most recent reasoned amendments that was brought forward by the NDP, the official opposition, and that was when the government was trying to attack the environment. One of the reasoned amendments that was brought forward by the member from Timmins was to ask for a report on the judicial process and what the consequences will be if that bill passed.

And what is incredible is that we were able to actually look at the consequences. We were able to understand how this legislation will impact Ontarians, how this legislation will impact the people of this province, but also the environment. With this report, we were actually able to do an incredible amount of work and let the people know what this would mean and make sure that we proposed to the government how we could make this bill better.

And you know what? Let's be honest with ourselves. With the way the government is ramming through different bills, people don't even know or understand what's going on, nor does the media, because they don't have enough time to be able to process through the legislation, because you can propose one on Tuesday, start debating on Wednesday and pass it through on Thursday. With the languages and everything, for myself as a new member who has been elected now for two years, two and a half years, I'm still learning the process. I cannot imagine what my constituents will have to go through to understand what is actually happening when government proposes legislation. What does it mean for them? How will it impact them?

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Not only are they trying to ram through legislation, but what I fear is that they are trying to do a lot of things that will hurt the people of this province, that will hurt things like the environment, that will hurt tenants, students, educators, parents. They want to get it through as fast as possible so that people don't question them. And let's be honest: That's undemocratic. This is not the job that the people of this province elected us to do.

Let's step back a little bit. Let's reassess what this bill will do and make sure that we are doing the job we're here to do, which is to represent the voices of the people of this province.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Further debate?

Mr. Sherif Sabawy: I am very glad to stand today to speak to this piece of legislation which, in my opinion, is actually enhancing the processes of this respected Legislature.

We need to look into it from the spirit of it, like why we are doing it, why we are trying to do that. I of course respect the member of the opposition talking about five years ago and eight years ago and stuff like that, which I really respect and everything; but we are in a pandemic. We are in COVID-19. We need to be able to respond faster. We need to be able to help the public. We need to be able to react to emerging situations with the changes needed to be able to control the pandemic or take decisions which can affect the lives of people.

That's the whole spirit of what we are here for. We are here to represent the people, to be the voice of the people and to make sure that we are protecting the people, as our government does. We need to protect what's the most important for us, which is the safety and health of people. Taking decisions—sometimes time really matters. Taking decisions in a timely manner could save lives.

What we are proposing today is actually, I would say, in a few categories. One of them is enhancing the existing procedures. With all respect to the discussions going on, I don't believe that what we are using today was the procedure we were using 10 years ago. It's dynamic. We need to keep changing to cope with situations, at the same time keeping—as the respected member for Streetsville said, we are keeping the tradition, we are keeping the ceremonial part of it, but at the same time, we need to

make it practical. We need to enhance the process. With the changes we—I think we did some changes earlier. About a year ago, we did some changes which I think were reflected very nicely in the flow of the procedures. Today this piece is adding, again, a few changes, which are, in my opinion, needed for us to be more flexible in doing this.

One of the proposals is the private members' bills. Private members' bills were supposed to be discussed and debated on Thursdays, when a lot of members, especially who are not in the GTA or close by—they are in far ridings—they plan to leave to go to their ridings, and they are not having the chance to be here. Some of the stakeholders, some of the ministers cannot be here for discussing private members' bills, which can enhance their duties as well.

Private members' bills are a very important and integral part of these procedures. By changing that to make it one private member's bill a day is actually allowing more members of provincial Parliament to be there, more stakeholders to be there, and also, we are proposing adding one more, a fourth, Monday—Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday, and adding one more to that. Especially with the fact that, through the pandemic summer and the changes which we had to do for COVID-19, there are about 27 private members' bills that could not be discussed, they are back-ordered, and we need to catch up with this.

Another consideration of the new piece of legislation is requiring all those recorded divisions on PMBs to be deferred for the following day after question period. In that case, more members will have the opportunity to vote for them, especially since private members' bills vary in areas of interest for people. Not everyone can usually be here for that, the debating or voting for this. Adding it after question period is allowing more people to vote, representing the majority of us.

Another proposed change is the times. Again, with all due respect to the opposition member who talked about the allocation of time, I think this is a more fair way, more equitable in adjusting the length of the question period. If I'm speaking for less than five minutes, why should the questioning be 10 minutes? It doesn't make sense. It's not proportionally suitable for this. Also, the inflexibility of this current rule—theoretically, a member can speak for one minute, or even a few seconds, and take 10 minutes in questions.

Another part of the changes is creating a provision for take-note debates, which are longer debates on issues of substantial importance, and allowing these debates to take place after the House would normally adjourn so that they can happen without impacting other business. We are not talking about eliminating it; we are just saying we are making it more flexible, so that we can talk about these issues of interest without impacting the flow of the business we are trying to get through.

The take-note debate would take up to four hours in length and could occur during the regular day, but would usually occur in the evenings, after the House would normally adjourn. This debate could be triggered by a minister, upon consultation with the House leaders of the

recognized parties, and members would debate in rotations, making speeches up to 10 minutes in length. There is no vote at the end of the take-note debate; the purpose is to simply take note of an issue of significance.

It also helps the government to allow the members to raise awareness of issues to the government, so that the decisions—again, back to the opposition member who was talking about raising awareness or flagging some issues to the government, and making sure the government is aware of that or making a decision based on this: This is exactly what we are trying to do. We are allowing this through the take-note debate, with no vote at the end of that, just to make sure that everyone can voice their concerns and that we are aware of this before making any decisions.

Now, allowing the deferral of closure votes so the schedule of the House can be more predictable: I can't

emphasize how important this is, because with the short notice—the maximum of the bells is 30 minutes. I think that lots of times, ministers and even—for example, as a PA in one ministry, it's actually about 20 minutes walking from here, so I can't even go to the building, because if I come to the building, I wouldn't be able to catch the vote. So we can't predict that. I think it's more predictable to be able to have our schedule and be here for the voting without getting surprised.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Thank you.

Debate deemed adjourned.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): It being 6 o'clock, this House stands adjourned until Monday, September 21 at 10:15 a.m.

The House adjourned at 1800.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO
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Fife, Catherine (NDP)	Waterloo	

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Gill, Parm (PC)	Milton	
Glover, Chris (NDP)	Spadina—Fort York	
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Harris, Mike (PC)	Kitchener—Conestoga	
Hassan, Faisal (NDP)	York South—Weston / York-Sud— Weston	
Hatfield, Percy (NDP)	Windsor—Tecumseh	Second Deputy Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Deuxième vice-président du comité plénier de l'Assemblée législative
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Lindo, Laura Mae (NDP)	Kitchener Centre / Kitchener-Centre	
MacLeod, Hon. / L'hon. Lisa (PC)	Nepean	Minister of Heritage, Sport, Tourism and Culture Industries / ministre des Industries du patrimoine, du sport, du tourisme et de la culture
Mamakwa, Sol (NDP)	Kiiwetinoong	
Mantha, Michael (NDP)	Algoma—Manitoulin	
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Martow, Gila (PC)	Thornhill	
McDonell, Jim (PC)	Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry	
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McNaughton, Hon. / L'hon. Monte (PC)	Lambton—Kent—Middlesex	Minister of Labour, Training and Skills Development / Ministre du Travail, de la Formation et du Développement des compétences
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Miller, Paul (NDP)	Hamilton East—Stoney Creek / Hamilton-Est—Stoney Creek	
Mitas, Christina Maria (PC)	Scarborough Centre / Scarborough- Centre	
Monteith-Farrell, Judith (NDP)	Thunder Bay—Atikokan	
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Romano, Hon. / L'hon. Ross (PC)	Sault Ste. Marie	Minister of Colleges and Universities / Ministre des Collèges et Universités
Sabawy, Sheref (PC)	Mississauga—Erin Mills	
Sandhu, Amarjot (PC)	Brampton West / Brampton-Ouest	
Sarkaria, Hon. / L'hon. Prabmeet Singh (PC)	Brampton South / Brampton-Sud	Associate Minister of Small Business and Red Tape Reduction / Ministre associé délégué au dossier des Petites Entreprises et de la Réduction des formalités administratives Minister Without Portfolio / Ministre sans portefeuille
Sattler, Peggy (NDP)	London West / London-Ouest	Deputy Opposition House Leader / Leader parlementaire adjointe de l'opposition officielle
Schreiner, Mike (GRN)	Guelph	
Scott, Hon. / L'hon. Laurie (PC)	Haliburton—Kawartha Lakes—Brock	Minister of Infrastructure
Shaw, Sandy (NDP)	Hamilton West—Ancaster—Dundas / Hamilton-Ouest—Ancaster—Dundas	
Simard, Amanda (LIB)	Glengarry—Prescott—Russell	
Singh, Gurratan (NDP)	Brampton East / Brampton-Est	
Singh, Sara (NDP)	Brampton Centre / Brampton-Centre	Deputy Leader, Official Opposition / Chef adjointe de l'opposition officielle
Skelly, Donna (PC)	Flamborough—Glanbrook	
Smith, Dave (PC)	Peterborough—Kawartha	
Smith, Hon. / L'hon. Todd (PC)	Bay of Quinte / Baie de Quinte	Minister of Children, Community and Social Services / Ministre des Services à l'enfance et des Services sociaux et communautaires
Stevens, Jennifer (Jennie) (NDP)	St. Catharines	
Stiles, Marit (NDP)	Davenport	
Surma, Hon. / L'hon. Kinga (PC)	Etobicoke Centre / Etobicoke-Centre	Associate Minister of Transportation (GTA) / Ministre associée des Transports (RGT) Minister Without Portfolio / Ministre sans portefeuille
Tabuns, Peter (NDP)	Toronto—Danforth	
Tangri, Nina (PC)	Mississauga—Streetsville	
Taylor, Monique (NDP)	Hamilton Mountain	
Thanigasalam, Vijay (PC)	Scarborough—Rouge Park	
Thompson, Hon. / L'hon. Lisa M. (PC)	Huron—Bruce	Minister of Government and Consumer Services / Ministre des Services gouvernementaux et des Services aux consommateurs
Tibollo, Hon. / L'hon. Michael A. (PC)	Vaughan—Woodbridge	Associate Minister of Mental Health and Addictions / Ministre associé délégué au dossier de la Santé mentale et de la Lutte contre les dépendances Minister Without Portfolio / Ministre sans portefeuille
Triantafilopoulos, Effie J. (PC)	Oakville North—Burlington / Oakville-Nord—Burlington	
Vanthof, John (NDP)	Timiskaming—Cochrane	Deputy Leader, Official Opposition / Chef adjoint de l'opposition officielle
Wai, Daisy (PC)	Richmond Hill	

Member and Party / Député(e) et parti	Constituency / Circonscription	Other responsibilities / Autres responsabilités
Walker, Hon. / L'hon. Bill (PC)	Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound	Associate Minister of Energy / Ministre associé de l'Énergie Minister Without Portfolio / Ministre sans portefeuille
West, Jamie (NDP)	Sudbury	
Wilson, Jim (IND)	Simcoe—Grey	
Wynne, Kathleen O. (LIB)	Don Valley West / Don Valley-Ouest	
Yakubski, Hon. / L'hon. John (PC)	Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke	Minister of Natural Resources and Forestry / Ministre des Richesses naturelles et des Forêts
Yarde, Kevin (NDP)	Brampton North / Brampton-Nord	
Yurek, Hon. / L'hon. Jeff (PC)	Elgin—Middlesex—London	Minister of the Environment, Conservation and Parks / Ministre de l'Environnement, de la Protection de la nature et des Parcs

**STANDING AND SELECT COMMITTEES OF THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
COMITÉS PERMANENTS ET SPÉCIAUX DE L'ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE**

Standing Committee on Estimates / Comité permanent des budgets des dépenses

Chair / Président: Peter Tabuns
Vice-Chair / Vice-président: Wayne Gates
Lorne Coe, Wayne Gates
Randy Hillier, Andrea Khanjin
Jane McKenna, Judith Monteith-Farrell
Michael Parsa, Randy Pettapiece
Kaleed Rasheed, Donna Skelly
Peter Tabuns
Committee Clerk / Greffière: Thushitha Kobikrishna

Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs / Comité permanent des finances et des affaires économiques

Chair / Président: Amarjot Sandhu
Vice-Chair / Vice-président: Jeremy Roberts
Ian Arthur, Stephen Blais
Stan Cho, Stephen Crawford
Catherine Fife, Randy Hillier
Mitzie Hunter, Logan Kanapathi
Andrea Khanjin, Laura Mae Lindo
Sol Mamakwa
Committee Clerk / Greffière: Julia Douglas

Standing Committee on General Government / Comité permanent des affaires gouvernementales

Chair / Présidente: Goldie Ghamari
Vice-Chair / Vice-président: Daryl Kramp
Robert Bailey, Jessica Bell
Goldie Ghamari, Chris Glover
Mike Harris, Daryl Kramp
Sheref Sabawy, Amarjot Sandhu
Mike Schreiner, Jennifer (Jennie) Stevens
Daisy Wai
Committee Clerk / Greffier: Isaiah Thorning

Standing Committee on Government Agencies / Comité permanent des organismes gouvernementaux

Chair / Président: John Vanthof
Vice-Chair / Vice-président: Taras Natyshak
Will Bouma, Lorne Coe
Rudy Cuzzetto, Robin Martin
Taras Natyshak, Rick Nicholls
Billy Pang, Amanda Simard
Marit Stiles, Nina Tangri
John Vanthof
Committee Clerk / Greffière: Tonia Grannum

Standing Committee on Justice Policy / Comité permanent de la justice

Chair / Président: Roman Baber
Vice-Chair / Vice-présidente: Effie J. Triantafilopoulos
Roman Baber, Will Bouma
Lucille Collard, Parm Gill
Natalia Kusendova, Suze Morrison
Lindsey Park, Gurratan Singh
Nina Tangri, Effie J. Triantafilopoulos
Kevin Yarde
Committee Clerk / Greffière: Thushitha Kobikrishna

Standing Committee on the Legislative Assembly / Comité permanent de l'Assemblée législative

Chair / Président: Kaleed Rasheed
Vice-Chair / Vice-président: Vijay Thanigasalam
Rima Berns-McGown, Michael Coteau
Faisal Hassan, Logan Kanapathi
Jim McDonell, Christina Maria Mitas
Sam Oosterhoff, Kaleed Rasheed
Sara Singh, Donna Skelly
Vijay Thanigasalam
Committee Clerk / Greffière: Valerie Quioc Lim

Standing Committee on Public Accounts / Comité permanent des comptes publics

Chair / Présidente: Catherine Fife
Vice-Chair / Vice-présidente: France Gélinas
Deepak Anand, Jill Andrew
Toby Barrett, Stan Cho
Stephen Crawford, Catherine Fife
John Fraser, France Gélinas
Christine Hogarth, Norman Miller
Michael Parsa
Committee Clerk / Greffier: Christopher Tyrell

Standing Committee on Regulations and Private Bills / Comité permanent des règlements et des projets de loi d'intérêt privé

Chair / Président: Deepak Anand
Vice-Chair / Vice-président: Will Bouma
Deepak Anand, Toby Barrett
Stephen Blais, Will Bouma
Stephen Crawford, Laura Mae Lindo
Gila Martow, Paul Miller
Billy Pang, Dave Smith
Jamie West
Committee Clerk / Greffier: Isaiah Thorning

Standing Committee on Social Policy / Comité permanent de la politique sociale

Chair / Présidente: Natalia Kusendova
Vice-Chair / Vice-président: Aris Babikian
Aris Babikian, Jeff Burch
Amy Fee, Michael Gravelle
Joel Harden, Mike Harris
Christine Hogarth, Belinda C. Karahalios
Terence Kernaghan, Natalia Kusendova
Robin Martin
Committee Clerk / Greffier: Christopher Tyrell

Select Committee on Emergency Management Oversight / Comité spécial de la surveillance de la gestion des situations d'urgence

Chair / Président: Daryl Kramp
Vice-Chair / Vice-président: Tom Rakocevic
Robert Bailey, Gilles Bisson
John Fraser, Christine Hogarth
Daryl Kramp, Robin Martin
Sam Oosterhoff, Lindsey Park
Tom Rakocevic, Sara Singh
Effie J. Triantafilopoulos
Committee Clerk / Greffier: Christopher Tyrell