

Legislative
Assembly
of Ontario



Assemblée
législative
de l'Ontario

**Official Report
of Debates
(Hansard)**

No. 189

**Journal
des débats
(Hansard)**

N^o 189

1st Session
42nd Parliament
Wednesday
30 September 2020

1^{re} session
42^e législature
Mercredi
30 septembre 2020

Speaker: Honourable Ted Arnott
Clerk: Todd Decker

Président : L'honorable Ted Arnott
Greffier : Todd Decker

Hansard on the Internet

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

<https://www.ola.org/>

Index inquiries

Reference to a cumulative index of previous issues may be obtained by calling the Hansard Reporting Service indexing staff at 416-325-7400.

Le Journal des débats sur Internet

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

Renseignements sur l'index

Adressez vos questions portant sur des numéros précédents du Journal des débats au personnel de l'index, qui vous fourniront des références aux pages dans l'index cumulatif, en composant le 416-325-7400.

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



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

ISSN 1180-2987

CONTENTS / TABLE DES MATIÈRES

Wednesday 30 September 2020 / Mercredi 30 septembre 2020

Wearing of shirts

Mr. Sol Mamakwa..... 9439

ORDERS OF THE DAY / ORDRE DU JOUR

Moving Ontario Family Law Forward Act, 2020, Bill 207, Mr. Downey / Loi de 2020 faisant avancer le droit de la famille en Ontario, projet de loi 207, M. Downey

Hon. Doug Downey 9439
Ms. Lindsey Park 9443
Miss Monique Taylor 9447
Mrs. Nina Tangri 9448
Miss Monique Taylor 9448
Mr. Stan Cho 9448
Miss Monique Taylor 9449
Mr. Jim McDonell 9449
Second reading debate deemed adjourned 9449

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS / DÉCLARATIONS DES DÉPUTÉES ET DÉPUTÉS

COVID-19 response

Mr. Wayne Gates 9449

Indigenous relations and reconciliation

Mr. Deepak Anand 9450

Special-needs students

Mme France Gélinas 9450

Public transit

Ms. Lindsey Park 9450

Social assistance

Mr. Joel Harden 9450

Veterans

Mr. Randy Hillier 9451

Julia Notebomer

Mr. Randy Pettapiece 9451

Indigenous relations and reconciliation

Mr. Sol Mamakwa 9451

COVID-19 response

Mr. Kaleed Rasheed 9451

World Vision

Mr. Billy Pang 9451

Residential schools

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott) 9452

QUESTION PERIOD / PÉRIODE DE QUESTIONS

COVID-19 response

Ms. Andrea Horwath 9452
Hon. Christine Elliott 9452

Long-term care

Ms. Andrea Horwath 9453
Hon. Merrilee Fullerton 9453

COVID-19 response

Ms. Peggy Sattler 9454
Hon. Christine Elliott 9454

Concussions

Ms. Lindsey Park 9454
Hon. Lisa MacLeod 9455

COVID-19 response in Indigenous and remote communities

Mr. Sol Mamakwa 9455
Hon. Greg Rickford 9455

COVID-19 response

Mr. Randy Hillier 9456
Hon. Christine Elliott 9456

COVID-19 response

Mr. Randy Pettapiece 9456
Hon. Steve Clark 9456

Affordable housing

Ms. Rima Berns-McGown 9457
Hon. Steve Clark 9457

Infectious disease control

Mlle Amanda Simard 9458
Hon. Stephen Lecce 9458

COVID-19 response

Mr. Jeremy Roberts 9458
Mr. Stan Cho 9458

Broadband infrastructure

Mr. Michael Mantha 9459
Hon. Laurie Scott 9459

Community safety

Ms. Jane McKenna 9460
Hon. Caroline Mulroney 9460
Ms. Christine Hogarth 9460

Mental health and addiction services

Ms. Bhutika Karpoche 9460
Hon. Christine Elliott 9460

Éducation en français

Mr. Jeremy Roberts 9461
Ms. Sam Oosterhoff 9461

Long-term care

Mr. Jeff Burch 9462
Mr. Jeremy Roberts 9462

Notice of dissatisfaction

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott) 9462

DEFERRED VOTES / VOTES DIFFÉRÉS

Time allocation

Motion agreed to 9463

REPORTS BY COMMITTEES / RAPPORTS DE COMITÉS

Standing Committee on Regulations and Private Bills

Mr. Deepak Anand 9463

Report adopted 9463

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS / DÉPÔT DES PROJETS DE LOI

Supporting Economic Recovery and Renewal in the Niagara Region Act, 2020, Bill 209, Mr. Gates / Loi de 2020 visant à soutenir les emplois dans l'industrie du vin et la croissance dans la région de Niagara, projet de loi 209, M. Gates

First reading agreed to 9463

Mr. Wayne Gates 9463

STATEMENTS BY THE MINISTRY AND RESPONSES / DÉCLARATIONS MINISTÉRIELLES ET RÉPONSES

Concussions

Hon. Lisa MacLeod 9463

Ms. Catherine Fife 9466

Mr. John Fraser 9466

MOTIONS

Private members' public business

Hon. Paul Calandra 9467

Motion agreed to 9467

PETITIONS / PÉTITIONS

Water extraction

Ms. Peggy Sattler 9467

Education

Mrs. Daisy Wai 9468

Long-term care

Miss Monique Taylor 9468

Veterans memorial

Mrs. Nina Tangri 9468

Long-term care

Mr. Jamie West 9468

Education

Mr. Will Bouma 9469

Long-term care

Mr. Michael Mantha 9469

Public sector compensation

Mme France Gélinas 9469

Winter highway maintenance

Mr. Michael Mantha 9469

Public sector compensation

Mr. Jamie West 9470

Services en français

Mme France Gélinas 9470

Climate change

Mr. Michael Mantha 9470

Documents gouvernementaux

Mme France Gélinas 9470

ORDERS OF THE DAY / ORDRE DU JOUR

Helping Tenants and Small Businesses Act, 2020, Bill 204, Mr. Clark / Loi de 2020 visant à soutenir les locataires et les petites entreprises, projet de loi 204, M. Clark

Hon. Steve Clark 9471

Ms. Catherine Fife 9473

Mr. Jim McDonell 9475

Mr. Jeff Burch 9477

Mr. Stephen Blais 9480

Ms. Christine Hogarth 9481

Ms. Peggy Sattler 9482

Mlle Amanda Simard 9484

Mr. Mike Schreiner 9485

Third reading agreed to 9486

ADJOURNMENT DEBATE / DÉBAT SUR LA MOTION D'AJOURNEMENT

Infectious disease control

Mlle Amanda Simard 9486

Mr. Sam Oosterhoff 9487

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

Wednesday 30 September 2020

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Mercredi 30 septembre 2020

The House met at 0900.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Good morning. We'll begin this morning with a moment of silence for inner thought and personal reflection.

Prayers.

WEARING OF SHIRTS

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Point of order, the member for Kiiwetinoong.

Mr. Sol Mamakwa: I seek unanimous consent to wear this shirt in honour of Orange Shirt Day, which is today, and for the House to observe a moment of silence prior to question period to honour and remember those impacted by Indian residential schools in Ontario and across Canada. Meegwetch.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The member for Kiiwetinoong is seeking the unanimous consent of the House to allow the members to wear an orange shirt and also to have a moment of silence before question period to honour the victims of residential schools. Agreed? Agreed.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

MOVING ONTARIO FAMILY LAW FORWARD ACT, 2020

LOI DE 2020 FAISANT AVANCER LE DROIT DE LA FAMILLE EN ONTARIO

Mr. Downey moved second reading of the following bill:

Bill 207, An Act to amend the Children's Law Reform Act, the Courts of Justice Act, the Family Law Act and other Acts respecting various family law matters / Projet de loi 207, Loi modifiant la Loi portant réforme du droit de l'enfance, la Loi sur les tribunaux judiciaires, la Loi sur le droit de la famille et d'autres lois en ce qui concerne diverses questions de droit de la famille.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I'll look to the Attorney General to lead off the debate.

Hon. Doug Downey: Good morning. I'm pleased to stand in the House today to open debate on a bill that would, if passed, move family law forward for Ontario's children and families.

I'll be sharing my time with my colleague, the parliamentary assistant to the Attorney General, Lindsey Park. She has been such a strong advocate, Mr. Speaker, for changes to family law that would improve the lives of

many parents and children across Ontario. She spent a great deal of time travelling the province, spurring conversations and gathering recommendations from many within the family law field. But more on that later, Mr. Speaker.

Before I begin, I want to acknowledge and thank the many justice partners who have worked tirelessly during the COVID-19 outbreak to support and expand access to justice for thousands of Ontario families. I would like to acknowledge the Ontario Bar Association, the Federation of Ontario Law Associations, the Ontario Trial Lawyers Association, Legal Aid Ontario, the Criminal Lawyers' Association and all the practising lawyers on the front lines of family law.

The staff at the Ministry of the Attorney General, who work in the justice system all over the province, have worked around the clock to maintain the integrity of our justice system and drive it forward. They've been resilient, they've adapted quickly and they've worked with the utmost professionalism under the most stressful of times. I want to thank all of those members of the Attorney General's office and justice partners who came together to make our system continue to function.

Mr. Speaker, people rely on our justice system to address urgent matters in moments of tremendous stress and crisis, such as child protection proceedings and restraining orders. It's thanks to our partners at the Superior Court, the Ontario Courts of Justice and the Court of Appeal, and the front-line workers across our justice system, that these critical services were able to continue during an outbreak and continue to be available as they continue to deal with the impacts of COVID-19. We aren't through this yet, Mr. Speaker.

We have provided alternatives to going to court, including facilitating virtual hearings and updating our online services to now file dozens of various Family Court documents, set up or change child support payments, and file for joint or simple divorce online. Throughout the COVID-19 emergency, we've worked with our partners to move Ontario's justice system forward decades in a matter of months. We've gone through groundbreaking modernization initiatives that have already changed the way Ontarians access justice services, and these aren't temporary measures.

Since March, the Superior Court of Justice has had over 50,000 virtual hearings. Hearing these matters remotely using video and teleconference, we took action to expand e-filing to include more than 400 more forms of civil and family law matters, increasing the scope of e-filing by almost 10 times. We've rolled out a new online court case search system to open up public access to information that

you previously had to line up at a courthouse to see; of course, if you can't get in the courthouse, you can't get to the kiosk and you can't see it, so we put it online where the world can see it. And we're gradually rolling out access to Thomson Reuters CaseLines, which is a document-sharing and e-hearing platform that supports remote and in-person hearings. It's a game-changer for Ontario's courts.

Ensuring justice services were available when needed has been critical for thousands of families, particularly at a time when it's so emotionally difficult, and financially taxing as well, Mr. Speaker. The past seven months have challenged Ontarians and their governments, the justice system and our province's justice partners. We needed to act swiftly and make changes many thought impossible or that it would take years to accomplish. We pressed forward together to keep Ontarians safe and to ensure that even in the most difficult moments, they would know that justice would be done.

As a result of the historic collaboration and ingenuity of so many dedicated professionals, I'm confident that Ontario's justice system, including the family law sector, will emerge from this crisis more resilient and better prepared to respond to future challenges better than ever before. But the work is far from over, Mr. Speaker, and there is broad consensus among all of our partners that we cannot go back to the way things were. Let me be clear: We are not going back. The proposed Moving Ontario Family Law Forward Act builds on this forward momentum. This legislation proposes much-needed changes that would make it easier, faster and more affordable for people to resolve their family law issues.

Family disputes pose unique challenges in our justice system. Ontarians encounter the family law system in some of life's most difficult moments, both emotionally and financially. I think everybody knows somebody who has gone through the system. It is difficult, it's overly complex, it's outdated and historically it has not helped to reduce the stress and anxiety Ontarians experience as they address their matters. The system can be better. We're making the system better.

Our government is working to apply common-sense solutions to strengthen the family justice system so it's more accessible and responsive. If passed, these changes would continue our work to move family law forward in the province by doing a number of things: supporting families and vulnerable children; simplifying a complex and outdated justice system; and making it easier for people to resolve their legal matters. Families and the legal community have told us many times that this system needs to be more accessible, responsive and resilient. They have told us many times, they've told us over many years and they've told us over many governments that the system isn't working for the people who need it the most.

0910

The consultations led by my parliamentary assistant Ms. Park were one of the first steps in our review of family law and civil procedures. As part of a summer-long review in 2019, PA Park met with hundreds of lawyers and legal

professionals across Ontario. In offices and community gatherings, and sometimes even in coffee shops, she sat down with those who had experience in family law in order to get their front-line perspective on how we could improve.

Across the province, we asked how can we simplify unnecessarily complicated processes so that it works better for those who interact with the justice system when they are interacting with it. This included exploring ways to simplify family and civil court processes for Ontarians, reduce the costs and delays associated with family law processes and help resolve family disputes faster. It wasn't just doing things a little bit differently; it was changing processes, changing rules, changing how we needed to move forward.

The people who are on the front lines, the people who are working in the system, we received their suggestions to improve both family and civil legislation, regulations and processes. They all helped to inform the actions we've proposed in the Moving Ontario Family Law Forward Act. We're debating it here today in the House as the result of a lot of consultation and a lot of work all across Ontario, and it's the people of Ontario who have their voice in this legislation.

Now, a comment we heard during these consultations, often from family lawyers, is that the family law appeals processes needed to be clearer and easier to navigate, and I could not agree more. Let me just say this, Mr. Speaker: Three different courts hear family law cases in Ontario—the Ontario Court of Justice, the Superior Court of Justice and, of course, with the Family Court branch of the Superior Court of Justice, and then the Court of Appeal has a role to play as well. The appeal process is different at each court. It makes it difficult for families, and sometimes even family lawyers, to decide where they should appeal a matter.

If I was to try and describe in words how the appeal process works and for different matters, I know that I would lose you. It is very complicated. As one senior practitioner told me—he sent me an email—“Excellent changes all around, especially with the appeal process which confused even senior counsel.” I think that says it all, coming from a senior counsel, saying even with 25 years of experience in the family field, he got confused on a regular basis about which appeal and it was a real labyrinth of decision-making. So we're fixing that.

Mr. Speaker, if some family lawyers find this process confusing, I can only imagine how intimidating it must be for a self-represented litigant. Self-represented litigants make up a significant proportion of those who interact with our Family Court. I'm not saying this as an official stat, but it's known within the profession that self-reps are somewhere around 70% of family law files. It's very high. It's certainly over 50%. That may be a dated number, but the sense of magnitude is significant. It's not a small or an isolated problem.

After consulting with the Chief Justices of Ontario and other justice sector partners, we found a better way, and we found a better way with consensus. To make the system

easier for everyone to navigate, we're proposing to clarify where to appeal family law cases and increase consistency and fairness regardless of where a case is heard. This is something I think the public expects of their system.

Should this legislation pass, Mr. Speaker, the appeals process will be more consistent for families regardless of what court hears their matter. These changes would also help children in difficult circumstances by ensuring final decisions are reached faster. We know that for families who rely on the family law system resolving matters in a timely fashion is critical to create stability for the children and to create consistency. If passed, the legislation will ensure the path from start to finish will be more clear and straightforward.

Of course, I've had discussions with federal Attorney General Lametti, calling on the federal government to follow through on its commitment to roll out and accelerate our work on the unified Family Court by providing necessary appointments that would support the UFC expansion. Eventually, once the UFC is expanded across Ontario, family law appeal routes will be even clearer for litigants. It will be different kinds of courts hearing family matters.

I just want to talk for a moment about unified Family Court. Actually, the first one was in Hamilton, and I affectionately called it a pilot project in the late 1970s. That pilot project existed on its own for many, many years, well over a decade, before it really grabbed hold.

And here's the thing: We have Family Court at two different levels, depending on what matters they're dealing with, whether there's child custody or whether there are child issues, or whether there aren't child issues or it's just property issues. Again, it's fairly cumbersome from a user standpoint.

I remember many years ago when I was in school, one of the things that we studied was the UFC, the unified Family Court. Fast forward to now: We only have about half the courts across Ontario that are UFC, so that has become a priority for me as we move forward. That's why I've spoken to federal Attorney General Lametti about it. He assures me that they are committed to it, and so I look forward to moving forward with him in that direction. We're hopeful the federal government will deliver on that sooner rather than later, and we'll continue to have those discussions as we talk through COVID and beyond.

As I just mentioned a few moments ago, the family law system is dealing with a large number of self-represented litigants, and the number keeps growing. The pressure on our judges is extraordinary. Not everybody thinks about that. Not everybody thinks about what happens in a courtroom and how a judge needs to deal with it. A judge can't act as counsel to either of the parties, a judge has to be balanced, but also needs to make sure that the parties are heard. So there is a little bit of a pressure when somebody comes in as a self-represented litigant and may not know all of the rules, may not know all of the parts. The judge has to ensure that justice is done and that the law is applied appropriately. These cases wind their way through the system, and when we have self-represented

litigants in a complicated system, it just increases pressure on the system across the board, not just on the filing clerks who take the materials, but the people who process them, who were interacting with the self-reps. It then makes its way to the judge, and the judge has to be balanced and fair and assist but not take a side. So we need to simplify the system to reduce the pressure on all of our justice partners.

Today I also want to talk about an important non-legislative initiative that helps families identify the core issue in their disputes and resolve those disputes faster. This is another way that we can supplement the system to help people who are entering the system. It also helps alleviate the growing pressure on the judges in Ontario.

Our government has been working with the Superior Court of Justice and Chief Justice Morawetz to expand the dispute resolution officer program. I'm proud to share that we're extending the dispute resolution officer program to two new locations: Kitchener and Welland. The program already exists in nine other locations around Ontario, and our government's investment will complement those existing locations. This is a positive step forward and something that we heard from people during the consultations. We heard it both from family law litigants and the practitioners who saw the value, the lawyers who saw the value, in having clients be able to access what we call a DRO, a dispute resolution officer.

So what is a dispute resolution officer? It's a title, but the person behind the title is a senior family lawyer, somebody appointed by the Superior Court of Justice to hear the case first at what are called case conferences; that's where a parent or guardian wants to change an existing order. They can help people in their family law disputes narrow the issues so that by the time it hits the judge, the issues have been narrowed a little bit, they've come closer to an agreement, and provide early, neutral evaluation of their case. So it's a resource to help people navigate the system, and it helps them at the front end so that they can scope what they need to do and potentially even come to resolve between themselves.

I believe strongly in the DROs. The expansion complements the changes proposed to allow families to benefit from the expertise of the dispute resolution officers. This is part of our government's commitment to bring more accessible and efficient services to the people who need it the most. It's as simple as that. I want to thank our partners at the Superior Court of Justice for their support on this important initiative. Their perspective is invaluable, and I look forward to our continued work together.

Our government doesn't run from problems when Ontarians call our attention to them. In fact, we lean in to them. We acknowledge the issues, we ask the questions, we investigate solutions and we do our best to make a difference for people. That's why we made it our mission to cut red tape, not only for businesses and jobs, but for all Ontarians. The Premier appointed an Associate Minister of Red Tape Reduction, Minister Sarkaria. He's one that I'm proud to stand with in this House. The work he's doing on red tape reduction is unparalleled. Our government has rallied around the leadership of Minister Sarkaria, and our

persistent and creative approach to fixing issues for people has changed the way the provincial government approaches obstacles that cost Ontarians unnecessary time and money.

0920

I could spend my entire time talking about the amazing work that Minister Sarkaria is doing, but part of his work is encouraging us to do similar work in our ministries. Part of our work to move family law forward involves removing outdated processes that can delay family law professionals and, in turn, delay their clients. It costs money. It costs time.

Through this act, Mr. Speaker, or in conjunction with this act, we're eliminating an old reporting requirement that required arbitrators to submit detailed reports on every family arbitration award they decided. The ministry doesn't regulate arbitrators, and no other jurisdiction in Canada has this reporting requirement, at least not as far as I can find. Eliminating the unnecessary reporting requirement not only helps make government more efficient, but also saves time and increases efficiency for our family arbitrators and our front-line workers. This change will free up more capacity in the system so arbitrators are able to focus on families and their needs. This is another step in our efforts to make it easier and faster for people in Ontario to resolve their family legal matters.

Mr. Speaker, the filing of these arbitration reports started many, many years ago, I expect, with the thought that we would use it as an analysis tool. But we have over a decade of that data, and quite frankly, it's an unnecessary red tape piece, and it just has to go.

Now, I also mentioned that we're making great strides to improve the family law system for its many participants, including parents and caregivers. One particular example I'd like to highlight today for the members of the House is our online child support service. Families are able to use our online service to quickly and easily set up or change child support payments, and they can do it without having to go to court. It operates on consensus, and the service helps parents and caregivers spend less time on frustrating administrative paperwork and travel to a courthouse. They can spend their time making plans and spending time with the kids, focusing their time where they should be, not on cumbersome systems.

However, parents who use the online service can't easily use it to enforce an order outside of Ontario. It just wasn't built into the design of that system. Parents outside of the province need a certified paper copy of the support notice in order for it to be registered, or for it to be enforced. Mr. Speaker, users of the online service can't get a certified copy without a visit in person to a courthouse. That's why we're proposing to allow the certification of child support notices that are issued through the online child support service. These proposed changes would allow families to manage and enforce their child support amounts anywhere in Canada.

Having parents and caregivers use the online child support service allows court resources to be focused where the need is greatest in more complex family law cases, particularly those involving child protection. Mr. Speaker,

again, it's one of those things that, if you were to design a system, you would have done it in the first place, but for reasons unknown to me, it wasn't. We want to make sure the system is working for the end-users.

The system hasn't been used as much as I expect it will be in the future. This is one of the features that people were looking for. If they couldn't get it, why would they use the service? So I'm very encouraged that we have the support of our partners, but mostly because we heard from people who are using the system that these little things, sometimes, just cause them not to access the system in a certain way. We're fixing that. We're not afraid to say the system wasn't working quite properly; now it will.

Last year, the federal government made wide-ranging changes to the language in the federal Divorce Act. The changes are the first substantive changes made to the legislation in 20 years—20 years, Mr. Speaker. This isn't the first piece of legislation that we've come to the House with that hadn't been touched in over 20 years. I'm not going to get into class actions and legal aid and all the other stuff, but I can tell you, we're hard at work updating things by decades. This is another one. Twenty years ago is the last time the act was comprehensively updated, so it's a bit of an understatement saying changes are overdue. The dynamic in divorces has changed; the dynamic in child welfare has changed. As we all know, a lot of things have changed in 20 years. I forget the exact date, but I think the iPhone was invented 12 years ago or something, just for a sense of perspective. Google was registered 25 years ago.

The federal Divorce Act amendments take into account the evolution of legal terminology—words matter, Mr. Speaker, and people in this House know words matter; they are our craft sometimes—as well as the common use of family dispute resolution processes such as mediation. They are certainly much more prevalent and much more sophisticated than they were 20 years ago.

Federal Bill C-78 passed on June 21, 2019, last year, and is scheduled to come into force March 1, 2021. It was going to come into force this year, but it was put off, I expect, because of the pandemic, and so we know March 1, 2021, is the coming into force of the federal Divorce Act, as amended.

With the support of our family justice partners, our government closely reviewed the federal amendments to determine the changes that would impact Ontario's family justice system and what changes would be needed to prepare for the amendments coming into force next March. We received dozens of responses, the vast majority in support of the solutions we prioritized. Our proposed amendments came through those, and the discussions and the consultations that parliamentary assistant Park will undoubtedly talk about a little bit.

I want to thank a number of the justice sector partners who provided feedback on the proposed amendments and came out publicly to support this part of the bill. The Ontario Bar Association, the Middlesex Law Association, Legal Aid Ontario, the Family Dispute Resolution Institute of Ontario and the Ontario Association for Family Mediation have all come out publicly and said, "This is the

right thing to do. This is what you should be doing.” I’ve said before that our goal in Ontario was to avoid any unnecessary confusion for Ontario families with respect to those changes introduced by federal Bill C-78.

Family law is an area where people often represent themselves. I’ve talked about that. Our government wants to make changes that follow from the implementation of the federal law to make things as consistent and easy to understand as possible. If you can imagine, Mr. Speaker, if we didn’t make this a priority and bring it forward, you would have two different family law systems operating, with two different kinds of language and two different sets of tools. I mean, it’s confusing enough. The whole system is confusing enough.

In response to the federal government’s modernization of the federal Divorce Act, where they heard from hundreds and hundreds of people, in addition to the hundreds of people that we heard from, Ontario is proposing to update our laws to reflect the federal changes. It includes updating the parenting terminology in Ontario’s legislation to match the terminology in the federal government legislation. It means removing terms like “custody” and “access” in order to move away from a perception that one parent wins. You hear: “I won custody. I won access.” The “parent wins, parent loses” thing is really not in the best interests of the child. It sets a stage for a combative discussion. Those words will be replaced with terms like “decision-making responsibility,” “parenting time,” and “contact.” We don’t have to have a series of winners and losers in this. We want all the children to win as we move forward and have the parents play the role that they’re best able to play in the situation.

The changes don’t just affect our courts and the family law sector. The divorce terminology is present in education, medical fields and many other places. We’re not inventing language; we’re adopting language that’s consistent across different fields. We’ll continue to engage with schools, government offices and medical professionals to ensure they’re aware of the revised terminology before it comes into force next spring. We’re also proposing to align Ontario’s family laws with the federal law to promote and create clarity around the best interests of the child.

The Moving Ontario Family Law Forward Act would adopt a more comprehensive list of factors for the court to consider. It’s an enumerated list of factors for them to consider. It’s not exhaustive, but it gives some guidance in determining what the best interests of the child may be as set out in the federal Divorce Act. So again, we’re aligning with that. For example, it asks the court to consider the stage of development of the child; the nature of the relationship with the child’s parents, siblings, grandparents; history of care; and the plans for child care as factors to consider when determining the best interests of a child.

We’re also proposing changes to ensure Ontario’s family laws are equipped to better address family violence. The proposed Moving Ontario Family Law Forward Act provides greater clarity regarding what constitutes violence. It adopts the definition of “family violence” and “family member” as set out in the federal Divorce Act.

Our review and consultation on federal Bill C-78 also pointed to another area where we could possibly make positive changes. We’ve identified opportunities to provide clarity and guidance around circumstances that require the relocation of a child. The proposed amendments would adopt a statutory framework for when a person with decision-making authority relocates with or without a child. If passed, they would also reduce the burden on our court system by adopting the obligations in the federal Divorce Act that encourage the use of alternative dispute resolution processes whenever appropriate, as well as the duties of courts to consider the existence of other proceedings.

The proposed amendments to align Ontario’s legislation with federal changes to the Divorce Act echo our goal to make it faster and easier for families to navigate the courts.

0930

I’m nearing the end of my speaking time, Mr. Speaker, and I know parliamentary assistant Park has much valuable insight to provide on the Moving Ontario Family Law Forward Act. I’m grateful for the opportunity to talk about this very important piece of legislation. These common-sense changes will help simplify a complex and outdated justice system and, if passed, make the family justice system easier to navigate while reducing the need for court intervention.

We know we must continue to move towards a more accessible, responsive and resilient system. Our focus must be on families and children, especially children in difficult circumstances. This was a large part of our focus as we considered the proposed changes in the Moving Ontario Family Law Forward Act. This was also our focus when we found ways to reduce the cost to families who need to be involved in the family law system, and other taxpayers as well. We know through our consultations that all Ontarians benefit from streamlining the Family Court processes and shortening the time to resolutions.

I look forward to continuing to engage with the members of this House and Ontarians on this very important legislation, and I ask all members of this House to consider supporting the Moving Ontario Family Law Forward Act. Let’s keep working together to support children and families in our communities. Thank you. Merci. Meegwetch.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Thank you very much, Attorney General. Now we’ll turn further debate over to your parliamentary assistant, the member from Durham.

Ms. Lindsey Park: I’m pleased to rise in the House today for second reading of the Moving Ontario Family Law Forward Act. This truly marks the beginning of significant family justice reform in the province of Ontario.

When I was in law school at uOttawa and in the early years of my practice as a lawyer, I could never have imagined I would be part of working to modernize the justice system in Ontario, nor could I have imagined that I would join Ontario’s chief justices, deans of law schools and law professors, and lawyers across the province in

ongoing discussions about how to simplify the family law process for Ontario families to truly serve the people of Ontario.

What was repeated to me throughout the process of reviewing our justice system, and in particular the family law system, is that people shouldn't be required to navigate a complex and outdated justice system during some of the most difficult times of their lives.

Now, I have a lot to say today in this speech, but before we get into discussion about the bill, I want to acknowledge and thank our many partners in our justice system, who have worked tirelessly during the COVID-19 outbreak to provide urgent access to justice for thousands of Ontario families.

The COVID-19 outbreak highlighted an immediate and urgent need to evolve and modernize our justice system. I'm certain that when our justice system was designed, it never could have contemplated Zoom hearings and the need to provide for social distancing and the other effects of COVID-19. The many stakeholders in the justice system and the Family Court have worked to adapt quickly to these changes, and for that, we are grateful.

Our government had committed to modernizing our outdated justice system well before the COVID-19 outbreak. I remember this Attorney General's first few speeches. He highlighted that as a goal last summer. But these unprecedented challenges drove us to look at what we could get done quickly, to collaborate and innovate and, so far, to accomplish far more than we could have imagined.

Since March, we have invested in technology in order to move more services online and make it easier for the people of Ontario to access justice. For example, we've updated and expanded our Justice Services Online platform so that users can submit close to 400 more civil and Family Court documents online, without having to walk into a courthouse, day or night, from anywhere across the province. Currently, in Toronto, we're piloting a cloud-based document-sharing and e-hearing platform.

These are the kinds of things I heard when visiting some of our most rural communities, where it's not that easy to drive around the corner to a courthouse. It can be great distances that you have to travel. This modern platform enables parties to an action and their lawyers to share court documents of any size. These documents are available to those involved 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

Our government also recently introduced legislative amendments passed by this Legislature so that Ontarians facing a speeding ticket, for example, or a ticket related to another provincial offence, can dispute those tickets by audio or video, where the local municipality offers it. The proposed Moving Ontario Family Law Forward Act that we are debating here today, Speaker, would build on this progress and reinforce our government's commitment to continue moving boldly towards a more accessible, responsive and resilient justice system.

So why are we here, Speaker? Individuals, families and businesses interact with court processes every day and, more often than not, they face unnecessary delays and

exorbitant legal costs to resolve their disputes. Particularly in the family law context, we need processes that help couples make the best decisions for them and their children with a court system that causes minimal additional stress and emotional strain. It's estimated that more than 40% of marriages in Canada will end by their 30th year of marriage, and for most Ontarians, going through a separation or a divorce will be their first interaction with our court system.

We all know that often couples already face significant financial and social changes at that time in their life. Their family and their children are going through a lot before they even start the court process. We should have the goal in this Legislature of working towards a justice system that adds minimal additional stress and emotional strain to what is already one of the most difficult circumstances of someone's life, and that's the circumstance, Speaker, that's leading them to the courtroom. One of the ways we can reduce that additional stress and emotional strain is by making the justice system easier to navigate.

It's with that in mind, Speaker, that in July 2019, I went on tour. Tasked by the Attorney General, I led a review of family and civil legislation and processes in Ontario. Throughout this review, I met with members of the legal community and the public across the province. This included Ontario's chief justices, deans of law schools, law professors, the Ontario Bar Association, the Federation of Ontario Law Associations and the many rural Ontario law associations, amongst other stakeholders.

I also spoke to those who have used the system. I listened to the stories of hundreds of Ontarians, including lawyers and legal professionals talking about their clients' experiences. Our aim was to explore ways we could simplify family and civil court processes, reduce costs and delays for families, particularly those going through a separation, and find pathways to earlier dispute resolution. My question was simple: How can we simplify this process for families?

I heard first-hand from our many justice partners, front-line staff, business owners, families and lawyers about the need for common-sense changes in our justice system. We heard about the incredibly challenging circumstances that many families face, which were being amplified through unnecessary court delays and excessive legal costs. We're grateful for the ideas and feedback we received, and we've been hard at work developing a more accessible, responsive and resilient family justice system that will continue to evolve for families across this province. Much of what we heard and learned from these discussions is reflected in the actions that we've taken over the last eight months and in the proposed legislation.

Over the last year, the government has responded to a number of the recommendations that came from those discussions, some of them accelerated by COVID-19. One broad recommendation, Speaker, that I heard in the Deputy Speaker's own riding—and, of course, there are lots of smaller recommendations within this broad one—is the need to increase the use of technology in our court system to make it more efficient.

0940

It's quite unbelievable, actually, when families first interact with the court system. They face modernization in every other area of their life—they're ordering, perhaps, their coffee on their smart phone—and then you're dealing with all this paper. You can't get rid of the paper when you're dealing with the court system. It makes no sense. We have some of the brightest minds in our country working in the justice system. We should be able to make it better, and, truly, that's what we're setting out to do, Speaker.

I heard that people wanted us to increase the use of online filing of documents and also increase the use of teleconferences or video conferences where the matter being dealt with is straightforward in nature. In many parts of the province, these advancements in technology could reduce the costs of court cases by reducing the time a lawyer and parties to a case might spend travelling to and from a courthouse or, even more than that, waiting for their matter to be heard at the courthouse once they've arrived. I actually remember someone saying to me in the meetings I kicked off the consultation with in Ottawa something along the lines of, "Lindsey, you'll be my hero if you can just get us online filing."

Since those discussions last summer, we've already taken steps to allow more online filing and introduced many modern online services to help people resolve their family law issues outside the courtroom. We expanded the province's online filing service in August. That expansion included enabling Ontarians to now file up to 150 Family Court documents online in any new or existing proceedings in all three of our Family Courts, whether it's the Superior Court of Justice, the Ontario Court of Justice or the unified Family Court.

We've also made it easier for Ontarians to find court case information without leaving home. I know many reporters who sit up in the press gallery here every day are grateful for this change as well. They don't have to leave home; they can access this online service that provides public access to case information online about criminal and civil court cases at the Superior Court of Justice.

We've also expanded teleconference lines and video conference technology in courtrooms across the province. Speaker, this may seem simple. You may have assumed, as I did when I was elected, that there are teleconference lines in every courtroom in the province. Well, actually, in March, that still wasn't true. So I'm really proud that under the leadership of this Attorney General, since March, over 600 teleconference lines have been added across the province and we now have at least one courtroom in every single courthouse in the province that is capable of video conferencing. These are all steps to make the family justice system more accessible and easier to use.

To echo the sentiments of the Attorney General and our many partners throughout the justice system in Ontario, we cannot go back to the way things were. This is just the beginning. We must continue to innovate across the entire justice system.

Other things we heard, Speaker, and continue to hear, in fact, as the Attorney General mentioned, is this government should continue to work on expanding the unified Family Court model. Unified Family Court streamline Family Court processes to ensure Ontario families only have to go to one court—they don't have to figure out which court—to resolve their legal issues.

We worked with the judiciary and our partners in the federal government, and in 2019, we expanded the court model to eight more locations. Residents in Belleville, Picton, Pembroke, Kitchener, Welland, Simcoe, Cayuga and St. Thomas now have access to these courts. More than half of Ontario residents are living in regions with a unified Family Court now. This means more Ontario families can spend less time navigating confusing courts and legal processes. But more work needs to be done. We'd like to see this model in 100% of our court locations, and we will continue to work with the federal government to advance this priority.

Another topic I heard in my meetings was the need to expand the dispute resolution officer program that's currently in nine locations in Ontario. I'm pleased that the Attorney General, as referenced in his remarks, is investing in the growth of the dispute resolution officer program to more court locations.

Through this program, people involved in family proceedings are provided with an early evaluation of their case by a neutral third party. Dispute resolution officers are senior family lawyers who are appointed to conduct family case conferences. And I can tell you, Speaker, these are people truly committed to serving our justice system and serving the people of Ontario, and helping families resolve their disputes. A dispute resolution officer can help families identify and narrow the issues in their case and facilitate an early settlement.

In locations where the dispute resolution officer program is offered, the first appearance on a request to change an existing Family Court order will come before a dispute resolution officer instead of a judge. Dispute resolution officers mainly deal with requests for changing existing child or spousal support orders. The dispute resolution officer will then meet with the parties to determine their issues and explore settlement options. We need to see more of this in the system.

This program is currently operating in the region of Durham at the courthouse in Oshawa—the Lieutenant-Colonel Sam Sharpe courthouse—as well as at courthouses in Toronto, Barrie, Brampton, Milton, Newmarket, Hamilton, London and St. Catharines. If you're unfamiliar with the program, I encourage you to speak to the family lawyers in your area. This program receives lots of positive reviews. As the Attorney General mentioned, the ministry is now working with the Superior Court of Justice to expand this program to Kitchener and Welland.

This program builds on our government's commitment to help families resolve their matters more quickly and easily, and the positive feedback I've heard about the dispute resolution officer program during my consultations.

Now I'm going to get into the substance of the bill, Speaker, but I thank you for letting me take the time to talk about some of these things that happened outside of this Legislature and through changes within our judiciary and court administration, because they're all part of the consultations that started last summer and the process that has led us here to this bill.

As the Attorney General noted, these proposed changes in the legislation we're debating today respond to the amendments in federal Bill C-78, known as the Divorce Act. Bill C-78 passed on June 21, 2019, and is scheduled to come into force on March 1, 2021. With the support of our family justice partners, our government closely reviewed the federal amendments to determine how changes would impact Ontario's family justice system and what changes would be needed to prepare our province for amendments coming into force next March. After having consulted with our provincial justice partners, I'm pleased to say the amendments introduced in Bill C-78 largely reflect our government's vision of a faster and easier court process for families.

We have seized opportunities that the federal bill presented to reduce the burden on the court system by encouraging the use of alternative dispute resolution processes outside the courts, and those can include Indigenous alternative dispute resolution processes that are specifically designed for Indigenous communities. There are also changes to better address family violence and to provide more clarity around the obligation of the courts to put a focus on the best interests of the child in their decision-making.

As part of our ongoing plan to make government smarter and in response to the federal government's modernization of the Divorce Act, the Ontario government is proposing, with the Moving Ontario Family Law Forward legislation, to align many of the definitions in our laws at the provincial level with the federal Divorce Act changes. This will avoid confusion, and this alignment that I speak of includes updating parenting terminology in Ontario's legislation to remove outdated terms like "custody" and "access." They would be replaced with modern terms like "decision-making responsibility," "parenting time" or "contact." Evolving this language helps our family justice system to move away from the idea that there are winners and losers in a custody dispute.

0950

This legislation, if passed, would help us move toward a less combative justice system. The proposed changes in the Moving Ontario Family Law Forward Act would ensure that Ontario statutes, including Ontario's Children's Law Reform Act, are consistent with federal laws. These changes will help avoid confusion created by one set of terms used by the courts in the case of parenting decisions where a couple is going through a divorce, and another set of terms used for parenting decisions where couples are not going through a divorce or were never married.

I also want to highlight specific provisions that have been added to encourage families to resolve their issues

through out-of-court family dispute resolution processes. The culture, too often, when someone has a family dispute, is to resort to the court system to resolve it. When appropriate, it's important that our justice system find ways to encourage earlier and alternative dispute resolution methods like mediation, collaborative law or arbitration. I am pleased references are made to these processes in this bill. Section 33.1(3) specifically says, "To the extent that it is appropriate to do so, the parties to a proceeding shall try to resolve the matters that may be the subject of an order under this part through an alternative dispute resolution process, such as negotiation, mediation or collaborative law."

These kinds of processes, as I referenced earlier, are very important for Indigenous communities that have a different way, a different culture, around how they resolve disputes. Writing this into the legislation is part of increasing awareness of these services and their valuable role in our justice system. But, Speaker, this is only a small piece of what we need to do to increase public understanding about the availability of these services. There is certainly more work to do before individuals see these alternative types of dispute resolution as a first step before the court process, instead of as a last resort when the court process becomes too frustrating or too expensive.

I also want to highlight section 24 of schedule 1, which outlines what the court must take into account in determining the best interests of the child in a proceeding for a parenting order or contact order. I'm pleased there's a clear list of factors, Speaker, which the court must consider when considering the impacts of family violence on a child. You'll also see in the first few pages of the bill a clear definition of what family violence is. We know, for example—we've talked about it a lot in this Legislature—animal violence is often a predictor of other types of family violence. Those are important things a court needs to look at.

There are a lot of good changes in this section of the bill to provide checks and balances that will help protect children when difficult changes to family relationships are taking place. I will add that making these provincial changes to align family law at the provincial level with the federal Divorce Act changes was one of my most frequently heard recommendations on my tour across the province last summer.

Another frequent topic was the need to clean up the way family law appeal cases work in Ontario. Where does your family law case go next if you want to appeal a decision? That was confusing to many. As the Attorney General said, even family law lawyers were confused. That's the next major problem we propose to fix with this bill.

Speaker, the Moving Ontario Family Law Forward Act aims to simplify the unnecessarily confusing process of filing family law appeals. As the Attorney General has touched on, the current path to filing appeals from family law cases is complicated and unclear. Three different courts hear family cases in Ontario: the Ontario Court of Justice, the Superior Court of Justice, and the Family Court branch of the Superior Court of Justice, also known

as the unified Family Court. Each of these three courts has a different route of appeal for their cases.

Having different routes to appeal a case depending on the court can make it difficult for even lawyers to determine where to appeal a matter. We know that a significant number of the people navigating the family justice system are representing themselves, without help from a lawyer, so you can imagine how those individuals must feel trying to figure out this process. I will highlight, as the Attorney General referenced, that some estimates suggest that it's as much as 70% of individuals appearing before courts in family law that are self-represented and don't have a lawyer. We have to respond to that reality as legislators. We have to make the system easier for people to navigate without a lawyer.

This is one of the reasons why we've proposed these changes to the family law appeal process: to fix this for Ontarians. To make the family law appeal process easier to navigate, the Moving Ontario Family Law Forward Act proposes amendments to the Courts of Justice Act to simplify the appeal routes for family law cases. We are proposing clarifying amendments to the Courts of Justice Act and various other statutes to help simplify appeal routes in family law cases. These proposed changes will help Ontarians—lawyers included—to better understand the family law appeal process and ultimately help reach final decisions faster. This common-sense proposal, if passed, would make it easier for parents to understand where to appeal their case, regardless of where their matter is heard.

I want to highlight one specific part of this proposal that intentionally streamlines the process for appeals when cases involve The Hague Convention on the Civil Aspects of International Child Abduction and involves children who have been removed from the jurisdiction they normally reside in. These cases often require court direction and need to be dealt with expeditiously. Our changes enable that to occur. Canada, as context, is a signatory to The Hague convention which seeks to protect children and their families against the risks of illegal, irregular, premature or ill-prepared adoptions abroad. It puts safeguards in place to make sure inter-country adoptions are in the best interests of the child and respect the child's human rights. It also creates a system of co-operation among countries to help ensure these safeguards are respected and to prevent the abduction of, sale of or trafficking of children.

I think we can probably all agree in this chamber that cases involving topics of this nature should be expedited. I've risen many times in this place, as you know, Speaker, to speak about the crime of sex trafficking. We must do everything we can to fight it, and this will help the courts do their part.

I also want to highlight that the calls for changes to the appeal routes in Ontario are long-standing. The need for a solution has been directly commented on in a number of Ontario Court of Appeal decisions over the last decade. Speaker, as I have seen across our justice system over the last eight months, decade-old problems can be solved

quickly when all justice sector partners come together, motivated to improve the system. I want to thank all our justice partners who I was able to meet with to come to this solution, and I want to say: This is not the end; this is just the beginning.

The goal of the proposed Moving Ontario Family Law Forward Act is to support Ontario families and protect vulnerable children. If passed, these common-sense changes would build on our government's commitment to simplify and modernize a complex and outdated justice system by making the family justice system easier to navigate. Families do not need to, and should not, spend days, weeks and months tied up in the court system. What they need is guidance and support to resolve their issues simply and quickly, and to move forward with their lives. That means access to family law services regardless of where they are; access to out-of-court dispute resolution tools and resources, such as dispute resolution officers, family arbitrators and mediators; and access to a family appeals process they can understand and actually use, no matter where they are or what court is dealing with their matter. This work is only the start of what needs to be done to move family law forward. Ontario families need to know that their government is working to make the family law system more responsive in their time of need. This bill is an important step to move Ontario family law forward.

1000

I just want to conclude by saying that it's incredible the power and responsibility we have as legislators to deal with complicated issues that matter to so many people in Ontario. I must say, I was humbled by the number of people across this province who wanted to participate in a productive way to move the family law system forward. As I said, this is just the start, and I look forward to ongoing collaboration with all our partners, all the users of the system across the province. We want to continue to hear from you: How can we do better? How can we keep moving our system forward?

We understand that we did not get here overnight. If we were designing a system ideal for families, it probably would not look like the system we have and are faced with today. We wouldn't want to change it overnight—it would be irresponsible to change it overnight—but we will continue to take steps day by day, month by month, as long as we're given the privilege to govern and given that responsibility by Ontarians.

We're committed to continuing to moving Ontario family law forward to a place that's easier to navigate, reduces costs and is faster, so people can move on with their lives and spend time with their family. I hope everyone will support this bill.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): It's now time for questions and responses.

Miss Monique Taylor: I would like to thank the Attorney General and his parliamentary assistant, the member from Durham, for bringing this bill forward, the Moving Ontario Family Law Forward Act.

This is probably a once-in-a-generation time that we're going to see this act opened, and so a lot of work, I'm sure,

has gone into it. I know I've also heard from folks who have been part of the consultation, but they think that this act could have gone further. They think that to truly help families, we could have done more. Instead of tweaking some language around the edges, I think that there could have been stronger measures that were put into place to truly ensure that families had the ability to navigate the very cumbersome court system.

As the critic for children's services, not a lawyer, but as someone who has dealt—

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Question?

Miss Monique Taylor: Oh, jeez, that quick already?

My question is: Why didn't you put stronger measures in place, to actually ensure that families had the ability to move through the court system much freer?

Hon. Doug Downey: Thank you for the question. Certainly it is a once-in-a-generation opportunity to open the act. Our focus was entirely on the children and the families who were going through the process, and how complicated the process is. Of course, there are things we could have tweaked differently, that we could have done differently, but aligning with the federal Divorce Act was important for the consumer, to have consistency.

So are there things that we might have done a little bit differently if we were operating entirely in our own silo? Probably, but it was more important to get the consistency that you're seeing before you in the Moving Ontario Family Law Forward Act.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further questions?

Mrs. Nina Tangri: Something that I remind my constituents about who have talked to me about their child custody and access issues during the pandemic is that the justice system has never closed. Ontario's justice system is here and available to serve families and children during some of the most difficult times. Can the Attorney General please share an update on the justice sector's recovery as the province begins to gradually and safely reopen?

Hon. Doug Downey: Thank you to the member for Mississauga—Streetsville, the home of the Bread and Honey Festival, for that question. There are so many things that have changed, and, Speaker, she is absolutely right: The system did not close, and it was because of all the justice partners that came together. The way that we have transformed the system is absolutely remarkable. I'm getting positive responses from Attorneys General from across Canada who are seeing what our government is doing to transform our system, keep it moving and improve it while we're going.

I heard early on in the pandemic somebody talking about building the plane while you're flying it. Mr. Speaker, that's exactly what we did. We have an absolutely top-rate system that we transformed through a very difficult time, and I'm very, very proud of that.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further questions?

Miss Monique Taylor: Again, I've been listening closely and I'm looking for those aspects that are going to be helping families through this process. Now, one of the

things that is mandated by the court process is supervised access for the same children who you are having the best interests in. Some of those children have not had access to their families through COVID due to a lack of funding from your government. Specifically, the YWCA in Hamilton has not had an increase in their base funding since 2008, so no extra money for the pandemic, no money for PPE, no money for extra cleaning. Families are still not being able to see their children because your government has not added funding. Is this in the best interests of the child?

Hon. Doug Downey: I thank the member for the question. I think what she's doing is taking one example that I have not talked to her about—I'm happy to talk to her about it—and extrapolating it across the system. The amount of health and safety measures we have taken in the courts, from deep cleaning right from the beginning, to where we have provided PPE, we have provided wayfinding, you can go on your phone and you can pre-clear—

Interjections.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): I am finding it very difficult to hear the Attorney General. I realize that it's a little difficult to talk through our masks, but that increases the volume levels, so please, I would ask that we keep the volume down as low as possible, and maybe we can eliminate the sidebars for the time being.

Back to the Attorney General.

Hon. Doug Downey: Thank you, Speaker. I was just speaking about the tremendous lengths we went to in terms of providing, under the supervision of medical professionals, PPE and hand sanitizer and wayfinding and electronic pre-clearance to go into courthouses, prioritizing what happens, working with victim services, putting cash into the system to allow people to work remotely and to allow them to work differently, with laptops and VPNs and digital recording devices. Mr. Speaker, I could spend 10 minutes and just rhyme off the list of things that we did for the health and safety of the participants in the justice sector.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further questions?

Mr. Stan Cho: I want to talk about government regulation for a second and ask the Attorney General about some of the red tape that's in the system, Speaker. Regulations can often be well-intended, and they can have unintended consequences. Specifically, there's a requirement for family arbitrators to submit a report to the Ministry of the Attorney General about family arbitration awards they decide. This doesn't seem to make sense to me. I'm hoping the Attorney General can explain how removing unnecessary red tape such as this reporting requirement can not only save money in the system but lead to better outcomes for the people we serve.

Hon. Doug Downey: This is classic red tape. This is just the very definition of red tape. It started off as a good idea and it had an original purpose, but it just existed in the system and nobody really looked at it anymore, and it became something that was no longer effective. When a mediator was doing a family mediation, they had to do a

detailed report and submit it to the government. Somebody within the government took that; whether they reviewed it, I'm not sure. We've been doing this for over a decade.

The original intention was to get data to make some decisions, so it started off with a good reason. We now have over a decade of data. There is no longer a useful reason to cause a mediator to have to fill out those forms, to have to submit them, to have government manage them. It is the very definition of red tape, and I am so pleased that my colleagues parliamentary assistant to finance Cho and Minister Sarkaria both encouraged me to look at every particular angle and see if we could find more red tape to cut. This is a prime example, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further questions?

Miss Monique Taylor: Access to justice should be something that should always be a focus here in this House. The Attorney General himself talked about self-representation within family law; 50% to 70% of people are self-representing, quite frankly because they can't afford a lawyer. Now, if the government had made mediation mandatory instead of a suggestion, I think that would have been helpful.

1010

But also, the cuts to legal aid have affected the most vulnerable people in our communities. A basic family law case costs about \$12,000, and the income cut-off for legal aid is \$20,000. That doesn't really leave a lot of room for our most vulnerable families to be able to get through the legal system with representation—and they become out-gunned and, in most cases, lose their children in the case.

Why do they not think that legal aid is an important aspect of access to justice within this bill, making sure that people truly have access to justice?

Hon. Doug Downey: There are a couple of pieces in there that I'd like to address. I know it may not be intentional, but people often say they can't afford a lawyer and that's the problem. The lawyer is not the problem, Mr. Speaker; the problem is the system is complex. It's complex, it's difficult to navigate and it's difficult to get an answer.

That's exactly what we're doing here: making the child support system easier to navigate, cheaper and reliable, to serve the people who need it when they need it the most.

The question about legal aid, about income cut-off: We've increased it year over year. We increase that income cut-off yearly. We're providing a first-rate service. We provide more service than any other jurisdiction in Canada. We provide just excellent, top-notch service in three different branches.

Again, I'll answer more in the supplementaries, if possible.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further questions?

Mr. Jim McDonnell: I listened intently about some of the efficiencies, I think we talked about, which improve access to justice. Maybe we could have the minister elaborate on some of the more key things they've done, with the last 30 seconds.

Hon. Doug Downey: Access to justice is what this is all about—justice for the children in particular and then the participants otherwise. Access means that they can get what they need, they can understand what they need. They can get answers. They can get them faster, they can get them cheaper, they can get them more consistently. Access to justice is all of those things, and each part of this bill addresses that in some way—again, very proud to have it in second reading. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): A good debate this morning, but unfortunately, the time for debate has expired.

Second reading debate deemed adjourned.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

COVID-19 RESPONSE

Mr. Wayne Gates: I rise today to tell the Premier that he must deal with COVID wait times in Niagara. We have outbreaks in nine schools. We have worried parents, teachers, grandparents and kids.

In Niagara, families can't get COVID tests for days, and when they can, they are forced to wait hours before getting tested. One family with a six-year-old called for a test on Tuesday and didn't hear back until Friday. On the day that the child did the test, they waited four hours and needed to leave repeatedly to take a washroom break. Imagine that experience for a six-year-old. These are kids who don't understand COVID or testing, and are scared. They miss school and they wait in their car the entire day for a test that may or may not happen.

Stories like this occurred before the closure of our drive-through testing facility, which often had lineups at 6 a.m., despite opening at 9 a.m.

When COVID cases start rising, we have very little time to get the virus under control. We know that in a week, cases can spiral out of control and begin to overwhelm our hospitals. Front-line workers are trying their hardest, but they just can't keep up.

We can address these issues head-on. We must have easier and quicker access to testing in Niagara.

To the Premier, I say this: Look at what's happening with testing in Niagara and get the needed resources there immediately. With the proper resources in place, this process can be quick and easier for children and their families. Parents will need less time off work and above all, it will give the people the information they need to keep our community safe.

Mr. Speaker, people without sick days to cover missed days from work and kids missing school can't wait a week for testing. It's not reasonable and it's not safe. The Conservative government must support our front-line workers, release funding and supports—

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

INDIGENOUS RELATIONS AND RECONCILIATION

Mr. Deepak Anand: I would like to acknowledge that we are meeting on the treaty lands and territory of the Mississaugas of the New Credit, traditionally inhabited by Indigenous people. As a settler, I am grateful for the opportunity to meet here and would like to say thank you. Thank you for all the generations of people who have taken care of this land for thousands of years.

Mr. Speaker, I rise to acknowledge Orange Shirt Day, recognized on September 30, the day inspired by Phyllis “Jack” Webstad who, in 1973 at the age of six, attended her first day of school in Williams Lake, BC, wearing a brand new orange shirt gifted by her grandmother. When she arrived at the school, Phyllis’s new orange shirt was stripped and taken away from her, something she never wore again. Phyllis has courageously spoken about the devastating impact this action had on her dignity and self-worth, and how it made her feel as if her existence did not matter.

Today, I am wearing an orange shirt to become a part of the reconciliation journey, acknowledging the painful truth of the long-lasting, multi-generational impact of the residential school system on the Indigenous communities. As we move forward together on the path of reconciliation, I urge all Ontarians to honour survivors like Phyllis and their families who have bravely shared their experiences, and to commit to learning more about the legacy of the residential school system in Canada. We need to acknowledge that every child matters.

SPECIAL-NEEDS STUDENTS

M^{me} France Gélinas: My constituent Mrs. Skevington is the mother of two young children, Paige and Eithan. Both of her children have special needs and have individual education plans with their schools in Hanmer in my riding. Since August, Mrs. Skevington has been trying to get answers from administrators, from principals, from health professionals about how to keep her children’s individual education plan with online learning. Unfortunately, all she’s getting is frustrated and confused.

Mrs. Skevington is a good mother who wants her children to succeed, and she is deaf. The challenges that she faces on a daily basis are unbelievable. Her son is not motivated to learn online. Many online tools do not have closed captioning, leaving her and her son to try to sign to each other words that he has not even learned yet. Keeping her son with ADHD engaged in online learning is causing a lot of family friction. It is demoralizing.

Her daughter, Paige, is slowly losing her hearing. A teacher wearing a mask gave her online classes. That did not work; she could not read lips and the words were all muffled. Therefore, she moved to in-class learning, yet the amplification system she needs is not available. So most days, she leaves school with a stress headache.

Speaker, our public education system is the great equalizer. Our schools need the resources during the pandemic and always to meet the educational needs of those two children and all children with special needs.

PUBLIC TRANSIT

Ms. Lindsey Park: On September 18, I had the pleasure of joining the Minister of Infrastructure, who is also the member for Haliburton–Kawartha Lakes–Brock, along with the member for Whitby and the member for Pickering–Uxbridge in Oshawa to announce more than \$126 million in joint federal, provincial and regional funding for 11 public transit projects that will modernize and improve public transit and active transportation in Durham region. Here is where some of the funding is going.

The implementation of a 10-kilometre north-south bus rapid transit corridor through Oshawa that will run along Simcoe Street from Royal Street north to Highway 407. The project will include eight new conventional buses, new bus shelters and traffic signal upgrades that will improve service reliability along the transit corridor.

The construction of bus rapid transit lanes with active transportation corridors are also happening on Kingston Road in Ajax, Dundas Street in Whitby and downtown Oshawa, including new cycling lanes and multi-use paths to connect to transit stations.

The improvement to bus stop infrastructure safety and accessibility across the region is also happening, including adding more lighting, which matters for those most vulnerable in our community when they’re standing there waiting for their bus.

The replacement of older vehicles with 11 conventional buses with new hybrid electric vehicles, 13 conventional buses and 16 mini buses, as well as the purchase of two additional articulated buses for the bus rapid transit fleet.

Together, these investments will provide residents with more frequent, accessible and reliable bus service.

1020

SOCIAL ASSISTANCE

Mr. Joel Harden: Last weekend, our office held a virtual town hall on social assistance, and it was a disturbing event. I’m going to ask all my fellow colleagues here listening to this just to be aware that I’m about to talk about some challenging things, and if anybody is watching this at home with small children, I invite you to ask them to tune out.

With that warning, Speaker, what we heard from far too many people participating in our town hall was that people with disabilities are living in such abject conditions that many have applied for medical assistance in dying. Christina Ranieri, the executive director of Ability First Ottawa, a many-decorated person who works with over 300 clients, informed us that over 100 people she works with have made this application.

I’m raising this today to ring an alarm bell with my colleagues in this House, because folks have been living alone, socially isolated, many without access to the appropriate medications, many living in constant pain. I invite us to think about what it’s like to live without powered equipment that’s necessary to live our lives, whether it be a chair or oxygen tanks. I invite all of us to

ask what it's like to have a \$100-a-month benefit now out of their monthly income, when they were living already deeply below poverty.

Speaker, the member for Windsor West and I have a meeting later today with an advocacy organization on this issue. I invite the government to immediately reinstate that \$100 a month and help folks who are absolutely struggling. We have to do it as a province.

VETERANS

Mr. Randy Hillier: This past Saturday, I joined with MP Scott Reid and Mayor Fenik, the mayor of the town of Perth, along with hundreds of our other residents and visitors, to pay tribute to many of the veterans from Perth with the inaugural unveiling of the Pathway of Heroes. Some 101 banners commemorating our veterans are now being displayed, hung on the street lamps of downtown Perth. The following is the address that I delivered to that large assembly of people:

"I'll be brief, because the actions of those we celebrate today speak much louder than any words that I could possibly deliver. Today, we honour those who volunteered to take a stand against tyranny and defended our principles of freedom, justice and democracy. Those we remember today held the strong belief that even with our differences, we have much more in common, and that the society we built together is better than any alternative and worth defending.

"Courage is not the absence of fear, it is doing what you know is right—despite your fears. We honour their courage today, lest we forget."

JULIA NOTEBOMER

Mr. Randy Pettapiece: Perth–Wellington is home to so many accomplished young people. Julia Notebomer is one of them. She is an open-water swimmer. Julia recently became the youngest person ever to swim across Lake Erie. This is a remarkable achievement. She spent months preparing for this 20-kilometre swim. Her training included swimming five times a week in open water and practising in her parents' unheated pool in the colder months. Julia successfully completed her swim on August 30, her 14th birthday.

Julia's athletic accomplishments are just part of the story, Speaker. She used this once-in-a-lifetime opportunity for something more: Julia wanted this event to double as a fundraiser for the Make-A-Wish Foundation, which works to fulfill the wishes of critically ill children. Julia raised over \$27,000.

Julia, congratulations on your achievements and thank you for inspiring all of us, young and old, to use our talents to benefit others.

INDIGENOUS RELATIONS AND RECONCILIATION

Mr. Sol Mamakwa: I rise today to recognize Orange Shirt Day. We observe this day to raise awareness of the

impacts of Indian residential schools in our communities. We acknowledge the survivors, and the ones who did not survive.

Phyllis Webstad, an elder now in Williams Lake, BC, inspired Orange Shirt Day. She was six years old on her first day of residential school in 1973. Before she left home, her grandmother dressed her in an orange shirt. She said, "When I got to the school, they took away my clothes, including the orange shirt. I never saw it again." She continued, "The colour orange has always reminded me of that day, how no one cared and how I felt I was worth nothing. All of us little children were crying and no one cared."

Indian residential schools were a creation of government colonial policies, using the churches. They took away our way of life and our language from generations of our children. They neglected us. They sexually abused us. They murdered us.

Through these schools, Canada attempted to commit genocide against Indigenous peoples. This genocide exists in the complacency of governments today. Our people pay in full for this inaction with their health and with their lives.

Governments can and must do better, but today, I'm grateful for those who survived and who thrive, and I'm thankful for the ongoing strength and resilience of our people. Kitchi-meegwetch.

COVID-19 RESPONSE

Mr. Kaleed Rasheed: Mr. Speaker, as you know, I represent the great riding of Mississauga East–Cooksville, where I have lived for almost 20 years. My riding is a place where my kids were born and are growing up and where my parents are living out their golden years.

The community where I live has been performing exceptionally in the wake of the COVID-19 crisis. Throughout the last six months, I have witnessed tremendous kindness and generosity from individuals, families, businesses and community groups. People came together to collect donations of money, food and PPE for those who needed it most. They took the time to stay home, isolate and socially distance to combat the rise in cases earlier this year and did their best to get us all through the first wave and into phase 3 of our recovery.

I want to thank the residents of the Mississauga East–Cooksville community and all the communities across Ontario for doing their part to stop the spread of COVID-19. Please, don't forget to download, install and activate the COVID Alert app on your phone, wear your mask, keep your distance, wash your hands and get your flu shot.

Ontarians have shown remarkable resilience and commitment to supporting each other this year. I know we can continue to show one another just how much we can accomplish when we work together.

WORLD VISION

Mr. Billy Pang: World Vision is a global relief, development and advocacy organization that aims to support

and empower kids, families and communities to rise out of poverty and tackle injustice.

Today, World Vision, with the support of volunteers, is helping more than four million children in nearly 100 countries. I'm proud to say that I have been a volunteer for World Vision for over three decades and am currently sponsoring six kids. This organization has a special place in my heart.

Six kilometres is the average distance a woman or a child in the developing world walks for water. Too often, the water obtained is not clean enough to drink and may cause illness, even death. This year, 2020, Global 6K aims to fund clean water projects in the Menkao region of the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Mr. Speaker, I want to thank everyone who attends and participates in World Vision's Markham-Unionville: Walk for Clean Water fundraising event. Following the health protocols, and in combination with four teams—Billy Pang and Friends, Grace Chinese Gospel Church of North York, MC Muay Thai Academy and Conditioning and Wesley Marie and Wini Zumba Dance—we fundraised over \$10,000 to support clean water projects for kids last Saturday. Let's continue to change lives one day at a time.

1030

RESIDENTIAL SCHOOLS

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Earlier this morning, the member for Kiiwetinoong sought and received the unanimous consent of the House to have a moment's silence in tribute to the Indigenous victims and survivors of the residential school experience. That moment of silence will take place now. I will ask all members to rise.

The House observed a moment's silence.

QUESTION PERIOD

COVID-19 RESPONSE

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My first question this morning is for the Premier. For weeks the Premier has been saying that all the decisions that he is making have been made on the advice of experts that sit around his COVID-19 command table. My question is, will the Premier actually tell us today exactly who those experts are?

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

Hon. Christine Elliott: We have been very clear about who is involved in the table from the very beginning. Of course it's Dr. Williams, our Chief Medical Officer of Health; we also have Dr. Huyer, who is helping with outbreak management; Dr. Yaffe, who has also appeared and spoken in many contexts; as well as many other physicians.

It's also important to note that as we developed our fall preparedness plan, Keeping Ontarians Safe, we conducted consultations with over 45 groups, including over 300

experts in all aspects of our health care system. So our fall preparedness plan was not something that came from one or two people; this was something that was done in conjunction with all aspects of our health care system, including the people that are on the public health measures table.

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

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Back to the Premier: For months the Premier has said, "You'll know what I know" when I know. That's exactly what he said: You'll know what I know when it comes to COVID-19. Yet the government refuses to say which long-term-care homes are at high risk, which workplaces have had outbreaks and which experts the Premier is consulting behind the scenes at his COVID-19 command table.

What possible reason could this Premier have for not telling us the information that people deserve? Why is he keeping these things secret?

Hon. Christine Elliott: There is nothing secret here. We have been straightforward and transparent with the people of Ontario with every step that we have taken throughout this COVID-19 outbreak. We have brought forward the experts. Today there was a release of modelling information. As the Premier has always indicated, when he knows it, the people of Ontario will know it. That's exactly what's happening now. That modelling information has been brought forward.

The Chief Medical Officer of Health comes to almost every briefing that we have, at 1 o'clock. There is a presentation. I understand that you have asked for an update, and that will be provided to you and to the leaders of the other parties this afternoon. That information is going to be provided. It's important that everyone know the decisions that are being made and why they are being made. That's why it's so important to have this information come forward, and we're prepared to answer any questions that you want to ask about it.

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

Ms. Andrea Horwath: You can't pick and choose transparency. This is not the case. We have asked questions about who is at the command table. They refuse to answer. We have asked questions about which long-term-care homes are considered high risk. They refuse to answer. We have asked questions about outbreaks in employment areas, in workplaces. They refuse to answer. That's what we're asking for. We're asking for transparency across the board, not just when this government picks and chooses to put out a tidbit of information.

He says he listens to experts, the Premier says that, but now we're unprepared for a second wave because the Ford government ignored experts for months. For months, in schools and long-term care, they were literally writing the Premier and saying, "We are not prepared for a second wave." And now here we sit. Experts in public health and hospitals were warning the Premier that the hospital testing system was heading for a crash. Yet the Premier still insists that he has his own experts.

Why is he refusing to be transparent and tell people, tell all of us, who those experts are?

Hon. Christine Elliott: First of all, we have been open and transparent with this information. We have brought the doctors forward. We know that it is very important to the people of Ontario to hear not just from us as politicians but from the doctors about what the situation is on the ground. And those doctors have come forward.: Dr. Yaffe has come forward; Dr. Williams has come forward; Dr. Allen, Dr. Brown, Dr. Huyer; and the list goes on. Those are the people who are at the public health measures table.

But we've also consulted more widely than that. We've consulted with the Ontario Hospital Association. We've consulted with the Ontario Medical Association, who has just come forward with a report advising us of their recommendations with respect to COVID-19 and dealing with a second wave. We are acting on those recommendations.

I would also like to point out that the OMA stated in their report that the government should stay alert and adapt to evolving science and take an iterative approach to developing guidelines and recommendations as new research, evidence and data emerges. And that is exactly what we are doing.

LONG-TERM CARE

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My next question is also for the Premier. Yesterday, three more families learned that their loved ones died in Ontario long-term-care homes from COVID-19 in Ottawa's West End Villa and in Toronto's Fairview Nursing Home. At least 46 homes now have COVID-19 outbreaks, a number that has doubled in the last week.

Will the Premier accept any responsibility for his failure to put measures in place that could have actually saved these lives?

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

Hon. Merrilee Fullerton: Thank you to the member opposite for the question. I am deeply troubled when I see members of the opposition laughing and smiling about this. This is a serious issue.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: That's not even happening.

Hon. Merrilee Fullerton: When I see people smiling and laughing about this, I am—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Order. Stop the clock. Order.

I'm going to caution all members on their language and the statements that they're making so as to ensure that we have a civil question period for the next 53 minutes.

Start the clock. Minister of Long-Term Care.

Hon. Merrilee Fullerton: Thank you, Speaker. Our government puts the safety and well-being of residents and staff as a priority. All the measures that we've taken with Public Health, with Ontario Health, with the public health units in the various locations, these are measures that are ongoing with the command table.

We look at the number of outbreaks—and I want to emphasize this point again, that the vast majority of outbreaks we have right now have no resident cases. Our surveillance system is working. I take this issue very, very seriously, and I hope that we all do.

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

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Seniors in long-term care needed protection months ago. Back in February, the Premier and the Treasury Board refused to put the extra money into long-term care that the department was asking for. Again, in June, the sector was begging the government for more resources, begging for more support, and the Premier said no. Instead, the Premier waited for the second wave to hit, and scribbled some numbers on a page. He's still refusing to implement the recommendations of his own expert panel for higher wages and a minimum standard of care for every resident in long-term care.

1040

A new study confirms that the Premier's inaction in the spring actually led to needless deaths. Why is the Premier constantly literally waiting until people are dying before taking action?

Hon. Merrilee Fullerton: I do take exception to the characterization of the efforts of the Premier. I look at his efforts with the PPE, I look at his ongoing efforts. This is his top priority. There's no question in my mind. All resources are being used. We continue to work to add more layers, to do more, working with the evolving information that is coming from the science in understanding the spread and being vigilant and adaptable; our surveillance in the homes, looking at the type of spread as the evidence changes, working with our ethics table, working with our public health table, working with the science table.

I want to impart the appreciation that I have for our Premier, the Premier of Ontario, who has done nothing but support me, has done everything to support residents and staff, and you will be hearing more this week about future efforts.

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

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Well, Speaker, if the Premier's top priority has been long-term care and this is how he has behaved, how he has treated the long-term-care system and the people who live in it, we are in big, big trouble.

The Premier said yesterday that the numbers speak for themselves. He's absolutely right: 46 homes are currently in outbreak; two more homes in Ottawa had to be taken over by hospitals because the for-profit operators couldn't handle what was happening in the homes; 1,867 seniors have died—my note said 1,866, although another person died just since this note was given to me this morning.

When the Premier says the numbers speak for themselves, what numbers is he actually talking about? Because these numbers are horrifying and shameful and could have been prevented.

Hon. Merrilee Fullerton: Thank you once again for the question. Of the 78,000 residents in long-term care, one tenth of 1% are affected right now. We have 90

resident cases. That perspective needs to be understood. The majority of our homes that are considered in outbreak are considered in outbreak because they have either a case of a resident or a staff. In the majority of our homes, the vast majority, there is not a single resident case.

We will continue to add layers—with this virus, the fight of all our lives. I would appreciate if the opposition would understand and be part of the solutions. We're going to need all the energy we have to muster to fight COVID-19, not only in our long-term-care homes but across Ontario. A collaborative effort when our energy needs to be at the best would be appreciated.

COVID-19 RESPONSE

Ms. Peggy Sattler: My question is to the Premier. Londoners are doing their part to limit the spread of COVID-19. They're following public health guidelines. They're lining up for hours to get tests for themselves or their children. But now the government is capping how many tests can be done in London. A leaked government memo states bluntly, "Do not proceed with any new growth or expansion of assessment centres at this time."

Speaker, just two days ago, our local medical officer of health warned, "We've had so many people that have been turned away, or not even seeking testing because of the long lineups, and that means that there are certainly many times more cases in the community than we're able to diagnose right now."

Why is this government capping testing in London, instead of allowing assessment centres to expand?

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

Hon. Christine Elliott: I thank the member opposite for the question. First of all, there is no one who needs a test who is going to be turned away. There is no capping; there are no quotas. Anyone who needs a test is going to be given a test.

But there has been a lot of misinformation, I would say, about this, and I welcome the opportunity to provide some clarity.

Speaker, with your indulgence, I would like to quote from the actual memo that went out from Ontario Health yesterday. In my supplementary, I'd like to provide further information about it. This is what it says:

"Anyone who needs to be tested per the guidance should get tested. There are no caps or quotas on testing consistent with the new guidance." It goes on to say, "To that end, we are working with assessment centres on testing targets that are based on a historical utilization of tests in each region. A testing target refers to how many tests a region should need, based on what we historically observed in each region. They also help us determine the number of tests coming to us and from where. Additionally, these tests go beyond anticipated need, based on the ministry's new testing—

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

The supplementary question?

Ms. Peggy Sattler: The memo also states, "Do not proceed with any new growth or expansion of assessment centres at this time." This minister gave exactly the same answer to the people of Ottawa when my colleague raised this issue in this chamber yesterday.

The government can pretend that its COVID response is fine, but its failure to plan for a second wave means that tests are being capped in both southwestern Ontario and eastern Ontario. The Premier knew that his government had struggled to complete even 20,000 tests a day in the spring. He knew that demands for testing would increase in the fall as students returned to school and post-secondary education. He knew that a testing backlog has been growing, leaving people who do get a test waiting days for their results.

Speaker, why does this government think it's acceptable to cut off the line and cap the number of COVID tests available to the people who need them?

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Stop the clock.

Neither the member for Ottawa South, nor the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing, nor the Minister of Natural Resources and Forestry have the floor. All of you have to come to order.

Start the clock. The response? Minister of Health.

Hon. Christine Elliott: Just to complete, what the guidance note from Ontario Health said is, "Ontario Health will continue to monitor testing volumes daily and adjust, as needed, in order to align with and support the ministry's guidance."

So the answer is the same because the strategy is the same. We have anticipated the need to increase testing, which we've done. We're up over 40,000 tests per day. We're increasing our lab capacity, and we're increasing our contact management. We're putting \$1 billion into managing this. What I need to say to the member and to the people of Ontario is, the reason why this memo was sent out is so that we can continue to support increased guidance and testing as necessary.

This is a very complicated system when you have volumes coming in from specimens all across the province from very different regions with different labs doing the testing, in some cases, with the revised guidance. Somewhere the test volumes are going down; somewhere they're going up. We're trying to match the guidance with the specimens going into the labs, bearing in mind there's a three-day limit on a specimen.

What we're trying to do is to make sure we can continue to increase the testing—

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

The next question.

CONCUSSIONS

Ms. Lindsey Park: My question is for the Minister of Heritage, Sport, Tourism and Culture Industries. Today is Rowan's Law Day. Rowan's Law has helped keep athletes

safe and protected against the severe impact of concussions, which are much more dangerous when they're neglected.

I can say, as an athlete myself, understanding the pressures, it's not always easy as an athlete to take yourself out of the game due to an injury, particularly injuries others can't see, like a concussion. Would the minister please tell us what action our government is taking to change that culture in sport because this is a very real issue?

Hon. Lisa MacLeod: I'd really like to say thank you to the member from Durham for raising this important issue today on the third annual Rowan's Law Day. I think it speaks volumes, as an athlete herself, as she's committed to making sure that we have a safer entry and re-entry into sport for all Ontario young athletes.

1050

Earlier today, I had the opportunity to be at SickKids hospital here in Toronto to mark a new announcement that the government is embarking upon. Obviously it was quite emotional, given that Rowan Stringer, my former constituent, died tragically at the age of 17 from second-impact syndrome at the Children's Hospital of Eastern Ontario. We were able to announce last week, with the committed member from Ottawa West–Nepean, that we will be creating a national dialogue at the next federal-provincial-territorial meeting of sports ministers.

In addition to that, we had an exceptional panel last night with former broadcaster and NHLer Nick Kypreos, former NHLer and Olympian Eric Lindros and former CFL player Tim Fleiszer to talk about the impacts of concussions on young athletes. I'll have more to say in the supplemental, but—

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

Ms. Lindsey Park: I want to thank the minister for her work around Rowan's Law Day, and I want to thank Rowan's parents for sharing her story. It's a story that has inspired so many Ontarians. The message is this: If you're injured, stop and sit out.

As many members are aware, our minister has coached her daughter's hockey team and no doubt faced situations where young athletes wanted to play through injuries. Minister, as not only a coach but as a mother, what advice can you share with young boys and girls who are playing sports in Ontario?

Hon. Lisa MacLeod: I think the first message will be from Gordon and Kathleen Stringer, who lost their daughter: Her death was preventable. Therefore, it's important that we do take every precaution we can, particularly with young minds.

I will say that our government is also committed to making sure that we support rural communities, which is why my colleague the Associate Minister of Energy yesterday made an announcement on my behalf for \$25,000 to rural communities for enhanced support.

Over the years, our ministry has invested over \$780,000 for concussion awareness and protocols, but today was very memorable because we were able to announce a

\$200,000 investment into a documentary in the name of Rowan Stringer, to showcase her life and death, and how it was preventable.

What I ask all parents to do is, just because you paid the entry fee—and I know it's expensive and you want your kid to play in that last tournament—if they have a concussion, it could be potentially fatal, and it's just not worth it. If Gordon and Kathleen Stringer had been able to prevent their daughter's death, I guarantee they would have.

COVID-19 RESPONSE IN INDIGENOUS AND REMOTE COMMUNITIES

Mr. Sol Mamakwa: My question is to the Premier. Speaker, communities across Kiiwetinoong were in crisis before COVID-19. The pandemic has only deepened these crises. In Neskantaga, there has been 26 years of boil-water advisories; to be exact, 9,373 days without access to clean drinking water. In another community, 85% of the homes do not have running water. In the community of Wapekeka, there have been approximately 25 suicides over the last 30 years.

What resources have been provided by the government to these communities to help them with the COVID-19 pandemic?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Minister of Indigenous Affairs.

Hon. Greg Rickford: I thank the honourable member for his question and for his statement this morning.

Mr. Speaker, just two years ago, this government made it a priority to reset the relationships with Indigenous communities to focus on things on the ground and in the community that could and would make a difference. Some of that is borne from the experiences that I had living and working in many of those communities over the course of my career, and I appreciate the leadership of the Premier and the support of our caucus and this government in bringing some of those to fruition. Others, Mr. Speaker, were business that was unfinished from a previous government that had simply not put priorities where they mattered most, and that was in the communities.

That's why we've put a particular emphasis on major projects across northern Ontario. The east-west tie comes to mind, the Watay Power project, fundamentally improving the fortunes and quality of life in those communities.

We remain committed to improving the quality of life and investing in Indigenous youth across northern Ontario.

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

Mr. Sol Mamakwa: Thank you for the response. Again, I think simple, basic human rights such as clean drinking water are very basic. We need Ontario to invest in them.

Since I've been here, and since I've been up north, growing up, I know governments come and go. Programs come and go. Funding comes and goes. That happens. As Ontario enters a second, more serious wave of COVID-19,

what is this government going to do to support these communities against a second wave?

Hon. Greg Rickford: I have to say that during the first wave, and continuing today, not only have we had thorough and consistent engagement with the Chiefs of Ontario and their leadership council every single week, I and many of my colleagues, ministerial colleagues, have joined them. It has been much appreciated. Not all the conversations have been easy, to the member opposite—there have been some difficult and tense moments.

But underpinning that was the confidence that this government was committed to making sure and supporting the incredible leadership that Indigenous leaders have shown, from Regional Chief Archibald to the grand chiefs, especially and including Grand Chief Alvin Fiddler, with the bigger challenges of protecting isolated communities, and the chiefs of those communities. I would say, given the number of COVID cases in those communities, they and we have done a great job. We will continue to remain engaged and make the priority investments to protect those communities. He has the word of the Premier and my word—

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

Next question.

COVID-19 RESPONSE

Mr. Randy Hillier: My question is to the Premier. Our COVID policies and the risk that they pose require an honest and forthright discussion. Dr. Yeadon, a former chief scientist with the pharmaceutical giant Pfizer, has stated that most if not all of the PCR tests result in false positives due to high Ct thresholds. Juliet Morrison, a virologist at the University of California, states that any test with a cycle threshold above 35 is too sensitive. The Public Health Agency of Canada reported in May of this year that testing over 25 cycles provides dubious results. The prestigious Oxford professor, Dr. Carl Heneghan, has stated that a PCR test does not equal COVID-19.

My question to the Premier: Is your testing creating both a false understanding of the risk, as well as false positives?

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

Hon. Christine Elliott: The PCR testing is very effective in areas where there are outbreaks. It has proven to be so. We are receiving that information. We need that information in order to take action. We have taken action on several fronts in terms of limiting unmonitored social gatherings, limiting capacities in restaurants and bars, and in other actions that we've taken.

But I'm not quite sure what the member is suggesting. Are you suggesting we don't do any testing? We just stop testing? Is that the reaction that we should be taking with this? What else would you suggest?

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

Mr. Randy Hillier: Back to the Premier: I'm glad that question was posed. On July 30, the Associate Chief Medical Officer of Health, Dr. Barbara Yaffe, stated that our testing can result in over 50% false positives, that is, the person actually doesn't have COVID-19, they have something else or they have nothing. She has also called for limits on testing of asymptomatic people, while the government calls for more—another contradiction in a long list of COVID contradictions.

We know high false positive rates are due to high Cts, and Canadian and world experts agree it should not be more than 25 cycles. Yet according to the Journal of Virology, Ontario labs are testing samples at 38 to 45 cycles. That's what needs to be done.

Speaker, to the Premier: When did the Premier become aware of these faulty tests and practices, and why have you done nothing to fix them since at least July?

Hon. Christine Elliott: I would say to the member, there are zero inconsistencies coming from our public health experts. Dr. Yaffe has clarified what she indicated before. What she indicated before was that the—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Order.

Hon. Christine Elliott:—PCR testing is very effective in areas where we are having outbreaks, such as what we're seeing in various parts of the province right now, in Peel, in Ottawa and in Toronto. We need that testing to make those decisions—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The member for Lanark–Frontenac–Kingston will come to order.

1100

Restart the clock. The minister can conclude her answer.

Hon. Christine Elliott: We are taking action where we need to take action. We're looking at other methods of testing as well. Some of the antigen testing is looking very promising; it looks as if Health Canada is going to be approving that. It's a good screening tool, but we need every tool that we can use at our discretion: PCR testing, antigen testing, we're looking at saliva testing. We need everything that we can do for screening and for testing purposes to keep the people of Ontario safe and healthy.

COVID-19 RESPONSE

Mr. Randy Pettapiece: My question is to the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing. Minister, I know that this summer you joined the Premier and the Minister of Finance to announce that our government has secured \$2 billion in support from the federal government for our municipal partners.

The first round of funding from your ministry has played a critical role in relieving the financial pressures that COVID-19 has put on our communities. Could you provide more details on the historic Safe Restart Agreement?

Hon. Steve Clark: I want to take this opportunity to thank the member for Perth–Wellington, not just for the

question but for the great work that he does in his riding. He is so very close to his municipalities and his municipal partners. I want to thank him for that.

As I've said in the House before, the Premier worked with our municipal partners, other Premiers, our Prime Minister and Deputy Prime Minister Freeland to reach the historic \$4-billion Safe Restart Agreement, which included \$2 billion for our municipal partners. Mr. Speaker, \$1.22 billion of that municipal support is coming directly from our government, and the funding, as we all know, is addressing those municipal operating needs, but it's also creating those more longer-term innovative housing solutions, and also supporting our public health costs.

Mr. Speaker, \$695 million in municipal operating funding has flowed through phase 1 of the agreement, and there's an additional \$695 million that's ready to flow for that second phase. I know that municipalities are keenly interested. They've been great partners, and we want—

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Thank you. Supplementary?

Mr. Randy Pettapiece: Thank you, Minister, for your response. I know that this funding has been greatly appreciated across Ontario and certainly in my riding of Perth–Wellington.

Our government knows that this first round of Safe Restart funding will be sufficient to meet the needs of most of our municipalities, but of course some communities have been hit extra-hard, and they will need access to the second round of funding. Could the minister provide more clarity on how and when municipalities can access the next round of funding?

Hon. Steve Clark: Again, thanks to the member. He's absolutely right: We know collectively, because we've all stayed in constant contact with our municipal partners, that for many of them, that first \$695-million allocation was sufficient to address some of those operating challenges that they had. But we also know that many of those communities need more assistance. That's why phase 2 will provide that much-needed \$695 million. It will be able to be demonstrated and given to those municipalities that show that need. Eligible municipalities that will be applying for phase 2 funding will be informed of their additional allocations in the very near future, because we know that they certainly need that to deal with those municipal pressures.

Again, we have been working with our municipal partners throughout the pandemic. I want to thank members from all parties on all sides of the House to ensure that we support them. I am convinced, Speaker, that our municipal partners will be leading the recovery in our province.

AFFORDABLE HOUSING

Ms. Rima Berns-McGown: My question is for the Premier. Encampments—some people are calling them “Ford towns,” because they are the growing legacy of this Premier's heartless policies—continue to expand in many neighbourhoods in Toronto and across the province.

Winter is coming, and we are facing a humanitarian disaster. Cities can't cope on their own. There's simply nowhere for people to go. Shelters, respites and drop-ins are full.

The government needs to step up to create tens of thousands of units of rent-gated-to-income, affordable housing. It needs to create emergency shelters and hotel spaces immediately, accompanied by overdose prevention and harm reduction services and mental health supports, as well as the necessities of life for people in encampments now: washroom facilities, food and water, safe sources of heat and winter survival gear.

COVID has vastly exacerbated what was already a homelessness emergency. When is the government going to act on this looming humanitarian disaster?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing.

Hon. Steve Clark: Thanks very much for the question. I've said many times in the House that we on this side of the House believe every Ontarian needs a safe and secure place to call home.

I want to say to the member opposite, through you, Speaker, that our government has acted. We've acted both in the budget this year—we'll be providing almost \$1 billion to help sustain, repair and grow our community housing system that was largely neglected by the previous government. In addition to that, Speaker, as part of our announcements with Minister Smith and I, we have now provided to our municipal partners over \$510 million as part of that agreement to help our most vulnerable.

We continue to work collaboratively with our federal government, and I'll have more to say in the supplementary.

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

Ms. Rima Berns-McGown: To make matters worse, housing experts are terrified of the eviction crisis they see on the horizon. They're expecting the numbers of people without housing to swell in the coming months by thousands or even tens of thousands. Most people who experience homelessness are Black or Indigenous. I am currently fighting to keep an Indigenous woman housed in Beaches–East York. The same communities most impacted by COVID-19 are also the most likely to be pushed into homelessness.

It is vital that Ontario both reinstate the residential moratorium on evictions throughout the pandemic and assist tenants directly with their rent payments so that they are not vulnerable to evictions down the road. Today, on Orange Shirt Day of all days, we need to hear: Will the Premier allow evictions and “Ford towns” to continue to grow exponentially, or will he act now to keep people housed?

Hon. Steve Clark: Speaker, again, I want to remind the member that our province was the first province or territory in Canada to sign on to the Canada-Ontario Housing Benefit, because we realized that for those who are most vulnerable, especially during the pandemic, we

need to ensure that we have dollars set aside collaboratively to work with all three levels of government.

I want the member to know, and I want all members to know, that as part of the Safe Restart Agreement, we are encouraging every single service provider in our province to bolster their rent banks, to ensure that there is more money that's being allocated through our social services relief fund and through the Safe Restart Agreement, to ensure that, as the nights are getting colder, those funds are provided directly to those who most need it.

We will continue to work with that member's community here in the city of Toronto and all of our service managers to ensure that those dollars that are allocated get to people who—

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

INFECTIOUS DISEASE CONTROL

M^{lle} Amanda Simard: My question is to the Minister of Education. A very serious and alarming issue has come to my attention with specific cases being confirmed to me. The ministry's current directive is that only local public health units can order a classroom into isolation and can notify parents when there is a confirmed case of COVID in the classroom. Due to the local units being completely overbooked, overburdened and struggling to keep up as it is, it can take days for this to happen. So during those in-between days, children are going back into the classroom as usual. Parents are unknowingly sending their children into a classroom that has had confirmed exposure to COVID-19.

Mr. Speaker, is the minister aware of this disturbing situation? How can the minister justify putting the lives of children and families at risk with such a poorly thought out and dangerous directive?

Hon. Stephen Lecce: The public health guidance is clear. We want all students and all staff to self-assess before they enter schools. We provided a self-assessment tool for students, launched with the President of the Treasury Board, to make it more accessible and easier for parents to understand the symptoms. We've also increased public health nurses to support both screening in schools and, likewise, symptom relief for those children who have ailments. We've enhanced the amount of flu vaccines being provided to more young people: 700,000 more have been ordered. It's \$70 million—a historic investment by the province.

Everything we're doing is to minimize risk, and I would continue to encourage parents to work with and listen to public health in their communities to ensure that those classrooms in those communities are safe.

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

1110

M^{lle} Amanda Simard: Respectfully, to the minister: That doesn't address the issue. The issue is the directive that it is only the public health units that can order the isolation when there's a confirmed case. It's the gap

between—that the teachers and the children are going back into the classroom for several days after they know that they've been exposed. There's the problem. What is the minister going to do about that directive?

Hon. Stephen Lecce: Speaker, students are encouraged to isolate if there are any symptoms. Public health will provide direction as per the outbreak protocol. In some circumstances, public health will require them to stay home for 14 days and the school board will pivot to online learning, as has been the case in each of the examples where we've seen outbreaks affecting a cohort or a school.

In the context of the protocol, Dr. Yaffe, Dr. Williams and the entire COVID-19 command table are constantly refining the protocol. I spoke with Dr. Etches in Ottawa, as well as the director and the chair of the board in Ottawa region, where the member represents. We are constantly looking for ways to improve the data flow as well as to improve the directive. It's going to be done by public health officials and by doctors, not politicians.

We'll continue to take their advice and implement it province-wide.

COVID-19 RESPONSE

Mr. Jeremy Roberts: My question is for the parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Finance. Last week, I was proud to join the Minister of Finance, the member for Willowdale and my colleagues from the Ottawa caucus on a virtual budget consultation with individuals from Ottawa's resilient business community. This town hall was an important opportunity for our government to hear directly from the people of Ottawa during these challenging times. I know this consultation will play a critical role in helping to ensure the challenges faced by Ottawa residents are addressed by our government as we continue to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic and plan for an uncertain future.

Mr. Speaker, this town hall provided an opportunity to hear about the important role Ontario has played in supporting people and businesses during this crisis. Could the parliamentary assistant please share with the House the actions our government has taken to support Ontario's small business community during the COVID-19 pandemic?

Mr. Stan Cho: I want to thank the member from the great riding of Ottawa West–Nepean. He has been an important voice and an incredible champion for the constituents in the Ottawa region.

Speaker, the member is correct. Hearing directly from businesses and community organizations like those in Ottawa is crucial to help inform Ontario's economic recovery plan and get the stories behind the numbers. Our government has taken the necessary action to protect the health and well-being of the people of Ontario during this crisis because this is not just the right public policy, Mr. Speaker, it's the right economic policy.

In March, the Minister of Finance introduced Ontario's action plan, the first phase of Ontario's response to the

COVID-19 pandemic. In the time since, we've made additional investments in the fight against the virus by allocating more support for people, jobs and a safe reopening in response to the second wave. These investments bring our COVID response action plan to a projected \$30 billion, up from the \$17 billion as first announced.

There's more to be done, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Jeremy Roberts: Thank you for that answer. It is heartwarming to know that our government is taking the economic recovery of Ontario so seriously.

Mr. Speaker, it's clear to me that this government is committed to listening as we continue building our recovery plan. I am proud to be part of a government that is committed to consultation and collaboration. As Vice-Chair on the Standing Committee of Finance and Economic Affairs, I have seen first-hand the value of broad and robust consultations in assessing the impact of COVID-19.

Could the parliamentary assistant please share with the House the actions this government has taken to listen to the concerns of Ontarians as we plan for an economic recovery?

Mr. Stan Cho: Again, the member is absolutely right. Our government understands the value of that broad consultation, hearing first-hand from those on the front lines. That's why we're asking Ontarians to tell us what they want to see in the fall 2020 Ontario budget.

Since this pandemic began, Mr. Speaker, our government has engaged with an unprecedented level of consultation with the people of Ontario. That includes businesses, labour groups, non-profits, associations and many others. We are listening because we are here to help.

Earlier this year, our government established the Ontario Jobs and Recovery Committee, and every minister on that committee established ministerial advisory councils to hear directly from key stakeholders and experts across the province in a variety of sectors. We also had MPPs from both sides of this House consult from across the province with local leaders and constituents. And I, too, Mr. Speaker, have been proud to work side by side with the member from Ottawa West–Nepean on the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs, a committee which has met for over 195 hours and listened to 522 witnesses. This is all part—

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

The next question.

BROADBAND INFRASTRUCTURE

Mr. Michael Mantha: My question is to the Premier. The ongoing COVID-19 pandemic is proof that fast, reliable and affordable Internet is an essential service. Christopher Maltais, a constituent of mine, has two kids. In their community of Goulais River, unlimited Internet is not available, which left the Maltais family with very few options at the height of this pandemic: either pay hundreds

of dollars extra for more Internet or send their kids to the schoolyard to access WiFi and do their online classes, even though the school is closed. Obviously, they chose the second option.

If schools have to shut down again in the middle of winter, does the Premier expect the kids to still go out to access WiFi, or does he expect the parents to pay hundreds of dollars extra to have a few more gigabytes of Internet?

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

Hon. Laurie Scott: Thank you very much for the question. I know the member opposite and I have talked many times about broadband and the need to expand that as fast as we can. That is why our government started last year, before the pandemic, with an investment of \$315 million in order to leverage up to \$1 billion in investments in broadband in the province of Ontario.

I know that I work with the Minister of Education closely, as well as many ministries now, on expanding those programs faster and sooner. I know that it's going to be in our secondary schools this fall; they'll all have access to broadband.

Mr. Speaker, I talk about this topic every day, and I ask the federal government to come to the table to help us expand faster and to more areas of the province of Ontario. This is critical in the times we live in. We are doing as much as we can, and there's more to come.

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

Mr. Michael Mantha: To the Premier: Again, people can't log in to announcements because those dollars are not coming down to the communities.

My colleagues and I raised the lack of access to broadband with the previous Liberal government to no avail. We have raised the issue with this Conservative government continuously since the election, again to no avail. We know the Ontario government needs to invest \$1 billion over the next 10 years to develop broadband infrastructure. Why won't this government work with the federal government and telecommunication companies to bring essential services to all Ontarians?

The member from Timiskaming–Cochrane quoted the Premier's words last week: I'm on this "like a dog on a bone." Speaker, my question to the Premier again: Why is this Premier chasing his tail on the broadband file?

Hon. Laurie Scott: Well, Mr. Speaker, the member is correct that the Premier has said that there is no more important infrastructure that we can do to change people's lives in the province of Ontario than to build the broadband. That is exactly what we are doing.

We are asking the federal government to come to the table because they do regulate the telecommunications companies. I spend large parts of my day talking to everyone, even people like yourselves, that live in my riding that can't access Internet. We continue to work with the Ministries of Energy, Northern Development and Mines, and Indigenous Affairs to get the Northern Ontario Heritage Fund Corporation—they've invested in several

projects in northern Ontario, including Indigenous communities. Some of the projects are the Northeast Superior Regional Broadband Network, a satellite bandwidth expansion project to the remote First Nations communities of Lansdowne, Fort Hope and Marten Falls. Matawa was a \$30-million project that the Minister of Energy, Northern Development and Mines, the Premier and I were at last year to connect northern communities—

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

The next question.

COMMUNITY SAFETY

Ms. Jane McKenna: My question is to the Minister of Transportation. In recent weeks, we've heard disturbing instances of street racing and stunt driving. I understand that many fines were issued in Wasaga Beach over the weekend and in Hamilton earlier this month.

1120

Mr. Speaker, dangerous driving is always a cause for concern. Motorists should know that under the Highway Traffic Act, stiff penalties are in place for those who choose to engage in dangerous driving behaviours. Could the minister please tell us what these penalties look like?

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

Hon. Caroline Mulroney: I'd like to thank the member from Burlington for the question.

I was extremely disappointed to hear of recent stunt driving events, especially those that have garnered crowds despite the advice from public health officials. This is reckless and irresponsible.

I want to remind Ontarians that under the Highway Traffic Act we have some of the toughest penalties in North America when it comes to speeding and aggressive driving. Drivers who are caught travelling 50 kilometres an hour or more above the posted speed limit, or engage in other high-risk behaviours, are liable to receive an immediate seven-day suspension and seven-day vehicle impoundment at roadside.

Drivers also face a series of other severe post-conviction penalties, including a fine of up to \$10,000, a licence suspension of up to two years for the first conviction, six demerit points and a jail term of up to six months.

The Ministry of Transportation reviews its policies on a regular basis, and if changes are necessary, we will make them.

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

Ms. Jane McKenna: I want to thank the Minister of Transportation. I want to reiterate that the events like we saw in Wasaga Beach over the weekend are deeply concerning. Not only are stunt driving events a danger to all those on the road and in the community, they are a danger to our community, in light of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Public health experts have indicated that these types of irresponsible gatherings are a danger to public safety

through increased risk of COVID-19 transmission. That's why it's important to ensure that those who blatantly disregard the rules and put the health and safety of Ontarians at risk are held accountable.

Can the Solicitor General explain what actions our government is taking to crack down on these types of irresponsible and dangerous events?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The parliamentary assistant.

Ms. Christine Hogarth: Thank you, Speaker, and through you, I want to thank the member from Burlington for that question.

Before I begin, I want to thank our dedicated members of the Ontario Provincial Police for putting a stop to the dangerous events that took place in Wasaga Beach. They are working on the front lines of community safety, addressing the changing nature of criminal behaviour that has come as a result of COVID-19 while putting themselves at increased risk of exposure.

Protecting the health and safety of Ontarians with regard to the threat of COVID-19 is our government's number one priority. That's why we took decisive action in response to these larger private gatherings that are taking place and that break the gathering limits which have been put in place to protect us and stop the spread of this deadly virus. We have provided law enforcement with the additional tools needed to shut down these premises that are hosting these types of events and we're establishing new minimum fines of \$10,000—the highest in Canada—for those individuals who organize those events.

MENTAL HEALTH AND ADDICTION SERVICES

Ms. Bhutla Karpoche: My question is to the Premier. Ontario is in the midst of two public health emergencies. The number of deaths from overdose is 35% to 40% higher than we've seen since the pandemic started, compared to last year's numbers, according to the chief coroner. In July, the city of Toronto reached a record high number of overdose-related deaths: 27 people died. The pandemic has made it harder to access help. Addiction is a health issue and we need to treat it as such. We don't need an ideological government to pick and choose which lives are worth saving.

Why has the Premier and his government refused to increase resources to save lives?

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

Hon. Christine Elliott: Thank you to the member opposite for the question. You're absolutely right: There are many Ontarians who, during this COVID crisis, are being faced with significant mental health as well as addiction challenges.

We did open our consumption treatment services sites several years ago now. They're still continuing to do their work, but we recognize that there are more mental health supports that we need to provide as well.

There are a number of people who are experiencing anxiety, depression and other issues that are leading in

some cases to addiction issues as well. That's one of the reasons we've supplied over \$27.75 million for the mental health and addictions system to expand more online and virtual assistance to people in situations where they weren't able to access their appointments in person with their advisers, both with respect to addictions as well as with mental health.

We know there's more that we need to do, and I will certainly speak to that in my supplemental.

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

Ms. Bhutla Karpoche: Back to the Premier: We've heard all of this before. What the minister has failed to mention is that the government closed overdose prevention sites. We only have 16 supervised consumption treatment sites for the entire province. They've abandoned the provincial emergency task force. The federal government had to step in to act, but it's not enough. More people are dying than ever before.

Speaker, I am angry for the families who have lost loved ones. We are sitting here debating, but these are real people; they deserve care. The government is speaking about supports that weren't adequate before the pandemic, and now we need it much more.

Will the minister admit the government's inaction is costing lives?

Hon. Christine Elliott: We certainly recognize that more needs to be done. With respect to the consumption and treatment services sites, municipalities can still apply to have a site located in their area. We are still considering applications. That is still open. Municipalities are still able to apply for that. So we are ready to expand consumption and treatment services sites.

With respect to mental health and addictions generally, just before we were struck with COVID, we released our mental health and addictions comprehensive plan, Roadmap to Wellness: A Plan to Build Ontario's Mental Health and Addictions System. That is something we're still continuing to build. It's as relevant now as it was when we launched it.

We know there's more work that needs to be done—an advancement of more services. We are dealing with that as we speak, because we know people need that help because alongside the COVID crisis we know there's a significant increase in mental health and addictions needs. It's not something we're going to wait until later to deal with. We need to deal with those issues now because mental health is equally as—

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

Next question?

ÉDUCATION EN FRANÇAIS

M. Jeremy Roberts: Ma question est pour le ministre de l'Éducation. Vendredi dernier, nous avons célébré le Jour des Franco-Ontariens et des Franco-Ontariennes. Je suis fier de notre gouvernement et de notre soutien pour les francophones en Ontario, y compris celles et ceux qui

habitent dans ma circonscription d'Ottawa-Ouest-Nepean.

Cette semaine, j'étais ravi que notre gouvernement ait pris des mesures pour recruter et maintenir en poste un plus grand nombre d'enseignantes et d'enseignants qualifiés pour enseigner en français.

Est-ce que le ministre peut décrire ces mesures et comment elles vont améliorer notre système d'éducation?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Education.

M. Sam Oosterhoff: Merci au député d'Ottawa-Ouest-Nepean pour cette question importante et pour son travail fort.

Je suis aussi très ravi que notre gouvernement appuie diverses initiatives pour répondre à la pénurie d'éducateurs que subit notre système d'éducation depuis longtemps, notamment :

—un portail en ligne destiné aux élèves pour promouvoir les études postsecondaires et les expériences pouvant mener à une carrière d'enseignante ou d'enseignant de français langue seconde en Ontario;

—un nouveau guide à l'intention des conseils scolaires de langue anglaise et un outil d'évaluation de la maîtrise du français qui aidera les écoles publiques à embaucher et à former plus d'enseignantes et d'enseignants de français langue seconde;

—des modifications possibles aux règlements qui permettraient d'engager des enseignantes et enseignants qualifiés pour enseigner en français.

Nous prenons des mesures pour assurer que les écoles aient accès à davantage d'enseignantes et d'enseignants qualifiés.

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

M. Jeremy Roberts: Merci à l'adjoint parlementaire pour sa réponse.

Les étudiants de l'Ontario méritent les ressources nécessaires pour apprendre en français, et les enseignantes et enseignants du français langue seconde sont essentiels pour soutenir la culture franco-ontarienne.

Je sais que l'adjoint parlementaire et le ministre de l'Éducation ont rencontré beaucoup de partenaires francophones afin de trouver des solutions concernant la pénurie d'enseignants de langue française. Est-ce que le ministre peut décrire l'importance de nos partenaires qui ont rendu possible ce plan?

M. Sam Oosterhoff: Merci encore au député d'Ottawa-Ouest-Nepean pour cette question importante. J'ai eu le plaisir d'avoir rencontré beaucoup de représentants d'institutions francophones, tels que les dirigeants de conseils scolaires, les enseignants, les groupes d'intervenants et d'autres qui travaillent de manière très forte afin d'améliorer le système d'éducation en langue française. Je tiens à les remercier pour leurs efforts.

1130

Nous formons un partenariat avec l'Université Laurentienne afin de créer un nouveau programme hybride de formation initiale en enseignement. Aussi, nous

travaillons actuellement avec l'Université York pour élaborer des activités de sensibilisation pour promouvoir auprès des élèves de 12^e année les carrières d'enseignante ou d'enseignant FLS en Ontario.

Nous attendons avec plaisir de poursuivre notre collaboration avec nos estimés groupes d'intervenants pour assurer que tous les élèves de l'Ontario aient accès à une éducation en français de qualité.

LONG-TERM CARE

Mr. Jeff Burch: My question is to the Premier. This week I heard from Loretta Gibbons, whose brother Gerald and his wife, Lucy, live at a supportive living home in Niagara named Lakeside Terrace. Lakeside Terrace, like other supportive living accommodations across Ontario, is a completely unregulated group home that more often than not has horrific conditions. Gerald and his wife have major health issues, including dementia, and are pensioners on a fixed income.

Loretta sent me a desperate email along with pictures of unliveable conditions. She said that there have been bedbugs for at least a year and the food served to residents is rotten.

Because the homes are unregulated, bylaw enforcement is unable to do anything. When they complained, the owner said, "Feel free to move out."

Why is this government allowing Ontario citizens like Gerald and Lucy to live in unregulated, substandard conditions?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The parliamentary assistant.

Mr. Jeremy Roberts: Thank you to the member opposite for this important question. This is an issue that I take personally as well as an important issue because my brother lives in a congregate care setting.

I know that our government is committed to ensuring that those in our congregate care settings are provided with the protection and services they need. Our government took immediate action to protect our province's most vulnerable and the front-line staff who care for them in residential settings. Through the COVID-19 Action Plan for Vulnerable People, we implemented measures that will help to stop COVID-19 at the door of these facilities, like enhanced screening and use of PPE; and manage outbreaks when they do happen, which included enhanced testing and contact tracing.

This plan builds on our previous investments, including up to \$40 million to support organizations that provide residential services, like our developmental services agencies.

I look forward to providing more information in the supplementary.

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

Mr. Jeff Burch: Speaker, the real problem is that these homes are unregulated. That's the issue. I proposed a private member's bill, Bill 164, that will protect residents from these abusive conditions. Members of the Premier's

own cabinet supported this bill in 2017, including the Solicitor General.

Many people who have complex needs, but who don't qualify for and can't get into long-term care, end up in these supportive living homes that claim to offer housing with supportive services and amenities typically provided in full-service retirement care. Owners have free rein to take advantage of vulnerable seniors who have no other options and frequently no one to advocate for them. We have seen fires, injuries and several deaths as a result of no regulation.

Will the Premier commit to regulating these homes and ask his members to pass my Bill 164, protecting vulnerable persons in supportive living?

Mr. Jeremy Roberts: Thank you for the supplementary question and for the member opposite's interest in this important file.

The COVID-19 Residential Relief Fund that our government introduced covered eligible costs such as additional staffing, residential respite for caregivers and personal protective equipment and supplies.

We have also as a government made several very important emergency orders, including providing flexibility so staffing and resources can be redirected to essential tasks; requiring that staff work for a single employer within that sector; and limiting staff to working at a single site in an outbreak to prevent the spread of COVID-19.

As the situation continues to evolve, our government remains committed to protecting our most vulnerable citizens. I thank the member opposite for that question.

NOTICE OF DISSATISFACTION

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Pursuant to standing order 36(a), the member for Glengarry–Prescott–Russell has given notice of her dissatisfaction with the answer to her question given by the Minister of Education concerning the ministry's directive for classroom isolation regarding COVID-19. This matter will be debated today at 6 p.m.

DEFERRED VOTES

TIME ALLOCATION

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): We have a deferred vote on government notice of motion number 90, relating to allocation of time on 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.

The bells will ring for 30 minutes, during which time members may cast their votes. I will ask the Clerks to prepare the lobbies.

The division bells rang from 1136 to 1206.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The vote on government notice of motion number 90, relating to allocation of time on 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, has been held.

The Deputy Clerk (Mr. Trevor Day): The ayes are 35; the nays are 19.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I declare the motion carried.

Motion agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): There being no further business at this time, this House stands in recess until 3 p.m.

The House recessed from 1208 to 1500.

REPORTS BY COMMITTEES

STANDING COMMITTEE ON REGULATIONS AND PRIVATE BILLS

Mr. Deepak Anand: I beg leave to present a report from the Standing Committee on Regulations and Private Bills and move its adoption.

The Clerk-at-the-Table (Mr. William Short): Your committee begs to report the following bills without amendment:

Bill Pr23, An Act to revive Cherry Hill Orchards Pelham Limited;

Bill Pr24, An Act to revive 2404907 Ontario Ltd.;

Bill Pr25, An Act to revive Tapir Corporation.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Shall the report be received and adopted? Agreed? Agreed.

Report adopted.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

SUPPORTING ECONOMIC RECOVERY AND RENEWAL IN THE NIAGARA REGION ACT, 2020

LOI DE 2020 VISANT À SOUTENIR LES EMPLOIS DANS L'INDUSTRIE DU VIN ET LA CROISSANCE DANS LA RÉGION DE NIAGARA

Mr. Gates moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 209, An Act to exempt certain wines from the basic tax on wine / Projet de loi 209, Loi visant à exempter certains vins de la taxe de base sur le vin.

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): I'll invite the member for Niagara Falls to briefly explain his bill.

Mr. Wayne Gates: The bill amends the Alcohol, Cannabis and Gaming Regulation and Public Protection Act, 1996, to provide an exception for certain wines to the tax set out in subsection 27(1).

The tax exemption would eliminate the 6.1% basic tax from VQA wines and Ontario wines produced entirely from grapes grown in the province of Ontario and that are sold at winery retail stores only located at the winery.

STATEMENTS BY THE MINISTRY AND RESPONSES

CONCUSSIONS

Hon. Lisa MacLeod: Today in Ontario is the third annual Rowan's Law Day. Speaker, as an esteemed and long-serving member of this assembly yourself, you'll know that I've spent many years of my career on the other side of the aisle, and now on this side, advancing concussion awareness and concussion legislation. I remember sitting on that side of the House as the education critic in the minority Parliament—and I think you'll recall, as well, that Canada's favourite hockey dad, Walter Gretzky, was up in the gallery—and talking about the need for concussion awareness. Well, typical of what was happening back in those days, the government at the time prorogued. There was a change in leadership, a change in premiership, and that piece of legislation died on the floor of this assembly.

Shortly after that, in my own constituency, I had moved on as the energy critic. I was in my constituency office one day, and I heard the news that a 17-year-old rugby player from Nepean, at John McCrae Secondary School, had died on the rugby pitch. Rowan Stringer, for whom this day is named, played rugby. She played ringette. She was a very popular girl next door. People loved her. She aspired to be a nurse. She was taken to the Children's Hospital of Eastern Ontario after sustaining multiple concussions, and she died of second impact syndrome.

I don't know if the legislation at the time would have saved her life; I hope it would have. But after that event, Rowan's parents pursued a public inquiry into her passing. From that, 49 recommendations were made in order to keep children safer when they played sport in the province of Ontario.

The challenge, though, is that when we have a coroner's inquest or an inquiry, it doesn't necessarily translate into legislation or ensure that a government of the day adopts it. So we decided to bring forward something called Rowan's Law. We started, actually, with a petition campaign led, of course, by the parents of Rowan Stringer, Gordon and Kathleen. It was a grassroots campaign; it was the finest of what happens when a community organizes together. We started in the pouring rain, in Barrhaven, on a pitch that Rowan would have played on. The Barrhaven Scottish Rugby Football Club was there, and many of our community leaders, including our school board officials,

our municipal councillors and parents who knew the Stringers or had just read about Rowan. We stood in the rain for about two hours. That was our commitment.

I recall after that day that we had province-wide support for this, and there were two calls I made: The first one was to MPP Catherine Fife, then the member for Kitchener–Waterloo and now the member for Waterloo in the official opposition; and the then-government member, the MPP for Ottawa South, now the House leader for the Liberals. I asked them if they would consider co-sponsoring a piece of legislation with me; the rules had just changed. Luckily for me and, I think, fortunately for this movement, they agreed. As the minister now responsible for this legislation and this day, I'm a bit moved that they'll both be speaking today to this ministerial statement.

From there, we ended up gathering a lot of steam and encouraging many people to join this movement. We used to say at home that we would have the Barrhaven team for Rowan and then we would have the Toronto team. And we were able to really put forward a piece of legislation that would find a mechanism to put forward these 49 recommendations and give them a home.

As we started to build up steam, we were able to get some really cool supporters. Catherine brought us Fitz the Whip, and I hope she talks about him today. I was able to recruit Hockey Hall of Famer—he wasn't at the time—I want to call him “Gordon Stringer” because Gordon was wearing his jersey today, but Eric Lindros. Through that level of support, we were able to continue to advance the cause. Even though the legislation hadn't passed, we were doing something equally as important, which was making sure that we were having a serious conversation about the impacts of concussion, because of what happened to Rowan Stringer.

We were able to advance the issue at a national level. Eric Lindros and his friend Tim Fleiszer from the Concussion Legacy Foundation created something at Western University called See the Line. They had done that prior to the legislation, but they were really able to advance it with our assistance at a national level. And the Governor General of the day, David Johnston, decided to host a symposium, and that continued with some discussions with the former NHLer and member of Parliament Ken Dryden.

We eventually started working a lot more with the Concussion Legacy Foundation. They would come here quite a bit to help guide us, and I think that was a really important step for this legislation. At the time—and unfortunately still today, Rowan's Law is the first, and only, concussion legislation in our country. If you can think about it, every jurisdiction in the United States has concussion legislation, but in Canada, we are still the only one. That's why I think it was extremely important for those national conversations that I just spoke about to occur. But we have more to do, and I'll talk about that in a little bit, Speaker.

1510

When we formed government, first my colleague Sylvia Jones and then my colleague Michael Tibollo

became the minister responsible for sport and Rowan's Law, and they included me. I remember, for the first Rowan's Law Day, Minister Tibollo, the Associate Minister of Mental Health and Addictions, who I was just with, included me in that wonderful day, at the University of Toronto. It felt really good to be able to celebrate Rowan's life and all the work of the people who made this happen.

But I think what has been most memorable since the legislation passed was getting a text message last year from the then-Attorney General and now-Minister of Transportation Caroline Mulroney—when her son was getting his hockey forms. As she was filling them out, she saw that slip, for the first time ever, that parents had to sign on to Rowan's Law protocols in our province. That, to me, although it took us a couple of years to get to that point, was what success looks like. It may not look like a 10-storey building that we're going to build or a rail line underneath the city. It may not look like a television production that gets all the Emmys. But the little form that came in that packet made parents aware; it told them what their responsibilities were. It told the team trainer, the team coach, the spectators, the parents of the opposing team, teammates in every sport in this province, what their roles and responsibilities were in keeping one another safe. That's absolutely important.

Everyone in this room knows I'm a hockey mom. I have been on the bench. I have been the trainer. I have been the assistant coach. I would be the one who would run on to the ice when a child was down and broke their ankle.

I was also the hockey trainer when a child got a concussion at school. It was the last weekend of the season. The parents paid a lot of money to put their child in hockey; it's not cheap. They wanted her to play that weekend, because they wanted her to be part of the team and they had paid a lot of money. I had to look at them and say, “Your child can't play.” We went back and forth, “Well, try, try, try”—and I said, “No. We live in Nepean. A few short years ago, a child not much older than your child died from sustaining concussions. If Rowan Stringer's parents could have prevented her death, they would have. We have an obligation.” That child didn't play the game. But the best memory I have of that season was us winning the championship and that kid showing up, with her helmet, in her plain clothes, standing in the goalie's area. She was still part of the team. She'll still have that gold medal. But I guarantee you she will not have a lasting concussion and the effects of it.

It's interesting; one of the things Eric Lindros will often say is, we have to shift the culture. If all of us in this room—well, some of us. I know Sam Oosterhoff and Jeremy Roberts aren't in the room—oh, there's Sam. They're young. They might not remember when seat belt legislation came in and people would balk at it. They may not remember when smoking legislation came in and people were angry that they weren't allowed to smoke in restaurants anymore. The culture shifted, and we made it so, thanks to legislation, but also because people stood up and spoke up. They talked about the safety effects of wearing a seat belt. They talked about the safety effects of

not getting second-hand smoke. I was here for that debate, Speaker, as were you, back in, I believe, 2006, when we made that decision as a province. In fact, it was one of our former colleagues, Norm Sterling, who started talking about that in the 1980s. So to Eric's point, we have to make it so that we've shifted the culture to safety.

That brings me to today and our current environment in sport, with COVID-19. COVID-19 has prevented us from being able to play sports the way we used to. It has also—I just spoke to a nurse practitioner from SickKids—obviously, prevented a lot of kids from getting concussions. So I think that there's an opportunity here to take the model that we created with Rowan's Law and actually apply it to the broader return of safe play when it is appropriate to do so. We have got the template and we've got the model, and that's important.

Today I met with the Rowan's Law working group as well as my ministerial advisory committee on amateur sport, and we had a wonderful conversation about transitioning to not just concussion safety but mental health, and how we do that and how we best support it. I think that it's in part by making sure that we continue to have a holistic approach among government, which is what we're doing with Rowan's Law, and that we continue to support these efforts.

Since Rowan's Law became law and we've advanced it, the government has invested over \$800,000 to support these efforts. In addition, today, as I mentioned earlier in the House, my colleague the Associate Minister of Energy announced \$25,000 to support rural communities in their fight against concussions.

We recognize, too, that you don't just get concussions from sport—it's a number of people in the military, those who are suffering from domestic abuse, and even people walking to their car who may not be involved in any of that. I think it's important that we have those conversations.

Last evening, I participated in a panel with NHLer and former broadcaster Nick Kypreos, Eric Lindros and Tim Fleiszer of the Concussion Legacy Foundation—he's a four-time Grey Cup champion—and we talked about the important effects. All of us are parents, so we all now worry about our own children and how they're engaging in their sport.

We wanted to make sure today that we could continue to profile the life and the symptoms of Rowan Stringer. I think it's important to note that although she didn't report to her doctor or her family, she did let her friends know through text messages that she felt she had been concussed. We have to really team up and speak up, and I think that's going to be a very big part of this documentary that we will move forward on.

Just getting back, I think it's important that we also have a national conversation. We were supposed to host the 2021 Canada Games in Niagara region this year. We had to postpone them as a result of COVID-19, but had they happened—and they will in the future—we would have been able to host all Canadian athletes at a high performance level, and they would have been expected to adhere to Rowan's Law while playing in this province.

I think we have an opportunity now, as federal, provincial and territorial leaders across this great nation, to have a renewed conversation about concussion safety. Therefore, in October I will be leading a national conversation with my federal, provincial and territorial counterparts, and I'm excited about that. I think that there is a tremendous opportunity, as I said earlier, as we review a safe return to play for all sports, for us to start to look at what all of the different facets of a safe return will look like. I really do believe, as well, that this documentary that we're going to be commissioning will have a good role in that.

On a side point about that: Obviously, it delights me that two sides of my ministry, the cultural side as well as the sports side, will be coming together to broaden that conversation and make sure that there is a larger commitment.

I think that as we do that, we have to look at the other downstream effects of concussion. We know, for example, that it could be a cause for CTE. It could be a cause for Alzheimer's, dementia, ALS, anxiety, depression and other chronic issues including, as we learned with Rowan Stringer, death. As Charles Tator, the noted neurologist in the province of Ontario and in this country, said, Rowan Stringer's death was preventable. If together, as members of this assembly, as the government that I'm privileged to be part of, as a society, we can prevent a death, then I think it's important that we ensure we have the appropriate resources to do that.

Later today, if it's not already done, I will be providing a detailed update on the work that the Rowan's Law working group has done. They made 21 recommendations. They have completed all but four, and those are currently under analysis with the Ministry of Education as well as the Ministry of Health.

As we move forward, I think we can all agree that we need athletes to be ambassadors for other athletes, particularly young ones, and engage them in modes of communication which are relevant to them.

1520

I think we all agree that we need to continue to have a multi-jurisdictional, multi-ministerial and multi-sectoral approach to concussion awareness and, of course, a safe return to sport. We have to align our jurisdictions so that we are ensuring that a Canadian who lives in Ontario, plays in Ontario, but then visits Quebec, Manitoba or any other province or territory, is also focused on this safety message.

As we encourage the sector to lead, supported, of course, by government, we have to seriously look at not only disease prevention, but also bone and joint injuries and how we prevent those. We want to make sure that we have drug-free spaces, safe spaces, inclusive spaces.

I was pleased to have Mark Laliberte on the phone today talking about concussions, as well as Orange Shirt Day, and having more inclusivity for our Indigenous youth, our francophone youth, our LGBTQ+ youth, those who have been marginalized. I know that with us able to do that, we will have to continue to put support into our marketing campaign.

Our Hit.Stop.Sit campaign was wildly successful, and although there is limited sport happening across the province, I have made the commitment that the ministry will continue to advocate that method of campaigning in terms of advertisement again at the appropriate time for a safe return to sport.

What a tremendous honour it has been to serve in this Legislature and advocate on behalf of this issue. My conversation earlier today with Gord Stringer—we've spoken twice—was really important to remind me of the roots of this legislation, the importance of Rowan Stringer's story and the wonderful all-party support that this Legislature proved is possible. And the groundswell at a grassroots level, from everyone from a minor football coach in Nepean to some of the top-performing athletes of my generation, was something that I think was quite spectacular.

Today, on the third anniversary of Rowan's Law, I think it has been marked with a lot of hope and optimism, and I believe, as we move forward as an assembly and as a government and as a society, that concussion legislation will play a key and leading role in how we view the safe return to sport in a post-COVID-19 environment.

Speaker, again, thank you for the opportunity you've allowed me today. I want to thank in advance my colleagues from both the NDP and the Liberal caucuses, because they have been instrumental in ensuring the success, viability and sustainability of this conversation.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Responses?

Ms. Catherine Fife: Thanks to my colleague for her kind words. It is always a pleasure to rise and speak to Rowan's Law. It was a precedent-setting moment for this Legislature and something that I think we should all try to aspire to on a go-forward basis.

It's amazing that we are here today not only advocating for concussion protocols for young amateur athletes, but now working to share and expand the Rowan's Law framework across the country. That is a sign of leadership.

Today, we are celebrating her day, which was created as part of the legislation that we are starting to see go a long way towards improving concussion education and shift the culture of sports. I think we can all agree that Rowan's experience and the advisory committee and legislation that have resulted were a wake-up call on the potential severity of concussions for thousands of young athletes, their parents and provincial sports organizations. Some sports organizations are taking concussions seriously for the first time. Coaches and others involved in youth sport are now required to learn about and recognize the symptoms of concussion. Parents have to sign concussion protocols so that there's an accountability measure in play. As a parent who experienced a coach being dismissive of my son Aidan's concussion just 10 years ago, this is a welcome change.

In fact, I was just reading a piece by Bob Elliott from 2012, and it reminded me of one of the hockey parents, who came up to me and said, "So your son got his bell rung"—and I answered, "No, he has a brain injury." That's the different narrative that we had to switch to.

Additionally, Rowan's Law now informs appropriate protocols for concussion follow-up, including assessment by a physician and adherence to evidence-informed return-to-sport and return-to-school guidelines. For so many kids and families, this is huge.

Prior to our collective work on concussion reform, the Ontario Public School Boards' Association had raised this issue with school boards, but change needed to be anchored with legislation, and that's what happened in this House.

It's great to see the work being done to make sure everyone stays safe when they play sports. I always like speaking about people who have overcome concussions—because these are hopeful moments—and the progress that is happening to protect people from them.

Strong voices who have lived the experience of a concussion have spoken up and in many cases demonstrated great courage in sharing their stories. One local athlete is Ben Fanelli in Kitchener-Waterloo. His goal is to change the narrative on concussions, and he is an inspiration to many young athletes. Fitz the Whip was mentioned by my colleague. He's a world champion boxer who has suffered concussions, lived to talk about it, to share his experience, and also, I must say, is a generous community leader in K-W.

It is in the public interest to continue to get this right. We all care deeply about honouring Rowan's memory, and I believe we owe a great debt of gratitude to Kathleen and Gordon Stringer. Their strength, courage and resiliency in turning grief into advocacy remains one of my most powerful memories of this place—and I always cry when I talk about it, so at least I am consistent. But you do continue to inspire. Thank you so much for your work. Indeed, it is our shared responsibility in this House to do so. I look forward to seeing the progress we make as a province to make sure that tragedies like Rowan's death never happen again.

To my colleagues here from Ottawa South and Nepean—we all worked together. But five years later, there are still not enough stories of us all working together. I remember very clearly Gordon Stringer reminding us that this collaboration is a model for going forward. Perhaps we can also honour Rowan, her parents and her family by coming together during these challenging times to truly take care of each other and the people of this province.

Thank you for your time.

Mr. John Fraser: It's a pleasure to rise and say a few words today about Rowan's Law Day. It's in recognition of Rowan Stringer, the young athlete from Ottawa who died, tragically, from multiple concussions or what's known as second impact syndrome. Today is about promoting concussion safety and prevention in amateur sport. It's about how we can keep our kids safe while they're playing and competing.

I want to start by thanking Gordon and Kathleen Stringer, Rowan's parents, who turned the tragedy of their daughter's death into something good. The first time I met the Stringers, I was at Nepean High School—the member

from Nepean–Carleton will remember. It was at a symposium that we were having. There were a few people there. Gordon got up and he told the story of the days that led up to Rowan's passing and about how, the morning they learned of their daughter's death, because news travels, they got a call from a media outlet asking to talk to them. If you can imagine, the worst possible thing to happen to a parent has just happened to you: You lose a child. And in that moment when you want to go in and protect yourself, you make a decision to take a risk, you make a decision to say, "No, we're going to do something going forward." And part of that is to tell that story that he told that day every day. It's like tearing the Band-Aid off. It's like feeling that hurt. That took a lot of courage. That really impressed me. I never met Rowan, but I'm sure that the apple didn't fall far from the tree. And what they've done is a legacy to Rowan.

Rowan's Law, of course, was brought forward by my friend and my colleague from Nepean, the minister of heritage, sport, tourism, culture—and there are a few other words in there; I've only got five minutes. She very kindly asked the member from Waterloo and I to join her in this bill, join her on this journey, along with educators, coaches, athletes, parents, doctors, researchers, public servants, and the list goes on. I want to thank her for that. It really is an excellent journey. It's still going on right now.

1530

Everyone was committed to the single goal of making amateur sports safer for young athletes. It started with the advisory committee—I think the first in Canada or first place in Canada to have that, maybe in North America—and 49 recommendations that were around the things that we could do, like increasing awareness for the dangers of concussions; better tools for coaches to identify symptoms; concussion policies in schools; and increasing education and training for health care providers when treating and managing concussions.

I did this when we first passed the law, and I'm going to do it again, but I want to thank Steve Harlow, who I understand is still the ADM at the ministry of tourism, culture and sport. This whole time—it's about four years. His team worked at lightning speed, as we know, with legislation and big policies, to get it done.

Interjection.

Mr. John Fraser: Yes, it's not something we use around here.

And they're still doing that now. They're still committed. They deserve thanks. Without their hard work, we wouldn't be where we're at right now and taking on the kind of initiatives the minister spoke about this morning. She has done well, and I'm really happy that she has had the opportunity to be able to follow this file in the way that she is now. It's good that you're there and that you're doing that. I'm sure it's personally gratifying—and both the member from Waterloo and I feel that way.

Like the member from Waterloo said, it really was a great example of how we work together, because it wasn't an easy thing to do. It was a big job and it could have fallen

apart at a few points. But we managed to work together; three different personalities worked together for the common good. It is the way that this place is supposed to work.

I really do like bills like Rowan's Law, where we all come together and we get people from all parties to say, "We're going to work on this thing and sort it out." They don't have to be big things. This started out as a committee and it's far bigger than that right now, and it's something that spread not just across Canada, but it's spreading across North America, so it did a lot of good. Like the member from Waterloo, I just hope, right now, with how things are going in this province, with the challenges that face us, that we can find some more ways to do that.

MOTIONS

PRIVATE MEMBERS' PUBLIC BUSINESS

Hon. Paul Calandra: Speaker, I am seeking unanimous consent to move a motion without notice regarding notice for private members' public business.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The government House leader is seeking the unanimous consent of the House to move a motion without notice regarding private members' public business. Agreed? Agreed.

Hon. Paul Calandra: I move that notice for ballot item number 22, standing in the name of Mr. Kramp; ballot item number 24, standing in the name of Ms. Ghamari; ballot item number 25, standing in the name of Mr. Gill; ballot item number 26, standing in the name of Mr. Smith, Peterborough–Kawartha; and ballot item number 28, standing in the name of Mr. Cuzzetto, be waived.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Mr. Calandra has moved that notice for ballot item number 22, standing in the name of Mr. Kramp; ballot item number 24, standing in the name of Ms. Ghamari; ballot item number 25, standing in the name of Mr. Gill; ballot item number 26, standing in the name of Mr. Smith, Peterborough–Kawartha; and ballot item number 28, standing in the name of Mr. Cuzzetto, be waived.

Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

Motion agreed to.

PETITIONS

WATER EXTRACTION

Ms. Peggy Sattler: I have a petition entitled "Protect Water as a Public Good," and it is signed by many residents of London. I appreciate their sending the petition in.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas groundwater is a public good, not a commodity; and

“Whereas the United Nations recognizes access to clean drinking water as a human right; and

“Whereas local ecosystems must be preserved for the well-being of future generations; and

“Whereas the duty to consult Indigenous communities regarding water-taking within traditional territories is often neglected, resulting in a disproportionate burden on systemically marginalized communities during a period of reconciliation; and

“Whereas a poll commissioned by the Wellington Water Watchers found that two thirds of respondents support phasing out bottled water in Ontario over the course of a decade; and

“Whereas a trend towards prioritizing the expansion of for-profit water bottling corporations over the needs of municipalities will negatively impact Ontario’s growing communities;

“Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to direct the Ministry of the Environment, Conservation and Parks to prioritize public ownership and control of water over corporate interests.”

I couldn’t agree more with this petition. I affix my name and will send it to the table.

EDUCATION

Mrs. Daisy Wai: I have a petition here: “Respect the Roles and Rights of Parents in their Children’s Education.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas parents must be respected as an important partner when it comes to their children’s education; and

“Whereas school boards and schools must fully involve parents in important decisions regarding their children and their academic progress; and

“Whereas parents want assurance that their children are safe at school; and

“Whereas parents expect their children to be in class, free from disruption to their learning;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly to:

“—recognize the importance of parents’ roles and rights as their children’s primary educators;

“—encourage and support parental engagement and participation in our education system;

“—work to ensure Ontario’s education system communicates with parents and guardians; and

“—provide ample opportunity for active engagement, knowledge and decision-making in their children’s education.”

I have a list of people signing their names to it and I would love to join them, so I’m signing my name to it and giving it to the usher.

LONG-TERM CARE

Miss Monique Taylor: I have a petition titled “Time to Care Act—Bill 13.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas quality care for the 78,000 residents of (LTC) homes is a priority for many Ontario families; and

“Whereas the provincial government does not provide adequate funding to ensure care and staffing levels in LTC homes to keep pace with residents’ increasing needs and the growing number of residents with complex behaviours; and

“Whereas several Ontario coroner’s inquests into LTC homes deaths have recommended an increase in direct hands-on care for residents and staffing levels and the most reputable studies on this topic recommend 4.1 hours of direct care per day;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to amend the LTC Homes Act (2007) for a legislated minimum care standard to provide an average of four hours per resident per day, adjusted for acuity level and case mix.”

I fully support this petition. I’m going to affix my name to it and give it to the usher to bring to the Clerk.

VETERANS MEMORIAL

Mrs. Nina Tangri: I have a petition titled “In Support of Constructing a Memorial to Honour Our Heroes.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas over 40,000 Canadian Armed Forces members served in the war in Afghanistan including the 159 Canadians who made the ultimate sacrifice; and

“Whereas the Premier made a commitment to the people of Ontario to build a memorial to honour the bravery and sacrifice of our armed forces; and

“Whereas, by remembering their service and sacrifice, we recognize the values and freedoms these men and women fought to preserve; and

1540

“Whereas the memorial will be a place of remembrance, a form of tribute, and an important reminder to future generations of the contributions and sacrifices that have helped shape our country;

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

“That the government of Ontario immediately construct the memorial to honour the heroes of the war in Afghanistan.”

I support this petition and I sign my name to it and I’ll pass it over to the Clerks.

LONG-TERM CARE

Mr. Jamie West: I want to thank Morgan Strojny from Sudbury for this petition. It is the “Time to Care” petition.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas quality care for the 78,000 residents of (LTC) homes is a priority for many Ontario families; and

“Whereas the provincial government does not provide adequate funding to ensure care and staffing levels in LTC homes to keep pace with residents’ increasing acuity and the growing number of residents with complex behaviours; and

“Whereas several Ontario coroner’s inquests into LTC homes deaths have recommended an increase in direct hands-on care for residents and staffing levels, and the most reputable studies on this topic recommend 4.1 hours of direct care per day;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario ...

“To amend the LTC Homes Act (2007) for a legislated minimum care standard of four hours per resident per day, adjusted for acuity level and case mix.”

I support this petition and will be affixing my signature.

EDUCATION

Mr. Will Bouma: “To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas parents must be respected as an important partner when it comes to their children’s education; and

“Whereas school boards and schools must fully involve parents in important decisions regarding their children and their academic progress; and

“Whereas parents want assurance that their children are safe at school; and

“Whereas parents expect their children to be in class, free from disruption to their learning;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly to:

“—recognize the importance of parents’ roles and rights as their children’s primary educators;

“—encourage and support parental engagement and participation in our education system;

“—work to ensure Ontario’s education system communicates with parents and guardians; and

“—provide ample opportunity for active engagement, knowledge and decision-making in their children’s education.”

I fully support this petition, will be affixing my name to it and giving it to the usher to bring to the table.

LONG-TERM CARE

Mr. Michael Mantha: I have a petition that’s entitled “Support Bill 153, the Till Death Do Us Part act...”

“Whereas there are 35,000 people on the wait-list for long-term care; and

“Whereas the median wait time for a long-term-care bed has risen from 99 days in 2011-12 to 152 days in 2018-19; and

“Whereas according to Home Care Ontario, the cost of a hospital bed is \$842 a day, while the cost of a long-term-care bed is \$126 a day; and

“Whereas couples should have the right to live together as they age; and

“Whereas Ontario seniors have worked hard to build this province and deserve dignity in care; and

“Whereas Bill 153 amends the Residents’ Bill of Rights in the Long-Term Care Homes Act to provide the resident with the right upon admission to continue to live with their spouse or partner;

“Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to direct the Minister of Long-Term Care to pass Bill 153 and provide seniors with the right to live together as they age.”

I wholeheartedly agree with this petition and thank the good people of Bruce Mines for having provided it to me.

PUBLIC SECTOR COMPENSATION

M^{me} France Gélinas: I would like to say thank you to Katherine Brenton from Dowling in my riding, for these petitions. They read as follows:

“Pandemic Pay...”

“Whereas the pandemic pay eligibility needs to be expanded as well as made retroactive to the beginning of the state of emergency; and

“Whereas Premier Ford stated repeatedly that the workers on the front lines have his full support but this is hard to believe given that so many do not qualify; and

“Whereas the list of eligible workers and workplaces should be expanded; and

“Whereas all front-line workers should be properly compensated;

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

“To call on the Ford government to expand the \$4-per-hour pandemic pay to include all front-line workers that have put the needs of their community first and make the pay retroactive to the day the state of emergency was declared, so that their sacrifice and hard work to keep us safe is recognized.”

I fully support this petition, Speaker, will affix my name to it and send it to the Clerk.

WINTER HIGHWAY MAINTENANCE

Mr. Michael Mantha: I have a petition from the good people of Hornepayne. The petition reads:

“Improve Winter Road Maintenance on Northern Highways...”

“Whereas Highways 11 and 17 play a critical role in the development and prosperity of northern Ontario;

“Whereas the former Liberal government introduced private winter maintenance contracts, and the current Conservative government has failed to improve winter road conditions in northern Ontario;

“Whereas injuries and fatalities are twice more likely to occur on a northern highway than on a highway in southern Ontario, per capita;

“Whereas current Ministry of Transportation classification for winter highway maintenance negatively impacts the safety of drivers on northern highways;

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

“Classify all 400-series highways, the QEW highway and Highways 11 and 17 as class 1 highways;

“Require that the pavement on class 1 highways be bare of snow within eight hours of the end of a snowfall.”

I completely agree with this petition, affix my name and send it down to the Clerks' table.

PUBLIC SECTOR COMPENSATION

Mr. Jamie West: I want to thank Kyla Bryans from Copper Cliff for working on this petition. It's a petition for pandemic pay.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the pandemic pay eligibility needs to be expanded as well as made retroactive to the beginning of the state of emergency; and

"Whereas Premier Ford stated repeatedly that the workers on the front lines have his full support but this is hard to believe given that so many do not qualify; and

"Whereas the list of eligible workers and workplaces should be expanded; and

"Whereas all front-line workers should be properly compensated;

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

"To call on the Ford government to expand the \$4-per-hour pandemic pay to include all front-line workers that have put the needs of their community first and make the pay retroactive to the day the state of emergency was declared, so that their sacrifice and hard work to keep us safe is recognized."

I agree with this petition. I'll affix my signature and give it to the Clerk.

SERVICES EN FRANÇAIS

M^{me} France Gélinas: J'aimerais remercier Clément Lacelle de Chelmsford dans mon comté pour les pétitions :

« Respectez la communauté francophone.

« Considérant que l'énoncé économique d'automne » 2018 « du gouvernement a annoncé l'élimination du Commissariat aux services en français et l'annulation des plans pour l'Université de l'Ontario français; et

« Considérant que ces décisions constituent une trahison de la responsabilité de l'Ontario envers notre communauté francophone;

« Nous, soussignés, pétitionnons l'Assemblée législative de l'Ontario de demander au gouvernement de maintenir le bureau du commissaire aux services en français, ainsi que son financement et ses pouvoirs, et de maintenir l'engagement de l'Ontario de financer l'Université de l'Ontario français. »

J'appuie cette pétition. Je vais la signer, et je l'envoie à la table des greffiers.

CLIMATE CHANGE

Mr. Michael Mantha: My petition is entitled "Save the 50 Million Tree Program.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the Ford government wants to end the 50 Million Tree Program which, since 2008, has planted more than 27 million trees;

"Whereas Ontario and the world face a major climate crisis that threatens our future;

"Whereas planting new trees and creating new forests is crucial in the fight against climate change;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to require the Ford government to reinstate all funding to the 50 Million Tree Program immediately."

I completely agree with this petition, affix my name and present it to the Clerks' table.

DOCUMENTS GOUVERNEMENTAUX

M^{me} France Gélinas: J'aimerais remercier Stéphanie Chiasson de Val Caron dans mon comté pour les pétitions :

« Accents en français sur les cartes santé...

« Alors qu'il est important d'avoir le nom exact des personnes sur les cartes émises par le gouvernement, » telle la carte santé;

« Alors que plusieurs ... francophones ont des accents dans l'épellation de leur nom », comme moi;

« Alors que ... le ministère de la Santé » a « confirmé que le système informatique ... ne permet pas l'enregistrement des lettres avec des accents;

1550

« Nous, soussignés, pétitionnons l'Assemblée législative de l'Ontario pour qu'elle s'assure que les accents de la langue française soient inclus sur » les cartes santé émises « par le gouvernement de l'Ontario », et ce, « avant le 31 décembre, 2020. »

J'appuie cette pétition. Je vais la signer et je l'envoie aux greffiers.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

HELPING TENANTS AND SMALL BUSINESSES ACT, 2020

LOI DE 2020

VISANT À SOUTENIR LES LOCATAIRES ET LES PETITES ENTREPRISES

Mr. Clark moved third 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 Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): I recognize the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing, Mr. Clark.

Hon. Steve Clark: Thanks, Speaker. It's great to see you in the chair this afternoon.

It's a pleasure for me to rise in the House for third reading debate of our proposed legislation, the Helping Tenants and Small Businesses Act.

Bill 204 includes important measures to support Ontario's residential tenants, small businesses and municipalities. It would amend the Residential Tenancies Act to freeze rent increases for the vast majority of Ontario's 1.7 million renters in 2021. It's going to provide families and individuals with important financial relief and predictability as we continue down the path of economic recovery. And to help small businesses get back on their feet and protect them from being locked out or having their assets seized, the proposed changes would amend the Commercial Tenancies Act to extend our temporary ban on evictions for small businesses whose landlords are eligible for the Canada Emergency Commercial Rent Assistance program. The act also proposes amendments that would reduce delays on election day by creating a more accurate and consistent single register of electors for both provincial and municipal elections. And to help support better compliance with public guidelines across Ontario, there will be amendments to the Reopening Ontario (A Flexible Response to COVID-19) Act which would, if passed, create a new offence and fines for breaking the rules for social gatherings.

Before the other sections of this bill are covered by Mr. McDonnell, my parliamentary assistant for municipal affairs, and also Ms. Hogarth, who is the parliamentary assistant to the Solicitor General—I'm going to let them speak on some very important details within the legislation—I'm going to first outline briefly the details of the proposed residential freeze, with your indulgence, Speaker.

On the rent freeze: Many Ontarians, as we all know, continue to face economic hardship and uncertainty as a result of COVID-19. Because of these uncertain times, we believe it's essential to provide more stability and predictability around the cost of keeping a roof over their heads. That's why our government's proposed changes would freeze rent for residential units across Ontario in 2021, ensuring that almost every Ontarian does not see a rent increase next year.

C'est pourquoi les modifications proposées par notre gouvernement prévoient le gel des loyers des logements dans tout l'Ontario en 2021 en veillant à ce que tous les Ontariens ne voient pas leur loyer augmenter l'année prochaine.

Speaker, the Residential Tenancies Act sets out the rent increase guideline formula which is used to calculate the maximum allowable rent increase for the next year in rent-controlled units. It's based on the consumer price index, a measure of inflation calculated by Statistics Canada. I think everyone in the House understands that. The proposed changes we're speaking of today will make the 2021 rent increase guideline 0%. It freezes rent from January 1, 2021, to December 31, 2021. Again, I spoke about this at second reading. I'm going to reiterate it today:

The proposed rent increase would apply to both rental units covered by the Residential Tenancies Act and will also include those first occupied on or after November 2018, which were typically exempt from rent control.

When our government was elected, Ontario was facing 15 years of inaction on the housing supply file, which created a critical shortage of new rental construction in our province. I think we all acknowledge that the rental construction was not where we needed—to keep up to supply. So we executed a decision in that first fall economic statement in 2018, where we excluded new rental buildings from rent control, to encourage more purpose-built rental construction. I think we all agree that it worked. Rental starts in the last two years are the highest they've been in decades. It doesn't matter what statistic you use—some use CMHC, Royal Bank, Urbanation; everyone agrees that we've seen a huge increase in rental starts over the last two years. That's why we were pleased to see those rental projects being moved forward, and we realized that it would assist greatly the challenges that current renters face. We want to ensure that renters living in these units also receive a break. That's why we've included them in this bill.

I'm going to talk about exemptions, because there was some discussion at second reading regarding this. We recognize that landlords often count on rent increases to maintain the quality and safety of the units, and to also offset increasing costs. That's why the proposed rent freeze would be temporary. It would be in place for 2021, and things would go back to normal in 2022. Landlords are still required to give at least 90 days' notice for any rent increase that would take place in 2022, and the proposed legislation does allow for some exemptions.

The freeze would not apply when a landlord had already received approval from the Landlord and Tenant Board to raise the rent to cover the cost of critical repairs and upgrades to those rental buildings. Above-guideline increases would be allowed for these improvements and operating costs relating to security services only. And above-guideline increases due to increases in municipal taxes and charges would not be allowed; I know there were some who indicated during their second reading speeches that it would be. I want to again make it clear that they will not be allowed, again, unless they had previously been approved by the Landlord and Tenant Board.

Of course, there are going to be circumstances where the landlord and the tenant have come to an agreement about a rent increase in exchange for an extra service or an extra facility—like the examples I used at second reading, like parking or air conditioning—that would be exempt. But again, those would be situations when the landlord and the tenant came to a previous agreement.

We also know that our seniors need extra predictability during these times, which is why our rent freeze would apply to retirement homes.

Mr. Speaker, the goal of our proposed rent freeze is simple: to freeze rent for Ontario's 1.7 million tenants.

Monsieur le Président, l'objectif de notre proposition de geler les loyers est simple : geler les loyers des 1,7 million de locataires de l'Ontario.

1600

I now want to talk about some of the incredible cooperation that we've received during the pandemic. Throughout the pandemic, the members of the Legislative Assembly of Ontario in this House have put partisan differences aside to pass legislation that protects Ontarians. Together with the opposition, we passed Bill 187, the Municipal Emergency Act, which allowed councils, boards and committees to meet remotely, allowing our local governments to continue to function while protecting health and safety. We also worked together to pass Bill 186, the infectious disease emergencies act, which provided job-protected leave for employees in isolation due to COVID-19.

I hope that the members of all parties, especially the opposition, will once again join us to pass this bill. I was very encouraged to hear that my opposition critic, the member for Toronto Centre, has indicated that she intends to support the bill, because I think that when we work together we can achieve so much. I want to thank those members who have indicated that they will support the bill.

This summer I was pleased to join members from the government, but also members of the opposition, to announce critical housing projects in their communities. I want to talk about three, if you'll indulge me.

In July, I was with the member for St. Catharines as our government announced our investment of \$2.2 million in supportive housing to give those who are homeless or at risk of being homeless in the Niagara region the housing and support services they need. I want to thank the member for Niagara West for being the host that day and doing an exceptional job as the master of ceremonies. He rolled out the welcome mat for me in Niagara region, and I want to thank him for that, as did Regional Chair Jim Bradley—who, as we all know, was in this House from 1977 until the 2018 election. He, along with Mr. Oosterhoff and also the member for St. Catharines—she was very excited about this development, because it meant a lot to her. It was the new 24-unit Oakdale Commons, of which 15 units are supportive housing, four of which are fully accessible. The new building included a community room, a kitchen, a public washroom and laundry facilities. It was a very great development with the great partnership of the YWCA Women's Resource Centre. It was an exceptional development that we visited.

I also want to take this opportunity to talk about a development I toured a few weeks ago in London with the member for London–Fanshawe. We made two announcements that day—one at 1090 Hamilton Road in London, the Residenza Ortona, which was a fully accessible apartment building that included 54 affordable housing units. The member for London–Fanshawe and the Minister of the Environment joined me at that announcement.

There was a second complex in London–Fanshawe, at 440 Clarke Road, that I went by privately because it was very close to my daughter's house in London. It was a 33-unit affordable housing complex for seniors, persons with disabilities and low-income residents. It was an excellent

development that was under way for a barrier-free building there.

The next day, I was with the member for Windsor–Tecumseh at an announcement for our province's largest passive home complex, at 3100 Meadowbrook Lane. This is a new, 145-unit building for individuals, small families and seniors that is barrier-free, with 46 accessible units.

At the same time that day we announced, with the member from—where is he? Oh, there you are in the Chair, Speaker. How could I miss you? I'm just kidding. I want to thank you, Speaker, for the warm welcome you gave me in your riding, the tour we did of your apartment unit, the purpose-built rental unit that was well under way for construction. Thank you for the opportunity to tour your riding. You know better than anyone that we also made an announcement in Kingsville at 215 Division Street for new supportive housing, four units for young people with disabilities. So thank you for all of the work that you did that day. We did run the roads in your riding and also in the member for Windsor–Tecumseh's. Thank you for all the work you're doing as well on affordable housing.

I want to thank Mr. Burch for being at an Indigenous housing development that we had in your riding. I think it was almost in your backyard. It was great for you to be able to join me for that day. We also had Parliamentary Secretary Vaughan there, from the federal government. I know we've been able to work very collaboratively with the federal government on a variety of projects.

I was glad to be in the member for Waterloo's riding as well to celebrate a new building that was under construction in the municipality where I enjoyed a number of fond years at the University of Waterloo.

So we've made lots of great announcements with the opposition members, and we hope to continue that as we help tenants, small businesses and our municipal partners.

Our proposed rent freeze complements steps that we've already taken to make renting easier and fairer for both landlords and tenants through the Protecting Tenants and Strengthening Community Housing Act. We made changes to the Residential Tenancies Act requiring the Landlord and Tenant Board to consider whether the landlord tried to negotiate a repayment agreement with a tenant if they fell behind in rent after March 17 of this year. This must happen before—before—the board can issue an eviction order for non-payment of rent. At eviction hearings, adjudicators must already review and consider the circumstances of each case to determine if the eviction should be refused or should be delayed. I want to be clear: All adjudicators must consider whether the landlord made efforts to negotiate a repayment agreement, and we're doing this to encourage this type of repayment agreement instead of evictions for rent arrears that were accumulated for COVID-19. Again, many, many landlords and tenants have come together to work collaboratively, moving forward.

Mr. Speaker, before the COVID-19 outbreak began, my ministry was hearing increasing complaints about reno-
victions, where a landlord evicts a tenant to renovate the

unit then re-rents it at a much higher price. It is very important to note that repairing and renovating units is not against the law. Maintaining and modernizing units to make sure they meet the building code and the fire code requirements, I think, and I hope members on the other side of the House agree, makes it better and safer for people to live. But if the landlord needs to evict a tenant to do the repairs, we know the law says they must give the tenant the opportunity to move back in at the same rent before offering it to others.

We've extended the time that a tenant can seek compensation if their landlord doesn't give them the opportunity to move back. We've also increased the compensation that tenants receive if they were evicted from bad faith. And we've doubled the fines for landlords convicted of breaking the law—up to \$50,000 for an individual and \$250,000 for a corporation.

Encouraging rent repayment agreements, cracking down on illegal evictions and our proposed rent freeze all work together to provide more stability and more security for tenants.

Speaker, we know the impact COVID-19 is having on our most vulnerable in our communities. I was asked a question about it today in the House. That's why our government acted quickly to help Ontarians through these unprecedented times, including the \$510-million investment that we've made under the social services relief fund. We need to help people stay in their homes, and we provided much, much more money so that municipalities can bolster their rent banks, bolster their utility banks, as well as provide emergency loans to those in need.

I also mentioned this morning that our government was the first to sign on to the Canada-Ontario Housing Benefit, which provides direct financial assistance to tenants. With the federal government, we've committed to a \$1.4-billion investment over the next nine years. Again, Ontarians can use this benefit to pay rent in any home, anywhere in the province, providing tenants with more choice and the ability to live where their support network is, where their jobs are or where school is. All of this is important. It's important work that has to continue. We have to move forward with improvements to the system and the services for vulnerable Ontarians. We've made great strides, but there is much, much more we need to do.

1610

I'm pleased that my ministry is working with the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services to continue our consultations on supportive housing across this province to learn how we can improve essential services and housing supports for people in need, and I was pleased to join into several round tables across our province this summer.

Speaker, the rent freeze that we're proposing builds on changes that our government has already made to keep Ontarians safe and in their homes. We know that COVID-19 has brought financial hardship to many tenants. That's why, when the pandemic first hit, the Attorney General was quick to suspend evictions. In March, our government

was proactive in seeking a temporary moratorium on residential evictions from April through to July. The proposed rent freeze is another important tool. Our government is the only jurisdiction in Canada that's proposing to freeze rents for tenants next year, because these are uncertain times, and now more than ever, we want to make sure Ontarians have a place to call home.

The demand for housing in Ontario is high, and we're seeing this in every community, bar none, all 444 municipalities. We know our community housing system is under stress. That's why our government has created very practical solutions to improve community housing and increase housing supply. As I have said many times, in April 2019, we launched our Community Housing Renewal Strategy, which is investing over \$1.5 billion in 2020-21 to help sustain, repair and grow our community housing system and to reduce homelessness. We know that a lack of supply is such a challenge for our government to move forward on, but we've made great strides through our More Homes, More Choice Act, our province's housing supply action plan, where we have put forward a suite of regulatory and policy changes necessary to transform Ontario's broken housing system, encourage construction of all types and all sizes of development, including purpose-built rental.

Regardless of the situation of COVID-19, one thing has not changed: People need places to live at prices they can afford, and this is the driving force behind our efforts to get Ontario back on track.

Les gens ont encore besoin d'endroits où vivre à des prix qu'ils peuvent se permettre, et c'est ce qui motive nos efforts pour remettre l'Ontario sur la bonne voie.

Our government is committed to putting the health and safety of Ontarians first. This bill adds to the measures that we've put forward. I'm proud to have been able to table this bill and to work collaboratively with my colleagues to add this to the other measures.

Speaker, thank you for giving me this opportunity to kick off debate for Bill 204. I hope that it gets all the support from all parties and all members.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further debate?

Ms. Catherine Fife: Once again, I am speaking about Bill 204, which is at third reading today. I just want to start off by saying I have had a very productive working relationship with the minister who is in charge of this piece of legislation. And I appreciated the invite to the announcement in Waterloo on housing. I didn't attend because I was social distancing.

But that is why I am so conflicted on the approach and in my commentary here, because Bill 204 misses the mark on so many levels. I feel very strongly that had this piece of legislation been able to go to committee, we could have made it stronger. We could have really, truly engaged in that collaboration that the minister referenced in his comments. I feel very strongly about bringing the voices of businesses to this Legislature because they are under such stress.

I should say also, I'm going to be sharing this time with the member from Niagara Centre, who's our critic on many of the issues that are in this piece of legislation—he's done an amazing job—and of course the member from London West, who is going to speak to the piece of legislation around a procedural and process perspective.

Our member from Toronto–Danforth has been—the communication between him, as the member for that riding, and myself, as the critic for economic development and jobs, has been consistent, because the Broadview Danforth BIA, the Riverside district BIA, Bloorcourt and Queen Street BIAs are four out of the 80 that have reached out to us throughout this entire process. Their request is very clear. They said, “We would welcome and appreciate the opportunity for further dialogue on this issue, this piece of legislation, which is absolutely critical to the viability of our business and property owner members.” And then they have specific requests. Of course, this letter just happened, because this legislation just had time allocation yesterday.

Their number one request is rent abatement. Everybody in this House knows this. They say to retire CECRA. CECRA has not worked. The 70% revenue cut-off part is too high. Asking a business to prove that you've lost 70% of your revenue and then having that be the qualifying factor to access rent support has been an epic fail. But Bill 204 doesn't address that. And they asked specifically—it needs to be a 75% subsidy. They cannot take on any more debt. And that's actually in our Save Main Street strategy.

The second thing that Bill 204 does not address for commercial operators is the rising commercial rent that they have experienced. Imagine, during this pandemic, when businesses have lost massive amounts of revenue or even the chance to generate revenue, commercial landlords have increased their rent or increased ancillary fees like security and cleaning. In our estimation, during a health crisis, during an economic crisis, this is somewhat predatory. So the Commercial Tenancies Act—the imbalance between commercial operators and tenants and the landlords: That power imbalance always falls with the landlord. It is the Wild West out there. It needs to be corrected. Bill 204 does not do that. And given our testimony throughout the summer, it seems downright irresponsible to bring a weak piece of legislation to the floor of this Legislature.

They go on to say finally that the commercial eviction lockout ban, which is currently set in this piece of legislation for October 30, which is only 32 days from now, they say—this is the Toronto Danforth BIA—to extend it to September 30, 2021. Give these businesses a fighting chance to stay in business.

And I've brought the voices of Riverside—feel free to wake up, any time; it's okay—Bloorcourt and Queen Street West BIAs to the Legislature, because these voices are reflective of what's happening in Sudbury, in Hamilton Mountain, in Niagara, in Algoma. There's a consistency. If we are hearing this, so are you. But why are you not absorbing it and reflecting it in legislation that can actually help these businesses?

The Broadview Danforth BIA say the wage subsidy program has been extended, as you know. But it is absolutely useless if businesses can't pay their rent and are forced to close. That means that that renders that wage subsidy program null and void, if you will. So you are either going to have businesses have a fighting chance to stay open or you're going to have their employees lose their jobs because the businesses go out of business or because they are evicted, and then you're going to have them on social assistance. Let's keep these businesses viable, Mr. Speaker.

And the Broadview Danforth BIA says to bring the threshold for qualification for rent subsidy—that should be tenant-driven, not landlord-driven. Imagine being a small business owner and saying, “Okay, my whole life, my whole livelihood, my whole existence is dependant on a landlord going through this process.” That is completely and utterly unfair. So they ask to set that threshold for 30% and to have it be a tenant-driven process and to have it be a subsidy. They cannot take on any more debt.

1620

The other issue that I want to bring to the floor of the Legislature today is that we put out a call yesterday. These business, to their credit, are very busy. They're very stressed. They reached out in response to Bill 204. This is actually a business from Sudbury. It's called RHP Training Centre. This is from Marc, the owner. He says, “Hi Catherine,

“This would be such a great help ... not too many commercial landlords are doing anything to help small and medium-sized businesses.”

So we proposed the 75% subsidy. That is a hopeful moment for businesses. We are talking about it. We're talking to you about it. We're hopeful that it might come to fruition—if it was in Bill 204 at present. Of course, it is not.

He says—this is RHP Training: “We have over \$21,000 of rent monthly and have had our revenues reduced by over 40%, and with that being said, we are not getting any help from our landlord and have to make sure rent is there on the first of every month or we ... get closed up or evicted.... Please help get something so we don't have to close our doors and lose everything that we have put into our business of over 10 years that serves ... kids and families across northern Ontario. As business owners we lose everything that we have put into the countless hours and stress over all the years as well as lose everything personally as we will be bankrupt.”

This is what's at stake. This is the government's opportunity to be hopeful, to be courageous, to be bold. You should do it. We would support you. And so, it doesn't make any sense.

This is another business that also—this just came in this morning, the Workaround in Toronto. This is from Amanda Munday. She says, “My small business, a co-working facility with on-site childcare, is on the brink of collapse. The lease, with \$300K remaining, is personally secured to my home. My landlord is a national REIT”—so he's a large commercial landlord, not a small

independent landlord. “We need immediate rent relief and an evictions ban so I can start to rebuild. Families are scared and understandably not returning. Is it safer for the public for me to close?” I don’t know. “But if I close, I’ll lose my home. My four full-time staff will lose their jobs. I’m a single parent of two kids, six and four. We need better, now. We need to be able to weather the health emergency by knowing the security of our businesses are not under imminent threat.” This is what is at stake.

Finally, Camden Spa Skincare and Wellness, in Toronto: They say, “We have so many issues because we do not want to shut down the business. Rent is definitely a major issue.”

Finally, this is Wig Boutique, again in Sudbury. They’ve been very good about responding. This is Joanne. She says, “They need to start telling us way before due dates for rent what is happening.

“It’s so stressful and causes lots of fights between tenants and landlords.

“As far as I am concerned, if we were mandated to close ... that means we lose a lot of revenue ... that should be enough to qualify for government assistance...”

“My sales are \$90K less than last year but if I have one good month ... well guess what ... I can’t get that help...”

So the CECRA plan is punitive. Do you understand that? We want businesses to do well. The local business initiative that’s been started by the CFIB, about buying local and shopping local—people want to support their businesses. They recognize that this is a key part of economic recovery. But if they do have one good month, then the support and that safety net, if you will, gets pulled out from underneath them.

The other component that I don’t understand about Bill 204—and the loopholes are even acknowledged by the minister—is around possible evictions and a lack of direct rent support for tenants. This is from the Federation of Metro Tenants’ Associations, and it reads, “Maybe just some perspective on the eviction crisis versus this freeze. If you look at the number of renter Ontario households, which is 1.7 million, and average rents, which is \$1,200 across the province, a 1.5% cut is about \$30 million in savings. However, with 170,000 households facing eviction and the province’s refusal to pass Quebec-style rent control, tenants stand to lose well over \$400 million in higher rents in addition to the explosion of homelessness and encampments already visible around the province, including in the Premier’s own riding.”

It should make each and every one of us deeply concerned and a little bit ashamed that people are in tents in our province, and that is their home.

Finally, this is a direct letter to Minister Clark. This is from the Advocacy Centre for Tenants Ontario: “We understand that the government has decided to forgo committee consideration of this bill and to call it for a third reading at the earliest possible opportunity,” which is, like, now.

“We are concerned with the inadequate coverage of the so-called rent freeze in schedule 7. We ask that you make two significant changes to the schedule. First, we ask that

the proposed RTA under 136.1(2)(c) found in section 2 of schedule 7 be deleted. This exemption of above-guideline increases from the rent freeze benefits only large corporate landlords at the expense of tenants, many of whom will not have the means to pay rent increases of 3%.”

Secondly, they ask that you add a section to schedule 7 to provide for a one-year rent freeze for all tenants instead of the brief relief the bill offers to tenants whose 2021 rent increases were scheduled to take effect in later months.

They go on to say, “While we support the principle of this bill, these two changes would bring the effect of the bill more into line with the principle.”

Do you understand? I think there’s an understanding that a rent freeze in 2021 is welcome. People are desperate for any kind of relief during this tense and stressful time. But the overall intention of the bill is not realized in this legislation. People will still be evicted. I hope we can agree that in a pandemic, evicting families and people out into the streets is not in the public’s best interest from a health and safety perspective, nor from an economic perspective.

Of course we will be supporting this piece of legislation, because it’s better than nothing. But we are so disappointed, on behalf of the people that we serve, that we didn’t get a chance to make it a more effective piece of legislation for small businesses and for tenants in Ontario.

Needless to say, we’re still going to keep fighting; that is our job. Every single day we will bring these voices of Ontario businesses and tenants to the floor of this Legislature.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further debate?

Mr. Jim McDonell: I’d like to thank the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing for the opportunity to speak about how our government is supporting Ontarians and their communities through these tough times.

We’re helping tenants keep a roof over their heads, and we’re helping small businesses with financial relief and with programs to protect their assets. We’re helping municipalities with direct financial aid, and new ways to cut red tape. Together, we’re building a solid foundation for Ontario’s economic recovery.

The minister has explained how the proposed rent freeze will provide stability for residential tenants throughout 2021. Now, Mr. Speaker, I would like to outline how this legislation will help commercial tenants.

Small businesses are the backbone of Ontario’s economy, providing much-needed jobs and essential goods and services. This spring, we worked with our federal counterparts to provide direct financial relief to commercial landlords and tenants by investing over \$240 million into the Canada Emergency Commercial Rent Assistance, or CECRA, program to support small businesses across the province.

Through CECRA, commercial landlords receive forgivable loans equivalent to half the rent they receive from tenants. Tenants pay 25% of the rent laid out in their lease agreement, and landlords absorb the remaining 25% of the

rent. It's a compromise but it's a fair one. It's an example of the Ontario spirit at work.

Small businesses shouldn't shoulder the full weight of an outbreak on their own; neither should landlords. In June, our government established a ban on commercial evictions to protect small businesses struggling with the impacts of COVID-19. Both CECRA and the ban were designed as temporary measures. Both were then ended this August.

Our government has been flexible to respond to daily reality. Just as we acted quickly to protect the health and safety of Ontarians, we're acting to protect small businesses. We know they need support. We successfully made our case to our federal counterparts, who extended the CECRA program. Now we're proposing to extend our ban on commercial evictions as well.

1630

The Helping Tenants and Small Businesses Act would extend the moratorium to protect CECRA-eligible businesses for an additional two months. It would be retroactive from September 1 and run to the end of October. This is one of the many ways our government is working to provide relief to small businesses.

We also acted promptly to provide financial relief for small businesses. In late March, we doubled the employer health tax exemption to \$1 million for 2020. We eliminated penalties and interest on late-filed returns or payments to the employer health tax, tobacco tax, gas tax and seven other provincially administered tax programs. Through the Regional Opportunities Investment Tax Credit, we offered businesses \$45,000 to renovate, buy or build an eligible commercial or industrial building in designated areas.

We're also giving small businesses a break on their hydro. Our government cut the cost of electricity for eligible small businesses from March 24 to May 31. Small business time-of-use customers were charged the lowest price available—the off-peak price—around the clock. This was the same price residential customers paid.

And, on June 1, we established a low, fixed electricity price for all time-of-use customers, including small businesses. That low rate kicked in on June 1 and is in effect through to October 31. Ontario benefits when the lights are on in our small local businesses. We're doing everything we can to support local business because they are central to the building of healthy communities.

The rent freeze and our proposal to extend the ban on commercial evictions reflect our commitment to building healthy communities. Just as we're investing in local businesses across the province, we're investing in local housing. Our government launched the Community Housing Renewal Strategy just last year. As part of this strategy, we've committed over \$1.5 billion this year and next into community housing. We're helping to sustain, repair and build more community housing. Millions of dollars have been invested in affordable housing through these programs, like the Social Infrastructure Fund, Investment in Affordable Housing for Ontario Program, the Ontario Priorities Housing Initiative and the Canada-

Ontario Community Housing Initiative. This money has gone directly to local communities, service managers and Indigenous program administrators on the ground. Because these local experts know best how to spend the money, it can be used to support their local housing needs. Together we are helping vulnerable Ontarians find homes, because we know that when people have a safe and stable home, they are healthier, safer and successful.

The outbreak has taught us that we are all vulnerable to the impacts of COVID-19. The legislation we are proposing is about protecting all of us—our businesses and our communities. That's why we're investing in housing as well as other health and safety measures, because every Ontarian deserves a place to call home. Our government knows that stronger communities make a stronger Ontario, and that's why our government supports municipalities—because they have been at the forefront of combatting COVID-19.

Over the past few months, we have been engaging with our municipal partners every step of the way. Municipalities have been providing critical services on the ground to keep Ontarians healthy and the communities functioning. We have taken their concerns and challenges to heart. The Premier and Minister Clark have gone to bat for municipalities in negotiations with the federal government. Ontario is committed to working hand in hand with our municipal partners so they can emerge stronger and so that they can lead the economic recovery in every community. Thanks to the Premier, Ontario's share of the Safe Restart Agreement with the federal government is \$4 billion, which is exactly the amount the Federation of Canadian Municipalities said that Ontario's municipalities needed. This month, \$695 million started flowing to 444 municipalities on a per household basis. Another \$695 million will flow in a second phase to municipalities that demonstrate a need for more support.

These funds will help municipalities across the province continue providing essential services to support the critical work done by public health, law enforcement and homeless shelters. This funding does not include the significant support municipalities are receiving in transportation funding through the Safe Restart Agreement.

We want to make it easier for municipalities to get things done, not just right now, but in the future. That's why we've worked hard to cut red tape. Mr. Speaker, the proposed legislation is another example of how we're cutting red tape so municipalities can get things done.

The Helping Tenants and Small Businesses Act will establish a single register of electors, a list of all eligible voters in Ontario. We would achieve this with amendments to the Municipal Elections Act, the Municipal Act, the Election Act, the Assessment Act and the Municipal Property Assessment Corporation Act. Right now, the Municipal Property Assessment Corp. gives municipalities a preliminary list of eligible local voters. Municipal clerks would then correct the list and develop a final list, which may contain inaccuracies. This slows down the process and creates delays for voters on election day. Our proposed legislation would see Elections Ontario assume

responsibility for providing the preliminary list to the municipal clerks. This is something several of our municipal partners have asked for, including the Association of Municipal Managers, Clerks and Treasurers of Ontario. This move is supported by the Chief Electoral Officer of Ontario.

The central register of electors would be used for both provincial and municipal elections. It would be in place in time for the municipal bylaws initiated in 2024 and all regular municipal elections in 2026. This means that clerks will spend less time correcting the voting lists at the polls and voters will experience fewer delays on election day. That's good news for voters, and it's good for government. It is exactly this kind of sound policy and red tape reduction that previous governments have failed to act on.

We're also helping municipalities deliver services more efficiently in other ways. Our Audit and Accountability Fund is helping large urban municipalities reduce costs by supporting line-by-line reviews, audits and other service reviews. The city of Guelph used its funding to review its time, attendance and scheduling performance systems. Mayor Cam Guthrie said that the city would use that review as part of a larger review into how to update human resources processes, with the ultimate goal of delivering municipal services more efficiently and saving the taxpayer money.

Our government has also committed to \$125 million under the Municipal Modernization Program, which is designed for small and rural municipalities. Under the first phase of the program, we committed over \$14 million to help more than 130 communities undertake reviews. Some of the projects we are funding are joint projects where municipalities are working together to find efficiencies and improved service. In Wellington county, seven municipalities are using the funding to see if IT resources can help them achieve savings and deliver better services.

The Municipal Modernization Program builds on the municipal modernization payment we provided to 405 small and rural municipalities last year. That funding helped municipalities update their operations and find smarter ways to deliver services, to respect taxpayer dollars.

For example, in the town of Gananoque, some used this modernization funding to install smart meters that can be read from a vehicle on the street. This will save staff time, and they can now focus on other priorities.

The town of Halton Hills is using some of its funding to set up a business concierge approach to attracting more investment in their community. The business concierge program helps investors and entrepreneurs and is designed to attract foreign investors as well. The town is also using the funds to implement an economic development and tourism strategy.

1640

The township of Lanark Highlands is putting its funding towards updating its website so people can book the local arena online. This not only makes the system efficient for all residents who want to use the arena, but it saves staff time as well.

As we help all these municipalities streamline operations, they can focus on other urgent and critical work. Mr. Speaker, municipalities are our partners on projects that create jobs, housing and critical services like long-term care. These kinds of projects will help jump-start the economy.

The minister is making ministerial zoning orders, or MZO's, to help municipalities cut red tape and get those priority projects off the ground faster. But the minister has also used MZO's to help our restaurants and bars recover from the impacts of COVID-19. In July, Toronto asked the minister to make an MZO to immediately allow for the creation and expansion of restaurant and bar patios, as the city couldn't hold a council meeting quickly enough to develop its own temporary use bylaw that would allow for this.

Earlier in the summer, our government passed an emergency order allowing Ontario's municipalities to quickly pass these temporary bylaws to keep patrons safe while dining outdoors. Mr. Speaker, we recognize that restaurants and bars, as well as their staff, have been hit hard by COVID-19, so it was important that we acted fast to help them make use of the short patio season, support our small businesses and create new jobs. This is just an example of how the minister is using his authority to make MZO's that communities need and that support jobs, housing and public transit.

Mr. Speaker, we're not just building houses; we're providing homes for people at risk of homelessness, creating healthier communities. And we're not just giving breaks to small businesses; we're investing billions in communities to support a recovery that will get Ontario back on track. And we're not just streamlining the voters lists; we're changing the way municipalities do business so they can work effectively now and bounce back stronger. That's why we tabled this legislation. We're building Ontario's future.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further debate?

Mr. Jeff Burch: It's a pleasure to stand and talk to you and speak again to Bill 204, Helping Tenants and Small Businesses Act. This is a piece of legislation that we've said over and over again we will be voting for. There's nothing objectionable in it, but what we object to is the fact that it doesn't actually meet the needs of either residents or small businesses in Ontario. Obviously, we agree with merging provincial and municipal enumeration. Municipal clerks have been calling for that for a long time, and I'm not even sure why it's in this bill—other than filler. The increased penalties for hosting overcrowded events—of course, we agree with that. And the residential rent freeze and commercial evictions ban extension are the bare minimum that this government could have done. So that's what we really object to—nothing that's actually in the bill, but everything that's not in this bill that people have asked for.

I know that the member from Waterloo met all summer—and I spent a little bit of time with her and the member from Toronto Centre, speaking to renters, associations, small businesses, individuals. As I said the other

day, possibly the most important thing that we do is listening to people, and they did a great job listening to small businesses and individuals who are having a really rough time. What they told us they needed is not in this bill.

Obviously, across the board, rent freezes are a welcome move. No one should be facing a rent increase during COVID-19. No one should be forced out of their home in the middle of a pandemic. However, many people in Ontario were behind on rent, were paying more than 50% of their income just to keep the roof over their heads before the pandemic began. Speaker, let's not forget that this government, at the beginning of their term, cancelled a scheduled 3% increase to ODSP, cut it in half to 1.5%, and then allowed landlords to raise rents by 1.8%, which a lot of legal clinics across Ontario called an equation for homelessness. And that, along with a serious lack of affordable housing, is the situation we already had before we went into this pandemic. So that response is nothing close to being enough.

I'm going to spend a little bit more time on the business side of things because that's what we've been hearing so much about in my riding, and calls from businesses that are really in danger. As the member from Waterloo so passionately said, these businesses really don't think they're going to make it through the second wave. We're hearing really dire predictions: one in seven businesses; 60% of restaurants. These are things that are going to permanently scar our economy.

We have a choice: We can either support those businesses so as many of them as possible survive over the next few months or we can walk away, and this bill is saying that we're going to walk away. That's why the current commercial evictions ban doesn't go far enough and the stringent criteria allows only a few businesses to qualify. Since the start of the programs, the CECRA, we have seen the impacts on those who fall through the cracks from extensions.

We've been hearing, as I mentioned, in my riding from dozens of businesses. Ryan, who owns Tailgates in Welland, which is a long-time local restaurant—when COVID-19 hit, he had a 190-seat restaurant that could only serve 25 guests. His landlord expected full rent and refused to take part in the assistance program, which made him ineligible for help. He still hasn't resolved his issues, and we're heading into a second wave.

In Port Colborne, a local chiropractor I mentioned the other day, Dr. Salanki, had to cash in his retirement savings because his landlord refused to apply for the program. His once-thriving practice was decimated. After 30 years in the same location, he was given an ultimatum recently to pay up or leave. On May 12, I wrote the Premier about this situation and have yet to hear a response.

Many other businesses in my riding—my office heard from Jerry, owner of Howells pumpkin farm. It's an agritourism business in my hometown of Thorold. Jerry's grandfather bought the farm in 1942, and as a result of COVID-19, the multi-generational farm faced imminent

closure. He's got over 40 acres of land on the main farm alone, yet for months his business could only have 100 people. Jerry could not get any response from the government for clarity on the rules, which forced him to lose massive amounts of income. In early September, the mayor of Thorold and I got together and were fortunately able to rectify the situation and ensure that he could open in a way that was safe and reflective of his unique business.

However, other businesses were not as lucky. Merrittville Speedway and Humberstone Speedway are two businesses—Merrittville is in my riding; Humberstone is in another part of Ontario, but they called us nonetheless. In August, a group of local mayors and I sent a letter to the Minister of Heritage, Sport, Tourism and Culture Industries. The speedways submitted a proposal to the government via their portal in July and hadn't received a response. This is not the only sector that we've heard this from. Businesses that are worried—they maybe see a little bit of light at the end of the tunnel if they can bring in some income by maybe the end of October, and they put a plan together because the government tells them, "Well, if you put a safe reopening plan together and you submit it through our portal, we will respond to you and you may be able to open, you may be able to survive." So in the midst of all of this stress, they put together a plan, they submit it to the portal, and they receive no response. Think about that. They are months away from losing their business, and they receive no response from the government.

I'm not going to embarrass members from the government side, but I know that members on the government benches had the same issue that I had in trying to get responses for businesses who put safe reopening plans through the portal. This was a huge problem, and it still remains a problem. These are some of the things that could have been resolved, could have been added to the bill or could have been discussed in committee, if this had gone to committee.

1650

Humberstone Speedway lost \$310,000 by August and were forced to forfeit nearly their entire season. Merrittville lost about \$1 million. Brighton Speedway, located in Northumberland-Peterborough South, lost \$430,000 by the end of July.

The stories of businesses like Tailgates, Dr. Salanki's chiropractic clinic, the speedways and many, many more speak to two broader challenges that businesses across the board in Ontario are facing. One is the lack of transparency on these decisions, and the other is the absence of substantial direct supports to businesses and not-for-profits that serve the community.

Businesses in my riding have been expressing concern, confusion and frustration regarding the lack of transparency on decisions and the short amount of time they have to implement them. On Friday, this government ordered new closing times for restaurants, bars and nightclubs that took effect Saturday. It's understandable that some decisions need to be made quickly—the health and safety of the province is obviously of the utmost importance. However, this week, the Greater Niagara Chamber

of Commerce released a statement requesting transparency in these decisions. In a public statement, one of the chambers that covers the entire Niagara region said, “The government stated that the decision was made in consultation with the Chief Medical Officer of Health, but did not reveal what the nature of that consultation was, who recommended the changes, who decided to legislate the changes, and what data that decision was based upon.

“These changes will negatively impact many businesses which are already struggling to survive under the pressure of the pandemic. The GNCC does not prioritize business over public health, but simply asks that decisions which harm businesses include a clear and tangible demonstration of benefit to public health, with data that include projections of cases with and without the measure.”

That seems like a very reasonable request from the business community, and if this government was listening to them, perhaps they’d be addressing these things in their bill and in their daily conduct at Queen’s Park. This is the lack of transparency our leader spoke about this morning in question period with respect to the COVID-19 response.

“The GNCC offered similar suggestions when Niagara was not among the regions selected to move to stage 2 of the provincial reopening. While we respect the decision of the government and encourage all of our members to comply with legislation, the government’s case would be better made if the data they were basing their decisions on, and the methods by which they reached them, were publicly available.

“We ask that the government of Ontario commit to greater transparency in dealing with the business community and the public at this very difficult time.”

This is a chamber of commerce speaking to the government, asking them for transparency on decisions in dealing with the business community.

Businesses have already faced unprecedented difficulties and have done a great job adjusting when possible, but they need transparency, they need clear instructions and, in many instances, direct financial support. That’s why our caucus has suggested direct financial support for businesses, which is lacking in this bill.

Last week, member from St. Catharines, the member from Niagara Falls and I released our program in downtown St. Catharines called Save Main Street. We did it in the downtown because many municipalities, like Thorold, are currently working to revitalize their main streets. I worked very hard with the member from St. Catharines when we were both city councillors in St. Catharines on revitalizing that downtown between 2006 and 2014.

A lot of work has gone into downtowns across the province, and when one business or group of businesses fails, all of the others face challenges. We know that it’s much harder for small businesses in a downtown than it often is for big box stores that have popped up through urban sprawl in many communities.

In the early 2000s, Niagara faced devastating job losses, and it took a long time to get the economy going again. As

businesses dried up in downtown areas, it took a great deal of effort and money to revitalize those areas.

This is what we believe the government should do:

—a ban on all commercial evictions. This is something we’ve heard loud and clear from the business community;

—a 75% commercial rent subsidy;

—a made-in-Ontario plan for sick days for all—and it’s been great to see some action on that from the federal government, with the help of a minority Parliament;

—a fund to help businesses with safe reopening costs or remote work set-up costs;

—more non-profit and public child care spaces for working parents, because we know that this pandemic has affected women more than other groups; and

—an end to insurance gouging.

This program is not something that we made up. It’s not something that is ideological. It’s something that has come right from the business community and the many chambers of commerce and small businesses that we’ve heard from.

There’s a lot missing in this bill. This bill aims low and falls short. We’ve referred to it as “penny-pinching” and “shortchanging,” and we’ve heard that from businesses and from individuals throughout the last several weeks, which means Ontarians aren’t getting the help they need. We will support this bill, but people deserve so much better than this.

Millions of Ontarians have seen their financial stability shattered by COVID-19. Many households have been on the brink of being unable to keep food in the pantry and keep the bills under control, through no fault of their own. No one should be facing rent increases right now. No one should be forced onto the street in the middle of a pandemic. While freezing rents in 2021 is the least the government could do, renters need more financial stability right now.

This bill does nothing at all to stop evictions during this pandemic, and no one should be forced onto the street. It’s working folks who will drive Ontario’s economy. As the member from Waterloo mentioned, the devastation of losing thousands of businesses over the next few months if they don’t receive direct support is going to be more expensive to rebuild than if we put the money out front to help them stay in business in the first place.

This logic that the government puts forward—we’ve heard a couple of members through this debate on the government side say, “Well, how much is that going to cost? It’s going to cost too much.” Well, it’s going to cost a lot more to rebuild the economy when thousands of businesses go under—businesses that we could have saved by directly helping them with their rent over the months of the second wave—so it’s false economy to say that it’s too expensive to support businesses now and keep them open.

Small businesses have been fighting to keep their heads above water since this began, and they deserve our support now. We need a complete commercial evictions ban, and we especially need to directly subsidize rents so that we do not face the devastation that many people are predicting through the second wave.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further debate?

Mr. Stephen Blais: Well, here we are again. It seems like we were just debating this bill just the other day—and if it seems that way, it's because we were.

As the member from Waterloo mentioned earlier, I think it's abundantly clear that this bill would have benefited from the opportunity to go to committee. But instead of discussing this bill at committee, instead of having learned testimony from experts in housing, instead of hearing from landlords and tenants and small business owners, instead of hearing from the Chief Electoral Officer, municipal officials and municipal candidates, the government has decided to fast-track this bill for reasons that, frankly, pass understanding.

The Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing mentioned earlier that this bill was somehow demonstrable of their efforts to work together. Certainly, as others have said, we're going to support the contents of this bill, but to suggest that that is somehow as a result of co-operation on behalf of the government is laughable.

Hours of testimony over the summer at SCOFEA, Mr. Speaker, dozens of recommendations from our caucus and the opposition, and I don't believe that any of those recommendations, as it relates to rent supports, as it relates to commercial evictions, and as it relates to supporting anything for COVID-19, are evident in Bill 204.

1700

I can attest to the poor quality of the municipal voters list. I've dealt with it in four different elections, and it's bad. In fact, there is an election happening in Ottawa right now, Mr. Speaker, and I have received a voter card at my home for someone who hasn't lived there for years. This person, in fact, owns their own home and owned that home before the last municipal election. That's how bad the list is. So certainly I agree that it needs to be improved.

But the government isn't proposing to take any action on this for six years, so I don't understand the rush. Why can't it go to committee? Why can't we hear from the Chief Electoral Officer? Why can't we hear from CAOs, clerks and municipal candidates who have had to deal with the issues with the municipal voters list? Why can't we hear from MPAC and others as to why the list is so bad, and ways to improve it? I just don't understand the rush, Mr. Speaker.

It's hard to understand the rush because the bill doesn't include a prohibition on evictions, and the rent freeze that it does include doesn't come into effect for another three months. Anyone facing a rent increase between now and the end of the year isn't going to be helped by this bill, Mr. Speaker, and so I don't understand the rush.

It's hard to understand why the legislation doesn't include a prohibition on residential evictions. In the early summer, the government made it easier to evict tenants who can't afford their rent due to COVID-19. If this bill would have included a prohibition of residential evictions then I could understand the rush, but it doesn't.

It's hard to understand the rush, Mr. Speaker, because Bill 204 doesn't do anything, really, to provide immediate

relief to tenants, and it does even less to provide any kind of immediate relief to small landlords.

As Ontarians have been stretched, they've been unemployed or underemployed because of COVID-19. We all know; we've all heard the stories that many have had a hard time paying their rent. This has been obviously problematic for those renters and it's been equally problematic for small landlords. I'm not talking about corporations or real estate income trusts, Mr. Speaker. I'm talking about regular people who chose to invest in real estate instead of investing in mutual funds, regular people who rely on those units to support their retirement—regular people, small landlords like Raj from Mississauga–Malton.

We heard that he invested in a condo near Square One. During COVID, his tenant hasn't been able to pay the rent. Apparently, he's been calling his MP over and over and over and over again looking for support. I'm sorry to tell Raj that, in Bill 204, there is no support for him or other small landlords, Mr. Speaker. He hasn't been supported by his government, and Bill 204 won't help him.

These small landlords have expenses like all of us. They need to pay their mortgage, they need to pay the hydro bill and they need to pay the water, just as we all do. And while the Conservatives have made it easier for them to evict their tenants—they've made it easier for them to throw their tenants out on the street—they've done nothing to make it easier for small landlords to keep their tenants. They have done nothing to help those small landlords pay their bills. And so I don't understand the rush to pass this bill so quickly, Mr. Speaker, when there's nothing in it for small landlords.

It's equally frustrating, Mr. Speaker, because it's not like the government doesn't know how to do it. They've been given advice by our caucus and by experts. They know how to help small landlords. You help small landlords by helping the tenants, by providing a rent support program to keep tenants paying their rent, to keep them in their homes.

There are 2,500 people in Ottawa today under threat of eviction because the government is not supporting tenants or small landlords, Mr. Speaker. As winter approaches, 2,500 people are facing being kicked to the curb.

But despite the Premier's bombast, the government hasn't done anything to help tenants, and they've done less to help small landlords. In fact, we know that the totality of the government's financial supports during COVID-19 comes out to three cents on the dollar. Their financial commitment is the equivalent to the spare change you keep in the dish in the front foyer, Mr. Speaker. In fact, there's not a denomination of money in Canada anymore that is the equivalent to their commitment to COVID-19 support.

If Bill 204 included a rent support program, if it included a program that would help tenants, if it included a program that would help small landlords, I could understand the rush, but it doesn't include any of those things. It's a shame that the government didn't take the advice we provided during the SCOFEA summer committee meetings. It's a shame that the government chose to

fast-track this legislation and not send it to committee to hear learned testimony from experts, to receive advice and recommendations from the opposition to make Bill 204 so much better.

We're going to support this bill, but it could have been so much better, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further debate?

Ms. Christine Hogarth: I'm proud to join the debate on third reading of Bill 204, the Helping Tenants and Small Businesses Act.

As members will know, Bill 204 includes proposed legislative amendments to the Reopening Ontario (A Flexible Response to COVID-19) Act, 2020. These proposed amendments are a necessary step in Ontario's fight against COVID-19, because while an overwhelming majority of Ontarians are doing their part to beat the pandemic, there are those who are carrying on as if the last six months had never happened.

Before I proceed further, let me take a moment to recognize the front-line workers, including all of those that fall under the umbrella of the Ministry of the Solicitor General, who have served us with such dedication over these past months. To our emergency responders and front-line enforcement, as well as to our health care workers and indeed all those who continue to serve the public while navigating the threat of this deadly virus, we thank you for your service.

Speaking on behalf of the Solicitor General, I also want to echo the sentiments that she has routinely made in this House and take a moment to thank the staff of the Legislative Assembly for their hard work and dedication to ensure that we, as MPPs, can continue to meet and continue to conduct business.

Over the last number of months, our government has been working tirelessly to respond to any and all new developments in the fight against COVID-19. It hasn't been easy. And while we, personally, may be tired of this virus, it does not get tired of us, which is why our government has been implementing increased layers of protections for Ontarians based on the advice of our top public health experts as we learn more about this novel coronavirus.

For example, Premier Ford recently announced an unprecedented \$1-billion-plus investment in testing and contact tracing to help control the spread. Ontario is home to 38% of Canada's population, and we account for 52% of all testing. We are ramping that up as the demand increases.

On July 24, 2020, the declared provincial emergency was terminated and the Reopening Ontario Act came into effect. Orders under that act can be extended for up to 30 days at a time, and while the act gives the government flexibility to amend certain orders, it does not permit the government to create new ones.

Every day, millions of Ontarians are protecting themselves, caring for others and following public health guidelines. But Ontarians' chain of defence is only as strong as its weakest link. Wild house parties and social

gatherings in the hundreds, when restrictions call for far fewer, are a dent in the COVID-19 armour. We've seen examples of this across Ontario, from parties in Brampton to car shows in Ancaster and Wasaga.

1710

Based on the data and reports from local medical officers of health, social gatherings at private residences are a significant source of increased transmission of COVID-19. That is why our government acted swiftly and responsibly to quell these particular hotspots in the COVID-19 response. We amended an order under the reopening Ontario act that sets out rules for areas in stage 3 to reduce the number of people permitted to attend social gatherings and organized public events that are not operated by a business or organization. The new maximum is 10 people indoors and 25 people outdoors, and is subject to limited exception. This reduction applies to such gatherings or events as social functions, parties, dinners, gatherings, barbecues and wedding receptions held in private residences, backyards, parks and other recreational areas. Additionally, recognizing the continued threat that COVID-19 has on our province, all orders under the ROA were extended until October 22.

Last week, we ordered bars, restaurants and clubs to stop selling alcohol by 11 p.m. and to close by midnight, except for takeout and delivery. But our orders can only work to protect public health and safety if they are followed. Sadly, over the past few weeks, on far too many occasions this has not been the case. From the start, our messaging has been clear: a graduated approach to enforcement is encouraged, understanding that we have been adjusting to the new normal. However, there's still a small minority of individuals who have been blatantly flouting the rules. Now it's time to take the rule-breakers to task, because the stakes are far too high, especially for Ontario's seniors and most vulnerable.

To better ensure compliance with these orders, we introduced proposed amendments to the reopening Ontario act that would, if passed, create a new offence regarding hosting or organizing a gathering at residential premises or other prescribed premises that exceeds limits under an order, and a minimum fine of \$10,000 for organizers or hosts of gatherings that exceed these limits. The proposed amendment would also authorize the Lieutenant Governor in Council to prescribe additional types of premises for the purpose of the new offence.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, the amendments would also give authority for a police officer, special constable or First Nations constable to order the temporary closure of a premises where there are reasonable grounds to believe that any gathering exceeding the number of people allowed is taking place and require individuals to leave the premises.

Speaker, I want to be clear: Under the set fines established in relation to the current reopening Ontario act orders, those attending one of these gatherings remain liable for a one-time fine of \$750 each. Our message is clear: If you want to hold one of these gatherings, there will be a cost. If you want to attend one of these gatherings,

there will be a cost, not just in dollars and cents, but in the risk to your health and safety and the health and safety of family and friends.

COVID-19 is a deadly virus, and just because we all want to get back to our pre-COVID lives doesn't make it any less so. COVID-19 is on the rise, and the vast majority of the 14.5 million Ontarians are responding by adhering to the orders and the public health guidance to do their part in limiting the spread. It's unfair to give a free pass to those who don't or those who just won't follow the rules. To those lawbreakers out there, I ask: If you don't care about your own health or safety, please consider your loved ones; kids returning to school; grandparents, who are among the most vulnerable to COVID-19; parents and other family members who are taking the necessary precautions.

Mr. Speaker, as I've said, the vast majority of Ontarians have been diligent in stopping the spread, and I thank them for it. Ontarians can continue to do their part by subscribing to the COVID Alert app—which is really easy to do, and I've done it myself—and reducing the burden on the health care system by getting your flu shot.

Ontario was the first province to launch the COVID Alert app. We have also announced the largest flu immunization campaign in the province's history, and for the first time, seniors can visit a pharmacy for the high-dose vaccine.

Speaker, we are re-entering uncertain times, but Ontario is better prepared. We are more equipped, more knowledgeable and, with the testing infrastructure in place, ready to respond.

Our government will not waver in our responsibility to keep Ontarians safe. We will do whatever it takes, including taking action against those who violate the rules and put our recovery at risk. This is exactly why we have taken the actions demonstrated through this bill before the Legislature.

I ask all members of the House to join me with your support for Bill 204.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further debate?

Ms. Peggy Sattler: I rise today to join the debate on third reading of Bill 204 on behalf of the people I represent in London West. It's always an honour to bring their perspective to this Legislature.

Normally, during third reading debate, we would have an opportunity to reflect on the kind of input that was received to the legislation we're considering and see if the contents of the bill respond to what we have heard from the people of this province. But of course, we don't have an opportunity to do that with Bill 204 because Bill 204 was fast-tracked by this government to go straight from second reading to third reading, with no committee input whatsoever—no opportunity for the people who are most affected by this bill, no opportunity for experts, for stakeholder organizations, to weigh in and talk about what they liked, what they didn't like and what would make the bill stronger.

I can understand, I guess, why the government was in such a rush to move this bill through the legislative

process, because one of the centrepieces of this bill, one of the things that this government is proudest of, is the fact that it will implement a ban on commercial evictions until October 30. Speaker, we are at the end of September. October 30 is a month away. So yes, I guess it was important for this government not to take a week or more out of the legislative process so that they could get this in place and they could say to all of the commercial businesses in the province who fear that they are going to lose their business—they could say to those people, "Look, we're doing something for you. We have introduced Bill 204, and it is going to prohibit your landlord from locking you out and evicting you from your place of business."

Now, I wonder, Speaker, what some of those 500 deputants who took the time to appear before the standing committee on finance during those hearings that were held in July and August, those 800 hours of hearings, might have said about this bill, might have said about this big measure to extend the ban on commercial evictions to the end of October. I wonder if those 500 deputants would have felt that this bill responds to the issues they raised, that this bill incorporates the recommendations that they brought to the table during that committee process. I suspect that they would have been quite disappointed, that the government would have heard an earful from the small and medium-sized business community in this province about the total inadequacy of Bill 204, given the circumstances that we are facing in this province, because if there ever was a moment for this government to rise to the occasion, that moment is now.

Just today, new projections were released. We're going to be seeing up to 1,000 new COVID cases in just a few weeks. I saw a public health expert actually predict that there could be possibly 2,300 new COVID cases by the end of October—the same time this commercial eviction ban is going to end—but there could be 2,300 new cases of COVID if the government doesn't do something different in its COVID response. And of course this bill also includes some new measures for the Premier to wag his finger at people who are violating the social gathering rules, but it doesn't do anything to improve the government's comprehensive response to the pressures that we are facing as a result of COVID.

1720

The other key piece of this bill that I'm going to talk about for a bit is around the rent freeze. I think that, again, the government could have benefited by hearing from tenants and advocates who understand the impact of COVID on people who are low-income, who are struggling, who have lost their jobs, who have seen their hours radically reduced as a result of COVID-19 and are really, really struggling to be able to pay the rent and keep food on the table.

Speaker, I just want to share an email that I received on August 31 from Carol in London West. Carol is a tenant, and as MPPs may recall, August 31 was three days after this government announced that it would be introducing a rent freeze later in the fall. Carol asked us to forward her email to the Premier, which we did. Her email states, "My

landlord stated rent would not go up this year, however, due to the fact that everyone now knows this” legislation “is going to be introduced, I have received notice that my rent will go up the 2.2% December 1, 2020.” So Carol had believed that she would not be getting a rent increase, but because the advanced notice in the media gave the landlord the three-month notice period that was needed to apply for a rent increase, the landlord took advantage of that.

Now, a cynical person might wonder if maybe that heads-up was given in the media so that landlords would have that three-month period so that they could send these notifications, but we have no way of knowing how many landlords scrambled to get those notices out to tenants.

Carol goes on to say, “Other tenants around me received the same notice. Therefore, having a freeze on rent does not help tenants if other landlords are doing the same, which I am sure they will. My rent won’t go up December 2021, but guaranteed the rent will go up January 2022. Respectfully, I ask you how is this going to help us tenants. Unless there is a rent freeze until 2023 ... this is helping the landlords, not the tenants.”

So Carol and others like her might have had something to say about this government’s one-year rent freeze that’s going to take effect in 2021. And I do want to make clear that we support this. It really is the bare minimum that this government could have come forward with. We’re not going to be opposed to a one-year rent freeze that’s going to take effect in 2021, but people like Carol need much more support than that one-year rent freeze.

In London, we are facing a housing crisis. Every community in this province is facing a housing crisis, but London’s situation is rather unique. There was a report that came out in the summer that showed that rents in London are off the charts. In fact, rents in London have increased to higher than any other Ontario city—the second-highest in Canada in terms of a proportion increase over this last year.

In London, average rents for a one-bedroom apartment went up 11.3% over the last year. It’s now over \$1,200 for a one-bedroom. Rents for a two-bedroom increased 23.3% in just one year, so we’re over \$1,600 for a two-bedroom apartment in London. That’s quite a difference from the situation in the GTA, where the same report showed that rents are going down.

Londoners are facing not only a lack of affordable housing, but also this dramatic increase in the costs of rental units. CMHC estimates that we would need at least 700 to 800 new units coming on market every year in order to deal with the supply challenges that we are facing in our city.

At the same time, we have a homeless database that shows that there are more than a thousand people in our city who are chronically homeless. We have a shelter system that is reducing capacity, because it has had to in order to implement safety measures as a result of COVID-19. We have a wait-list of almost 5,000 people who need rent-gear-to-income public housing.

This rent freeze for one year—yes, tenants will take it, but it does absolutely nothing to deal with the larger systemic problems. Unlike some of the comments that I heard across the way about how they understand that no one should face eviction in the middle of a pandemic, no one should lose their home in the middle of a pandemic—statements that we on this side of the House have shared repeatedly—the problem is, this bill does absolutely nothing to prevent somebody from being evicted in the middle of a pandemic. It does absolutely nothing to prevent a tenant from losing their home because they were a dollar short on the monthly rent amount. That could allow a landlord to go to the Landlord and Tenant Board and seek an eviction. There are zero protections for tenants who have fallen behind on their rent and who are at real risk of eviction. With winter coming, the second wave that I talked about, and the number of people who are already chronically homeless, we know what eviction would mean for some of the most vulnerable in our province.

I want to go back to the moratorium on commercial rent evictions. I want to give a shout-out to Donna Szpakowski from the Hyde Park Business Improvement Association in London West, because Donna has been an incredible advocate for the business community, the small and medium-sized retailers, restaurants, other kinds of businesses, recreation facilities—all of these really important businesses that contribute so much to the quality of life in our communities. Donna has been a very effective and unrelenting advocate on behalf of those businesses.

Interestingly, she sent me an email on May 1. In that email—she copied it to people who are elected in London. The letter was sent to the Prime Minister and the Premier. Back in May, Donna pointed out in her letter to the Premier some of the problems with the current federal-provincial commercial rent relief program. She noted that “the incentive for landlords to apply and make use of the ... mortgage and rent relief is very low. Landlords and property owners stand to experience further debt of their own and thus will continue to demand rent from business tenants who are not earning any, or greatly reduced revenue. Arguably, there is more incentive for landlords to stay off the program and receive 100% of their rent rather than just 25% from their tenants while remaining responsible to pay 50% of their mortgages.”

1730

That is an example of how the problems with CECRA, the federal-provincial program, were obvious. They were obvious to people who understand the pressures that small and medium-sized businesses are facing. They were obvious right from the very beginning. Instead of standing up for the small business community in Ontario and calling on the federal government to direct the funding that’s been allocated to this commercial rent relief program, to give it to Ontario and allow Ontario to deliver direct rent subsidies to businesses—which is what we know businesses need, but did this government do that? Did this government stand up for small businesses, step up and start responding with measures that are really going to help small and medium-sized businesses? No, they did

not. They came forward with a one-month extension on a commercial rent eviction.

I do want to share some of the voices of businesses in London who have talked about the kind of support they need, the leadership they're desperately looking for from this government and the kinds of pressures they're facing as a result of COVID-19.

Jean Coles, who operates Sport Clips London, says, "Small businesses need grants, not loans. Grants will help them stay afloat. Can you imagine what our communities will look like after this? Many businesses will close during this" COVID-19 "with many others closing within the year as they struggle to pay back the loans. It's a sad time for retail and personal service businesses like ours."

Mike Inglis, who operates Gymworld in London West, says, "We cannot have loans; we need forgiveness if we are taking money out.... We are in survival mode and we are left with either going into debt or going bankrupt."

Jill Maloney from CheerStrike Royals says, "I think the only way we can survive this is if the government mandates rent freeze"—that's a commercial rent freeze, and no, there's no mention of that in this bill—"and mortgage relief for commercial properties."

Of course, as I raised in this Legislature earlier this week, as all of us have raised, the inadequate program that this government is partnering with the federal government on relies entirely on the voluntary good nature of landlords to participate. As a result, few landlords are taking up the rent relief, and small and medium-sized businesses are being excluded from any relief on their commercial rent.

Nick Bejenaru of Beje Gymnastics says, "It's going to take 10 to 20 years to get our business back up to the point they were before any of this happened."

Kelly Hajar from North London Dance Centre says, "We have been in business for 23 years. We have big, fixed overhead costs for huge square footage with no income.... We can stay afloat for five months, but what does it look like going forward? ... We are reversing back 20 years to when we started."

Speaker, businesses are very, very worried. They are hanging by a thread. They see this government holding up its shiny plan—Helping Tenants and Small Businesses Act—but their plan to help small businesses weather this unprecedented pandemic—and we don't even know where it is headed. But to help small businesses weather COVID-19, this government is saying, "We're going to help you. We're going to ensure that you don't get evicted from your commercial place of business until October 30."

This is why the NDP, our caucus, came up with our Save Main Street plan—because we listened to what small businesses were telling us, and we saw the total inadequacy of the measures that this government was bringing forward. Our Save Main Street plan has, as its centrepiece, a 75% commercial rent subsidy, to provide a monthly subsidy of up to \$10,000 until the pandemic ends—because when this moratorium on commercial rent eviction ends on October 30, 2020, the second wave of the pandemic is just getting started. And yet, on October 30, small businesses, who don't have the kind of support they

need from this government, will lose even this completely meager kind of action that this government is taking by bringing in a moratorium on commercial rent eviction.

Speaker, we're going to support this bill because something is better than nothing, but my goodness, they could have done so much better.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further debate?

M^{lle} Amanda Simard: I am pleased to rise today to speak on Bill 204, the Helping Tenants and Small Businesses Act, 2020. This legislation is important. I first called on the government to legislate a rental freeze on May 26 in this very House. I'm happy they listened, and I will support the legislation, but I'm disappointed they waited so long to provide Ontarians with critical support. Some of the measures in this legislation will help Ontarians, but I agree with my colleagues on this side of the chamber: It's too little too late.

Ontarians have had to make increasingly difficult choices over the past few months—choices between feeding their family or paying the rent and whether or not to send their children back to school with the unsafe non-plan put forth by this government.

First, the rental freeze measures in this legislation: The proposed protections come too late for those who have already been evicted, as the government prematurely lifted the moratorium on residential evictions last month. A residential rent freeze for next year does not help those who need it this year, nor those who will need more than a year to recover. It does nothing for those who have fallen behind on rent during the pandemic and are vulnerable to eviction. The Premier and his government have failed those Ontarians.

On to another critical issue, the commercial evictions: If this bill is passed, the halt on commercial evictions would be extended by mere days. This is not nearly enough time, and it's definitely not anywhere near enough support for small businesses. I've spoken to small businesses across the province and they've all echoed the same thing: They need urgent support from the government so that they're not forced to close their doors forever and lose their hard-earned livelihoods that they've worked their entire lives building. We know that Ontarians still have precarious finances and they need support now more than they ever have.

Mr. Speaker, many sectors, including tourism and hospitality, have not been able to resume operations at all because of the pandemic. The message from small businesses in every sector, though, has been clear: They need tax relief, yes, financial measures, but also concrete policies from the government to control the spread of COVID-19 so that we don't go back into a full lockdown. That's the number one priority. Ontario's small businesses are still extremely vulnerable. They have not yet had the time they need to rebuild and recover. This may take more than a few years, and we need to get this right.

So now, about those social gathering penalties: I think we're all aware of the risks that large social gatherings pose to our public health situation as we fight the spread

of COVID-19. We've seen the Premier time and time again sternly warning Ontarians not to gather in large numbers, to keep to our social bubbles, practise physical distancing and to wear a mask. However, it's unclear how effective this policy would be in curbing the spread of the virus. Over the past days, we've seen that enforcing gathering limits has been a challenge in many jurisdictions. Furthermore, while this government has reversed course and lowered the gathering limits in private functions, people are still gathering in staffed spaces as if the virus does not spread in classrooms, restaurants and other places where Ontarians gather—as if it was selective.

1740

We know that gatherings where people are not following public health guidelines can be a vector for transmission, but we haven't heard from our government about how much private gatherings are actually responsible for the rise in cases. Ontarians are left in the dark about how the virus is spreading and how to respond accordingly.

The government's line of public shaming and hefty fines does not encourage people to be forthcoming about where they've been and who they've socialized with, when it comes to contact tracing. The hardline approach will not enhance public confidence in our contact tracing efforts. Leaders in the government are keen to pit the rise of the second wave on a failure of personal choices, COVID-19 fatigue and the fickleness of Ontario's young people, while conveniently skirting the policy choices that have allowed the virus to spread. We've seen that the vast majority of Ontarians are keen to follow the rules when they're clear and they feel supported by the government.

Instead of blaming wild parties for community spread, the government could instead take action to invest in rapid testing research, protect our long-term-care homes and cap class sizes. However, those measures take investment, while levying fines and blaming millennials is a cheap and easy way to abdicate responsibility.

I will be supporting this imperfect legislation when it comes up for a vote, because something is better than the nothing we had before.

I look forward to working with the government on measures to support Ontarians and Ontario businesses to ensure they have the support they need during these challenging, unprecedented times.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further debate?

Mr. Mike Schreiner: I rise to contribute to the debate on Bill 204 today, and I do it with a bit of trepidation. We just talked about this bill two days ago, and I voted for it at second reading—and just to be clear, I'm planning on voting for it at third reading. But what I don't understand is why the government didn't listen to the opposition and why the government didn't listen to small business owners and tenants who asked for this bill to go to committee so we could make it a little bit better. It's part of our job in this House, isn't it? We can figure out ways to work across party lines to bring the people's voices to this House and to this Legislature and improve legislation. Instead, the government decided to ignore the concerns of the

Canadian Federation of Independent Business and intended advocacy groups and to just get rid of the public consultation process altogether.

This is our third week back in the Legislature, and we're now in the second wave. The Chief Medical Officer of Health has projected that we're on track to possibly be seeing 1,000 cases of COVID-19 a day. So I understand the need to move quickly, but I wonder why the government isn't taking just a couple of days to improve the bill at committee, to listen to what the people of Ontario want to see in Bill 204. The surge in cases should be giving us more urgency to help small businesses and tenants during a second wave.

Small businesses desperately need direct support, not half measures. Extending the commercial eviction ban for a month doesn't provide small businesses with the certainty they need to at least get through the end of the year. For some small businesses, the holiday season is their big time of year, when maybe they can make some additional revenue to make up for what they lost during COVID-19. That's not going to happen if they're evicted after October 30.

For others, having a few months to know that they may not be evicted would give them the peace of mind they need to pivot and try new things with their business or maybe be able to obtain some other support or adopt new strategies. But that's not going to happen if they're evicted after October 30.

Speaker, I'm worried. I'm worried that the government is not paying enough attention to the numbers. I'm worried that people are not going to go out and continue to shop in October like they did during the summer if the numbers continue to go up. And I know we want to do everything to avoid a shutdown, but what if we have another shutdown between now and then? Do you think small businesses will survive?

It's going to be tough. I can't tell you how many small businesses came to committee over the summer and asked all of us—we spent hours and hours, and I would say that the two biggest asks were to fix the rent relief program and extend the commercial eviction ban, and let's make sure we have rural broadband that works. Extending the commercial eviction ban to the end of October doesn't give small businesses the time they really need to get through this pandemic. It doesn't give the government the time it needs to fix the rent program—and we all know the commercial rent program doesn't work. Businesses need some time for the province to either stop passing the buck to the federal government or to sit down and work with the federal government, or to just develop our own rent relief program that puts tenants in charge of it, that lowers the revenue threshold to be eligible for it. That's not going to happen if businesses are being evicted starting on October 30.

Speaker, in my final minutes here, I also want to express some concerns I have for how this bill affects residential tenants. We know, and this pandemic has shown, that everyone in Ontario needs an affordable place to call home. Many tenants are up late at night, worried

about how they're going to get through the month and pay the bills. Many people are worried about possibly being out on the streets. So I will commend the government—I'm saying a nice thing about the government right now—for having a moratorium on residential evictions during the first wave of the virus. I'm going to ask them to have a moratorium on evictions as we head into the second wave, because people need certainty. They need to know that if they're sick, they're going to have a place of their own, a roof over their head to self-isolate and to be safe.

I also support the government freezing rent increases in 2021, but there's a tiny loophole in the bill: that if someone's rent increase is due, if it's coming up at the end of this year, their rent could go up now, and then the freeze in 2021 doesn't do them any good. In some cases, it may actually hurt them, because it may actually incentivize landlords to do the increase now. Even if the government doesn't want to do the wholesale changes to really help tenants and small businesses, we could have gone to committee and at least closed that really important loophole for tenants, to make sure their rent increases will be frozen now. And we could have extended the commercial eviction ban to the end of the year, to give us time to fix the program.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further debate? Further debate?

Mr. Clark has moved third reading of 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.

Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

Be it resolved that the bill do now pass and be entitled as in the motion.

Third reading agreed to.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Orders of the day? I recognize the government House leader.

Hon. Paul Calandra: No further business.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Pursuant to standing order 36, the question that this House do now adjourn is deemed to have been made.

1750

ADJOURNMENT DEBATE

INFECTIOUS DISEASE CONTROL

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): The member for Glengarry–Prescott–Russell has given notice of dissatisfaction with the answer to a question given by the Minister of Education. The member has up to five minutes to debate the matter, and the minister, or in this case the parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Education, the member from Niagara West, may reply for up to five minutes.

I turn it over now to the member from Glengarry–Prescott–Russell.

M^{lle} Amanda Simard: Today, I asked the Minister of Education if he was aware of a very disturbing situation that is happening as a result of his ministry's directive, which was clearly not thought out to consider highly probable scenarios, like public health units being backlogged. It's putting the health and safety of children, their families and our communities at risk. It's keeping parents, teachers and school staff in the dark for days.

Mr. Speaker, the ministry's directive is that only the local public health unit can notify parents—this is the parents of the other children in the classroom—when there is a confirmed case of COVID-19 in the classroom, and only the local public health unit can order a classroom into isolation. Theoretically, on paper, that seems good—great, actually. Practically, on the ground, it's very, very bad.

Here's what's happening: When a child in a classroom tests positive for COVID-19, only the parents of that child and the local public health unit know, and only the public health unit can take any sort of action. The public health unit advises the school of the case, but again, only that health unit can take the next steps. The parents usually proactively share that information with the teacher to be transparent, so they inform the teacher of that child's class. However, the teacher cannot say one word to anyone—not the other parents, not the other teachers, not anyone—until the public health units act and take charge of the situation and decide the next move—which seems right and logical. They are the experts, and they should be the ones to declare that a classroom needs to go into isolation for X many days and to take X measures. That is all correct, or would be, if the local health units were able to get on the cases right away and take action. Everyone would be advised without delay and would be able to protect themselves and their children.

But here's the problem: The local health units are completely overbooked, overburdened and struggling to keep up as it is. It can take days for this to actually happen. Days go by without anyone knowing there was confirmed exposure to COVID-19 in the classroom, except the teacher of that class and the public health unit. The teachers can't tell anyone, not the parents, not their colleagues. And during those days, students and teachers are all back into that classroom—yes, that stuffed classroom, and we know that those classrooms have too many students in them and they do not respect the public health measures of physical distancing—all together in a classroom for days, having all been exposed to COVID-19 and not even knowing it, parents unknowingly sending their children to school in classrooms exposed to COVID-19. Days go by that teachers have to withhold critical, potentially life-saving information. The families of high-risk classmates can't even be informed. I think we can all agree that that is beyond problematic.

This is creating serious problems that could have tragic consequences—problems that are avoidable right now. It's only a question of time if this situation isn't addressed immediately.

We like to talk about transparency and communication, but in this situation, there's zero of either. I hope the government will rectify and address the situation as soon as possible and keep children, families and teachers safe. Will it? That's the question.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Now the parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Education has up to five minutes to respond.

Mr. Sam Oosterhoff: My thanks to the member for her question this evening.

Speaker, public health guidelines are clear: If you feel sick, stay home. If you have been in close proximity with someone who has COVID-19, go get tested and self-isolate until your results are in.

We understand that students are wanting to come back after a long March break, and there is a desire to return to the normalcy before COVID-19 happened. But we need a collective effort to tackle this problem.

All students and all staff must self-assess before entering schools. Along with the President of the Treasury Board, we have provided a self-assessment tool for students, to make it more accessible and easier for parents to decide whether to send their child to school.

Ontario's COVID-19 management plan for schools was developed by medical leaders, with one aim and one aim only: to maximize safety and minimize the risk to your child. We have the resources in place, from nursing to testing and enhanced screening and cleaning, to help prevent the spread, coupled with a comprehensive plan to respond to any challenge immediately and decisively.

Speaker, our government released Operational Guidance: COVID-19 Management in Schools, a comprehensive document developed in consultation with public health experts, including Ontario's top doctor, the Chief Medical Officer of Health, that aims to help schools identify and isolate COVID-19 cases, reduce the spread of COVID-19 in schools and prevent and minimize outbreaks. We're providing school boards and school authorities with guidance to help them consistently implement prevention measures; maintain accurate records of staff, students, visitors; work with their local public health units; and take appropriate action when staff, students or visitors become ill during the school day.

An outbreak in a school is defined as two or more lab-confirmed COVID-19 cases in students or in staff in a school with an epidemiological link, within a 14-day period, where at least one case could have reasonably

acquired their infection in the school, including transportation and before- and after-school care. The local public health unit is responsible for determining if an outbreak exists, declaring an outbreak and providing direction on outbreak control measures to be implemented. This declaration and direction should be provided by the experts in public health units. This collaboration between public health experts and schools will keep our students and staff safe.

In some circumstances, public health will require students and staff to self-isolate for 14 days. In other situations, however, students may return to the class once it's been proven that there is no transmission. That happens at the school when students who have been exposed receive a negative COVID-19 test. Even though an outbreak may be declared in the school, the public health unit will assist in determining which cohort or cohorts may be sent home or if a partial or full school closure is required based on the scope of the outbreak.

While an individual suspected to have COVID-19 is waiting for test results, they must be in isolation and cannot attend school in person. The individual can attend school virtually, if they feel well enough to participate, but individuals who have had a COVID-19 test because of symptoms but who test negative should not return to school until at least 24 hours after the symptoms have resolved.

When cases appeared in school, we saw that the local public health units responded rapidly. They've been immediate in responding, working closely with the school community to ensure that staff and students are safe. I will continue to encourage parents to work with and listen to public health, and their communities, to ensure that these classrooms in the communities are safe.

We all have a responsibility, and we all play a role in reducing the spread of COVID-19 by following the protocols at home and following public health guidance. If you're sick, stay home. If you're at school, distance, wear a mask and properly practise hygiene.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): I would like to thank the member from Glengarry–Prescott–Russell for her question and the parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Education for your response.

There being no further matters to debate, I deem the motion to adjourn to have been carried. This House will now stand adjourned until 9 o'clock tomorrow morning.

The House adjourned at 1759.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO
ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Lieutenant Governor / Lieutenante-gouverneure: Hon. / L'hon. Elizabeth Dowdeswell, OC, OOnt.
Speaker / Président: Hon. / L'hon. Ted Arnott
Clerk / Greffier: Todd Decker
Deputy Clerk / Sous-greffier: Trevor Day
Clerks-at-the-Table / Greffiers parlementaires: Tonia Grannum, Valerie Quioic Lim, William Short
Sergeant-at-Arms / Sergente d'armes: Jacquelyn Gordon

Member and Party / Député(e) et parti	Constituency / Circonscription	Other responsibilities / Autres responsabilités
Anand, Deepak (PC)	Mississauga—Malton	
Andrew, Jill (NDP)	Toronto—St. Paul's	
Armstrong, Teresa J. (NDP)	London—Fanshawe	
Arnott, Hon. / L'hon. Ted (PC)	Wellington—Halton Hills	Speaker / Président de l'Assemblée législative
Arthur, Ian (NDP)	Kingston and the Islands / Kingston et les Îles	
Baber, Roman (PC)	York Centre / York-Centre	
Babikian, Aris (PC)	Scarborough—Agincourt	
Bailey, Robert (PC)	Sarnia—Lambton	
Barrett, Toby (PC)	Haldimand—Norfolk	
Begum, Doly (NDP)	Scarborough Southwest / Scarborough-Sud-Ouest	
Bell, Jessica (NDP)	University—Rosedale	
Berns-McGown, Rima (NDP)	Beaches—East York / Beaches—East York	
Bethlenfalvy, Hon. / L'hon. Peter (PC)	Pickering—Uxbridge	President of the Treasury Board / Président du Conseil du Trésor
Bisson, Gilles (NDP)	Timmins	Opposition House Leader / Leader parlementaire de l'opposition officielle
Blais, Stephen (LIB)	Orléans	
Bouma, Will (PC)	Brantford—Brant	
Bourgouin, Guy (NDP)	Mushkegowuk—James Bay / Mushkegowuk—Baie James	
Burch, Jeff (NDP)	Niagara Centre / Niagara-Centre	
Calandra, Hon. / L'hon. Paul (PC)	Markham—Stouffville	Minister Without Portfolio / Ministre sans portefeuille Government House Leader / Leader parlementaire du gouvernement
Cho, Hon. / L'hon. Raymond Sung Joon (PC)	Scarborough North / Scarborough-Nord	Minister for Seniors and Accessibility / Ministre des Services aux aînés et de l'Accessibilité
Cho, Stan (PC)	Willowdale	
Clark, Hon. / L'hon. Steve (PC)	Leeds—Grenville—Thousand Islands and Rideau Lakes / Leeds—Grenville—Thousand Islands et Rideau Lakes	Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing / Ministre des Affaires municipales et du Logement
Coe, Lorne (PC)	Whitby	
Collard, Lucille (LIB)	Ottawa—Vanier	
Coteau, Michael (LIB)	Don Valley East / Don Valley-Est	
Crawford, Stephen (PC)	Oakville	
Cuzzetto, Rudy (PC)	Mississauga—Lakeshore	
Downey, Hon. / L'hon. Doug (PC)	Barrie—Springwater—Oro-Medonte	Attorney General / Procureur général
Dunlop, Hon. / L'hon. Jill (PC)	Simcoe North / Simcoe-Nord	Associate Minister of Children and Women's Issues / Ministre associée déléguée au dossier de l'Enfance et à la Condition féminine Minister Without Portfolio / Ministre sans portefeuille
Elliott, Hon. / L'hon. Christine (PC)	Newmarket—Aurora	Deputy Premier / Vice-première ministre Minister of Health / Ministre de la Santé
Fedeli, Hon. / L'hon. Victor (PC)	Nipissing	Chair of Cabinet / Président du Conseil des ministres Minister of Economic Development, Job Creation and Trade / Ministre du Développement économique, de la Création d'emplois et du Commerce
Fee, Amy (PC)	Kitchener South—Hespeler / Kitchener-Sud—Hespeler	
Fife, Catherine (NDP)	Waterloo	

Member and Party / Député(e) et parti	Constituency / Circonscription	Other responsibilities / Autres responsabilités
Ford, Hon. / L'hon. Doug (PC)	Etobicoke North / Etobicoke-Nord	Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs / Ministre des Affaires intergouvernementales Premier / Premier ministre
Fraser, John (LIB)	Ottawa South / Ottawa-Sud	
French, Jennifer K. (NDP)	Oshawa	Third Deputy Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Troisième vice-présidente du comité plénier de l'Assemblée législative
Fullerton, Hon. / L'hon. Merrilee (PC)	Kanata—Carleton	Minister of Long-Term Care / Ministre des Soins de longue durée
Gates, Wayne (NDP)	Niagara Falls	
Gélinas, France (NDP)	Nickel Belt	
Ghamari, Goldie (PC)	Carleton	
Gill, Parm (PC)	Milton	
Glover, Chris (NDP)	Spadina—Fort York	
Gravelle, Michael (LIB)	Thunder Bay—Superior North / Thunder Bay—Supérieur-Nord	
Gretzky, Lisa (NDP)	Windsor West / Windsor-Ouest	First Deputy Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Première vice-présidente du comité plénier de l'Assemblée
Hardeman, Hon. / L'hon. Ernie (PC)	Oxford	Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs / Ministre de l'Agriculture, de l'Alimentation et des Affaires rurales
Harden, Joel (NDP)	Ottawa Centre / Ottawa-Centre	
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
Hillier, Randy (IND)	Lanark—Frontenac—Kingston	
Hogarth, Christine (PC)	Etobicoke—Lakeshore	
Horwath, Andrea (NDP)	Hamilton Centre / Hamilton-Centre	Leader, Official Opposition / Chef de l'opposition officielle
Hunter, Mitzie (LIB)	Scarborough—Guildwood	
Jones, Hon. / L'hon. Sylvia (PC)	Dufferin—Caledon	Solicitor General / Solliciteure générale
Kanapathi, Logan (PC)	Markham—Thornhill	
Karahalios, Belinda C. (IND)	Cambridge	
Karpoche, Bhutla (NDP)	Parkdale—High Park	
Ke, Vincent (PC)	Don Valley North / Don Valley-Nord	
Kernaghan, Terence (NDP)	London North Centre / London-Centre-Nord	
Khanjin, Andrea (PC)	Barrie—Innisfil	Deputy Government House Leader / Leader parlementaire adjointe du gouvernement
Kramp, Daryl (PC)	Hastings—Lennox and Addington	
Kusendova, Natalia (PC)	Mississauga Centre / Mississauga-Centre	
Lecce, Hon. / L'hon. Stephen (PC)	King—Vaughan	Minister of Education / Ministre de l'Éducation
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	
Martin, Robin (PC)	Eglinton—Lawrence	
Martow, Gila (PC)	Thornhill	
McDonell, Jim (PC)	Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry	
McKenna, Jane (PC)	Burlington	
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
Miller, Norman (PC)	Parry Sound—Muskoka	
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	
Morrison, Suze (NDP)	Toronto Centre / Toronto-Centre	
Mulroney, Hon. / L'hon. Caroline (PC)	York—Simcoe	Minister of Francophone Affairs / Ministre des Affaires francophones Minister of Transportation / Ministre des Transports

Member and Party / Député(e) et parti	Constituency / Circonscription	Other responsibilities / Autres responsabilités
Natyshak, Taras (NDP)	Essex	
Nicholls, Rick (PC)	Chatham-Kent—Leamington	Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Président du comité plénier de l'Assemblée Deputy Speaker / Vice-président
Oosterhoff, Sam (PC)	Niagara West / Niagara-Ouest	
Pang, Billy (PC)	Markham—Unionville	
Park, Lindsey (PC)	Durham	
Parsa, Michael (PC)	Aurora—Oak Ridges—Richmond Hill	
Pettapiece, Randy (PC)	Perth—Wellington	
Phillips, Hon. / L'hon. Rod (PC)	Ajax	Minister of Finance / Ministre des Finances
Piccini, David (PC)	Northumberland—Peterborough South / Northumberland—Peterborough-Sud	
Rakocevic, Tom (NDP)	Humber River—Black Creek	
Rasheed, Kaleed (PC)	Mississauga East—Cooksville / Mississauga-Est—Cooksville	
Rickford, Hon. / L'hon. Greg (PC)	Kenora—Rainy River	Minister of Energy, Northern Development and Mines / Ministre de l'Énergie, du Développement du Nord et des Mines Minister of Indigenous Affairs / Ministre des Affaires autochtones
Roberts, Jeremy (PC)	Ottawa West—Nepean / Ottawa-Ouest—Nepean	
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, Rudy Cuzzetto
Wayne Gates, Randy Hillier
Andrea Khanjin, Jane McKenna
Judith Monteith-Farrell, Michael Parsa
Randy Pettapiece, 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
Robin Martin, Norman Miller
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, Daryl Kramp
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