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Lundi
16 novembre 2020

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
OF ONTARIO

Monday 16 November 2020

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE
DE L'ONTARIO

Lundi 16 novembre 2020

The House met at 0900.

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

Prayers.

ROYAL ASSENT
SANCTION ROYALE

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I beg to inform the House that, in the name of Her Majesty the Queen, the Administrator has been pleased to assent to a certain bill in her office.

The Clerk-at-the-Table (Mr. Peter Sibenik): The following is the title of the bill to which Her Honour did assent:

An Act to continue the Soldiers' Aid Commission / Loi prorogeant la Commission d'aide aux anciens combattants.

PRIVATE MEMBERS'
PUBLIC BUSINESS

PROTECTING RENTERS FROM ILLEGAL
EVICTIONS ACT, 2020

LOI DE 2020 VISANT À PROTÉGER
LES LOCATAIRES CONTRE
LES EXPULSIONS ILLÉGALES

Ms. Bell moved second reading of the following bill:

Bill 205, An Act to amend the Residential Tenancies Act, 2006 and other Acts with respect to certain categories of evictions and the provision of legal representation with respect to such evictions / Projet de loi 205, Loi modifiant la Loi de 2006 sur la location à usage d'habitation et d'autres lois en ce qui concerne certaines catégories d'expulsions et la représentation juridique en cas d'expulsions de ce genre.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Pursuant to standing order 101, the member has 12 minutes to make her presentation.

Ms. Jessica Bell: I rise today to speak to Bill 205, the Protecting Renters from Illegal Evictions Act, 2020, a bill I introduced to make housing more affordable in our great city of Toronto and beyond in the province.

I do want to recognize the many people who inspired this bill in the first place. One includes my former executive assistant, Wyndham Bettencourt-McCarthy, who played a lead role in writing the bill.

I also want to recognize many of the residents in my riding who are affected by the threat of illegal eviction.

They include Kwame, a tenant in Kensington whose new landlord illegally and forcibly evicted him and his roommates, forcing him to move into a shelter. Even though the landlord was charged by the police, Kwame has still not returned to his home.

I want to recognize Leonard, a senior who lives at 103 Avenue Road. Leonard can't afford the rent, so he's down to one meal a day. He told me it's hard, but I know those words meant a lot more than that. His landlord is pushing through the cost of superficial renovations to justify rent hikes, and once those rent hikes come in, he doesn't know where he's going to go.

This bill is also for the people who live in parks, from Trinity Bellwoods to Dufferin Grove and beyond, because they can't afford anything right now, not a basement apartment, not a rooming house—nothing—because our city is too expensive.

This bill is for all the people who have been illegally evicted, or who are currently threatened with illegal eviction, and that includes the residents at 10 Walmer, at 15 Walmer, at 50 Walmer, the ghost hotel in Kensington, 666 Spadina, 83 Elm, 35 Castle Frank and all the Akelius residents within my riding and beyond. There are many people who are affected by illegal evictions in our city. The vast majority of these people pay their rent on time and they contribute to our city, but they are harassed and threatened with illegal eviction because their landlord wants to maximize their profit, illegally kick them out of their rent-controlled apartment and find a new tenant who will pay a much higher market rent, because that's how it works. And when that happens, it drives up the prices for everyone.

I want to explain to you how pernicious and large this problem of illegal eviction is. Since 2015, the number of official requests from landlords to evict so that they can move in a family member or themselves has gone up by 150%. The number of official requests from landlords to evict in order to renovate has gone up by 77%. I bring up those two examples because they are the two ways that landlords—often corporate landlords—illegally evict: They say they're going to have someone move in, or they say they're going to renovate, but as time passes and the tenant has moved out, neither of those things happen.

What is also important to know is that these official eviction rates that are tracked by the Landlord and Tenant Board are really only the tip of the iceberg. They're the tip of the iceberg because, in most cases, the stress and fear of an eviction results in the tenant giving up and moving out long before—long before—this case or this issue ever reaches the Landlord and Tenant Board. The reason why

this happens is because many of these landlords—a lot of them—are corporate landlords. We're talking about landlords who are acting in bad faith, the bad actors. They represent capital: the pension funds, the real estate investment trusts, the foreign investment capital, the private equity. There are a lot of names, but the purpose is very clear: Their sole job is to maximize profits for their shareholders, and that profit comes from us: from you and I and the people who rent in our ridings.

These corporate landlords know that the laws in Ontario are by and large stacked up against renters and for them. They know that. That's why they're moving here and investing here. These unfair laws were made by the previous government, until the last minute before the election where there was a sudden change. Now this government, sadly, is doubling down on that and passing laws that make it even harder for renters to find a good place and a good home in this good city. That includes the decision this government made to exempt new builds from rent control and the decision this government made to move forward with Bill 184, which makes it easier for landlords to evict—in the middle of a pandemic.

I don't believe renters should be viewed first and foremost as an investment opportunity for people who are already wealthy. We are people and this is our city, and if we are truly committed—truly committed—to build a fair and affordable and kind thriving world-class Toronto that has a place for all of us, then we need to change the laws to make housing more affordable, make housing a human right and treat renters with respect.

That is exactly what this bill, Bill 205, intends to do. I want to explain how it intends to do it. If this bill passes, it means that tenants who are legally and illegally evicted will receive more compensation once that happens. The reason is because right now, tenants receive very little compensation: not enough to cover their moving costs. The reality is that most tenants when they move have to pay double the rent, or up to double the rent, for that final month, because they have to pay the previous home and then they have to pay their future home so that they can guarantee that they're not homeless in between. It's common practice.

If this bill passes, it would make it so that landlords who illegally evict face higher fines, because right now the fines are not enough to disincentivize bad actors. We know this, because it is still happening. The Landlord and Tenant Board eviction rates are telling us very clearly that it is still happening.

0910

If passed, this bill would bring in proper enforcement of the rules. Right now, if a tenant is evicted by a landlord who says they're going to move in or have a family member move in, there's no follow-up or enforcement to ensure that that is actually what's happening. On the books it says there is enforcement, but in practice there isn't. One of the main reasons why there is no enforcement is because the responsibility is on the renter to do the investigation, and it's very hard for a renter to do that, because they don't

have access to all the information that they need, and because the compensation they get or the likelihood they're going to move into their former home is essentially zero. So why bother? They don't.

Enforcement, quite frankly, is broken. This bill aims to address that. If passed, this bill would create a public eviction registry by address so prospective renters can see which addresses frequently evict, and so repeat offenders can be identified. Because it is often those repeat offenders who evict again and again and again, and that shouldn't be happening anymore, because we do know where those addresses are and who those people are, and this would create an eviction registry by address.

This bill would also guarantee legal representation for tenants facing a no-fault eviction. This is important, because right now 80% of landlords have legal representation when they go to the Landlord and Tenant Board, yet only 3% of tenants do. This discrepancy unfairly impacts the outcome of Landlord and Tenant Board hearings in favour of the landlord. This wouldn't apply to everyone; it would apply to tenants who are facing a no-fault eviction—so they're paying the rent on time and they're good, paying tenants.

I believe these measures in this “stop illegal evictions” bill will crack down on the bad actors who are deliberately breaking the rules in order to maximize profit. When we do this, these measures will ensure that tenants are able to keep their home and continue to live in this city.

It is also important to recognize that this bill, Bill 205, is part of our overall plan to provide homes for people and make housing more affordable for all. Our broader plan includes measures to end vacancy de-control so renters can have more stability. Montreal has done it. Other cities can do it. We can do it here as well. Our broader plan includes a commitment to build thousands of affordable housing and supportive housing units so that more people can have a home.

This government, in contrast, likes to talk a good talk about all the homes they need to build and that if we just increase supply, then the issue of affordability will magically go away. We have seen that rhetoric be played out by the previous government and this government for decades now, and quite frankly, it doesn't happen. It doesn't work. Government needs to get involved.

Our broader plan includes measures to increase speculation taxes so that people who live here can afford to have a better chance of affording a home here, because right now the playing field is unfair. And our broader housing plan includes the idea of a transparency registry, so no longer can anonymous numbered corporations come into our city and invest—and potentially launder—money, because what this registry would do is make ownership of all property public. Right now, only ownership of homes owned by individuals, you and I, is public. But if you're a numbered corporation, it's all secret. What that means is that the housing market becomes unfair.

I'm proud of our plan and I'm proud of this bill, Bill 205, because it will help stop illegal evictions in my riding and many of the ridings across Ontario, and it will provide

the renters from Spadina Road to Walmer Road, to Leonard, to Kwame, to the people in 103 Avenue Road a little bit more protection so that they can live good lives here and afford to pay their rent. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Further debate?

Mr. Jim McDonell: It's a pleasure to rise today in the House to discuss Bill 205, Protecting Renters from Illegal Evictions Act. This is an important topic, and it's something our government has taken a lot of decisive action to combat.

Speaker, I want to begin by acknowledging that many Ontarians continue to face financial hardship as a result of COVID-19. Because of these uncertain times, we believe it is essential to help provide more stability and predictability around the costs to rent Ontario homes. That is why our government has frozen rent increases for the vast majority of Ontarian renters to 2021. This change is in effect starting January 1, 2021, until December 31, 2021. Ontario is the only province to freeze rent for the entirety of 2021, and we are proud of that. This is an unprecedented move, but this is also an unprecedented year.

We are the first province to sign a joint investment agreement with the federal government to provide funding directly to people to help them afford their housing costs. The Canada-Ontario Housing Benefit provides \$1.4 billion available in a portable benefit directly to those who need it most. This year, we expect 5,200 Ontarians to receive payments, with that number growing every year.

The Residential Tenancies Act sets out the rights and the responsibilities of residential landlords and tenants in Ontario. These rules affect both tenants and landlords, and they need updating every once in a while. That is why we consulted on changes to the Residential Tenancies Act as part of our historic housing supply action plan. We received over 2,000 submissions, 85% of which were from the public. These consultations were crucial in developing Bill 184, the Protecting Tenants and Strengthening Community Housing Act, where we introduced measures to further discourage the practice of renovictions.

Before the COVID-19 outbreak began, the ministry was already hearing increasing complaints about renovictions. To be clear, repairing and renovating units is not against the law. In fact, maintaining and modernizing units, like ensuring they meet property standards and fire code requirements, makes them better and safer places to live. Repairing and renovating these units is an important step in ensuring that Ontario maintains a healthy housing stock, but if a landlord needs to evict a tenant to do some repairs, they must give the tenant the opportunity to move back in at the same rent before offering it to others.

Bill 184 sought to discourage landlords from breaking the law, and not following the rules, to take advantage of vulnerable tenants. That's why the bill—which is now law, despite opposition from the members opposite—increased the maximum fines for landlords who break the law. Our legislation doubled the maximum fines upon conviction to \$50,000 for an individual and \$250,000 for a corporation.

But that's not all we have done to combat illegal evictions. We have increased compensation to tenants. If a tenant is evicted in bad faith, like for a renoviction, the Landlord and Tenant Board will be able to order an additional 12 months' rent in compensation. That's on top of the compensation they could already order. It will also require landlords to disclose to the board if they have previously filed for an eviction to move into or renovate a unit before this. This will help adjudicators look for patterns and identify landlords who may be breaking the law.

We are also providing tenants with two years, instead of one, to apply for a remedy if the landlord does not give them the opportunity to move back in, and we are requiring landlords of small buildings to give their tenants one month's compensation for evictions for repairs or renovations, where previously there was no compensation. These are concrete changes that we have made to discourage renovictions, to increase compensation and to continue to protect tenants and landlords.

Mr. Speaker, I would now like to spend some time on discussing the bill that is in front of us today. Discouraging illegal evictions is extremely important to this government. That's why we have taken all the actions I have already discussed. Bill 205 proposes a number of measures that either duplicate what the government has already introduced through Bill 184, as well as measures that would just not work. For example, the bill proposes a measure that would have the Landlord and Tenant Board order compensation that is equal to or greater than \$35,000 in certain cases. However, the board's monetary jurisdiction is capped at no higher than \$35,000, making this measure inconsistent with the board's jurisdiction. In this circumstance, the Protecting Tenants and Strengthening Community Housing Act already increased compensation available to a tenant by 12 months' rent.

0920

This bill also proposes extending the period during which a board can make an order in the case of a bad-faith eviction to two years. Again, however, the Protecting Tenants and Strengthening Community Housing Act already made changes to provide tenants with up to two years instead of one year to file an application if a landlord fails to provide first right of refusal after repairs or renovations.

This bill also proposes requiring landlords to provide copies of the necessary approvals for major repairs to tenants alongside the notice to vacate. But in situations of repair, the Landlord and Tenant Board already reviews documentation to decide whether the unit needs to be vacated in order to conduct these repairs. In addition, in the case of urgent repairs, it's possible that waiting for a building permit to be issued before giving termination notice would unduly delay urgent repairs and further damage the unit.

Some parts of the bill just don't make sense. How will new owners of a rental unit provide six months' advance notice that they would like to live in their new home when the current landlord may not even have considered selling

it yet? Likewise, it doesn't make sense to require the Landlord and Tenant Board to restore a tenancy when the former tenant may already have moved into another rental unit.

Following a no-fault eviction for renovations, Bill 205 also proposes to require a landlord to offer the next available rental unit to a former tenant. This is not practical, as the next available unit could be several months later or even in another building. It is unclear how this could help a tenant find housing in the meantime, while disrupting the housing market unnecessarily.

In addition to ensuring that tenants are protected in the homes they already have, our government is committed to enabling the construction of more rental housing. We introduced More Homes, More Choice to help solve Ontario's housing crisis, and part of that meant encouraging more purpose-built rentals. Purpose-built rentals are a crucial part of Ontario's housing supply, and unfortunately, the construction of these units was at one of the lowest levels when we formed government. Since the introduction of More Homes, More Choice, Ontario has seen record levels of new rental starts. Last year we had the most since 1992, and this year we are on pace for even more.

Given the crucial role these homes play in the province's housing stock, I was alarmed to see that the opposition, who have apparently launched their own 2022 campaign, have proposed to undo this progress. The opposition's housing plan proposes measures that are at complete odds with stimulating new purpose-built rentals and would only serve to discourage the construction of this crucial housing stock. But, Speaker, it is not only in rental starts that we are seeing quarter-century highs; it's also in new rental applications and completions. This year, the new housing starts are even up 15% compared to last year.

While this bill is well intentioned, when compared with the measures undertaken by the government in the Protecting Tenants and Strengthening Community Housing Act, it duplicates changes to respond to issues that were already addressed with the Residential Tenancies Act and procedures of the Landlord and Tenant Board. Proceeding with Bill 205 would bring in measures that do not reflect the actual workings of the Landlord and Tenant Board, dissuade investment in the rental market and fail to serve its primary goal of further protecting tenants. Our government is committed to continuing to protect tenants from bad faith and illegal evictions, and we are proud of the legislation we have passed to do just that.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Further debate?

Ms. Rima Berns-McGown: I want to thank the member for University–Rosedale for bringing forward Bill 205, which is an absolutely essential part to fixing the housing crisis and the related homelessness catastrophe we are facing across Ontario.

Vacancy decontrol is the loophole that unethical landlords vault through when they want a jump in profit, regardless of the human cost. The stories are heart-wrench-

ing, and I hear them all the time in my riding: older residents who have lived in their units for decades, whose community in Beaches–East York is rock-solid and made up of a lifetime of building relationships with neighbours and store owners, suddenly threatened and torn apart because a new landlord decides they want to make a greater profit.

Vacancy decontrol is their ticket. It leads to illegal evictions, renovations or a mythical need for the landlord's family to move in, which never materializes in unethical cases. It means that people, often older citizens on fixed incomes or low-income Ontarians, are frequently forced out of their communities or onto the street and into homelessness.

When reasonably priced housing is in terribly short supply, people need to hang onto their homes and they need to be able to afford to stay in them. The current Ford government and the Liberal government that preceded it are both responsible for this mess. Illegal evictions contribute to the human misery we see every day on the streets of Toronto and across the province, especially during a pandemic. This needs to get fixed.

Housing is a human right, not the ticket to profit for corporate investors. It needs to be fixed now. Please help to make Bill 205 the law in Ontario.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Further debate?

Mr. Chris Glover: Yesterday, I was out delivering meals to people in the homeless camps in my riding. Those camps just keep growing, and the city can't keep up. The number of homeless in the city has doubled in the last five years, and during the pandemic, it's become all the more visible.

This crisis that we're facing in the middle of this pandemic has been two decades in the making. Neither the Liberals nor the Conservatives have built affordable housing in the last two decades. There have been almost no co-ops built, there has been almost no social housing built; in fact, those were downloaded onto the city, which can't actually afford to even maintain them. So this homelessness crisis continues to grow in the middle of this pandemic, and yet this government isn't taking the action.

I just heard the government say that they're not going to be supporting Bill 205, which has been brought forward by my colleague from University–Rosedale to ban renovations and take other measures to keep people housed. I think it's unconscionable that this government is not going to support that bill that will keep some people housed and prevent the homelessness camps from growing in my riding and across the city and across the province.

We need to address homelessness. Bill 205 is one way of doing it. I hope the government will change its mind and support the member from University–Rosedale's bill.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Further debate?

Mr. Faisal Hassan: I'm proud to rise on behalf of the decent and hard-working people of York South–Weston and to express my full support of my colleague from

University–Rosedale’s Bill 205 calling for protecting renters from illegal evictions.

COVID-19 has put financial strain on many Ontarians, and this government’s recent legislation has made it easier for landlords to evict tenants. In my riding of York South–Weston, our office regularly hears disturbing stories from tenants facing evictions and having few tools available to fight for themselves. The deck is stacked against them.

One such resident has lived in the same apartment for 17 years and always paid their rent on time, even when COVID meant they were unable to work for many months. Her building was sold and residents were told to move by September 31 so renovations could take place—this in the middle of a devastating pandemic.

The stress and constant fear of renters being displaced from their homes through the practice of renovations must end. The Liberals had 15 years to fix the threat of renovations and failed to act. This government has made tenant protection and the housing crisis worse. This bill puts tenant protection in place by increasing government enforcement of eviction laws, granting tenants more compensation if evicted due to no fault of their own and offers protection for illegal evictions by bringing in real fines for landlords who illegally evict them.

0930

The tenant protections this bill provides are needed now more than ever. I fully support this bill and will be proudly voting in favour of my colleague from University–Rosedale’s bill.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Further debate?

Ms. Suze Morrison: Every day, my office hears from residents who are being harassed by their landlords, living in units that are falling apart, or being threatened with illegal evictions. In my riding and across the province, corporate and bad-apple landlords are taking advantage of rising market rents to force out long-term tenants and then turning around those same units and renting them out for much higher rents.

For decades, Conservative and Liberal governments have allowed landlords to exploit loopholes in the Residential Tenancies Act and force tenants out of their homes, driving up the cost of housing. We know that these practices are making it impossible for people to find affordable housing and are pushing tenants out of their neighbourhoods that they have lived in for years, losing ties to schools, neighbours and cultural communities.

We need urgent action to prevent more people from being forced out of their homes, especially now during a pandemic. The Protecting Renters from Illegal Evictions Act would raise fines on landlords who illegally evict tenants, would increase government enforcement of the eviction laws and would grant tenants more compensation if they are evicted. It gives tenants more protection. It gives them more rights and more peace of mind.

Meaningful action like this is so long overdue. I want to thank my colleague the member for University–Rosedale for bringing forward this really important bill. I urge

all members of the House to vote in favour of this bill, and again, thank you to my colleague for tabling it.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Further debate?

Ms. Sara Singh: It’s an honour to rise here and contribute to the debate in favour of my colleague from University–Rosedale’s bill to help stop what we know is an illegal practice taking place here in the province of Ontario and across communities like mine in Brampton. You know, Speaker, throughout the pandemic, we’ve seen the impacts of homelessness increasing in communities which simply just don’t have the available housing supply. What we’ve seen in many communities is that landlords—bad-faith landlords, if I can just clarify—are using loopholes to evict those tenants under the guise of renovating those units, only to turn around and triple, in some instances, those rents, making them unaffordable for those residents.

This is not going to help the underlying crisis that we have in the province with homelessness. In fact, this is exacerbating the problem. This bill seeks to get at the heart of that issue and address that, and make it illegal for landlords to evict those tenants and claim that they’re doing those renovations and turn around and jack up the rents, essentially.

We heard from the member from Beaches–East York about the impact this has on an aging population who have lived in a community for their entire lives. To be forced out onto the streets because there are no affordable housing options for them is a travesty, that we would allow that to happen. Rather than put in place protections for those seniors or vulnerable tenants, this government is actually making it easier for those landlords to evict those tenants and put them out on the street.

You know what, Speaker? New Democrats believe that housing is a human right, and we’re going to continue to fight for that at every chance we can. So I’ll be voting in favour of this bill and I hope that others will as well.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Further debate?

M^{me} France Gélinas: J’aimerais donner deux exemples de Sudbury. Le premier, c’est un de mes amis. Je vais l’appeler Michel; ce n’est pas son vrai nom. Il a demeuré dans le même appartement pendant 23 ans de temps, un bloc appartements à huit logements, avec une belle cour en arrière—il y avait un barbecue, une table de pique-nique etc.—dans un des beaux vieux quartiers de Sudbury, avec des arbres quasi-centenaires. Il était près du centre-ville, lui qui ne conduit pas. C’était bien. Il pouvait se rendre à pied à son café préféré du centre-ville.

Puis son propriétaire lui a dit que son fils voulait déménager dans son appartement et qu’il devait laisser son appartement. Par contre, il y avait un appartement vide juste au-dessus de lui, mais non, non, le propriétaire voulait son appartement à lui. Il a été chassé de son appartement et a dû se trouver un autre appartement ailleurs, beaucoup plus cher et pas dans un quartier aussi beau qu’où il était avant.

This is just one example, of a friend of mine. After 23 years in the same apartment—nice neighbourhood, great big hundred-year-old trees, nice backyard—his landlord came in and said that his son was wanting to move into his apartment. Although there was another vacant apartment in the eight-apartment block, no, no, he wanted his, because he had been there for 23 years under rent control and was paying very reasonable rent. He was evicted and now lives in a very different neighbourhood from where he used to be.

There are also many, many speculators coming to Sudbury right now. You can get a pretty decent apartment in Sudbury for about \$1,000, \$1,100 a month. That gets you a nice apartment in a nice neighbourhood in Sudbury. Well, those speculators are coming in and then doing renovations to the eight-plex or six-plex or four-plex or whatever it is. In some of the cases, the renovation is, he puts mirrors in the hallways and in the stairways—that was it—and the rent is now 2,300 bucks. This is not the kind of rent that people in Sudbury or anywhere else can afford. Those were apartment buildings where students used to live, where single mothers used to live. It was a nice neighbourhood. They knew one another. They're now all looking for a place to live that they can afford. The same thing is happening on Lasalle Boulevard in Sudbury. There are a number of eight-plexes, one after the other. They all belong to Sudbury families. They all have reasonable rent. They are all being bought up and the people kicked out, and then the rent goes from 1,000 bucks to over 2,000 bucks a month. This is wrong.

The bill from the University–Rosedale MPP would change this. It would protect landlords who are good landlords, and it would protect tenants who have done nothing wrong from speculators, from people who just want to make money. We on the NDP side believe that housing is a human right. Everybody needs food and shelter, and this bill goes along those values.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Back to the member for University–Rosedale for her right of reply.

Ms. Jessica Bell: Thank you very much to my colleagues, including the members for Spadina–Fort York, Beaches–East York, Brampton Centre, Toronto Centre, York South–Weston, Nickel Belt and Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry. I appreciate your comments, and I appreciate many of the concerns you raised about how the issue of illegal evictions is affecting the people in your riding—the people who are homeless in your riding and people up north who are losing their homes through no fault of their own.

The member opposite mentioned some concerns around how the government has already addressed this issue. We are opening the same pieces of law, but we're not duplicating what this government is doing; we're seeking to improve it, because the fines are not enough to stop the problem and the enforcement is non-existent. What good is a fine if there's no enforcement? What good is a rule if a bad-actor landlord can come in and evict someone on the grounds of doing some superficial renovation or that their sister is going to move in, and then they move someone

else in and there's no enforcement? What the government is doing with the laws that are currently on the books and the laws that it is enacting is not addressing the problem that we continue to see in our ridings across the province of Ontario. People continue to be illegally evicted. They should not be illegally evicted. Housing is a human right. People in our city and across Ontario, including renters, deserve to live in good, safe, affordable homes.

I urge you to pass Bill 205 to make the rules of this province a little bit more fair.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): The time provided for private members' public business has expired.

Ms. Bell has moved second reading of Bill 205, An Act to amend the Residential Tenancies Act, 2006 and other Acts with respect to certain categories of evictions and the provision of legal representation with respect to such evictions.

Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? I heard a no.

All those in favour of the motion will please say aye.

All those opposed to the motion will please say nay.

In my opinion, the nays have it.

Pursuant to standing order 101(d), the recorded division on this item of private members' public business will be deferred to the proceeding of deferred votes.

Second reading vote deferred.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): All matters relating to private members' public business having been completed, orders of the day. The government House leader.

Hon. Paul Calandra: No further business this morning.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): There being no further business, this House stands adjourned until 1015.

The House recessed from 0940 to 1015.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

HOUSING

Ms. Rima Berns-McGown: In two apartment complexes in Beaches–East York alone, the people in 50 households are in imminent danger of eviction because they got sick or lost jobs or income during COVID and have had trouble paying their rent.

The Crescent Town complexes are among the communities that have been the hardest hit by COVID—mostly BIPOC and newcomer folks who are front-line workers in low-paid jobs they can't afford to lose and that don't have benefits, so there's no sick leave if you get COVID or have to miss work for a test, or whose jobs have disappeared outright, whose income has been slashed. These are the folks who heeded the Premier's advice to hold their rent if they didn't have enough money to both eat and pay rent. He promised he would spare no expense to take care of

them. Now, at the end of November, on the cusp of winter, people in 50 households are on the verge of homelessness.

Speaker, there are already 1,000 more people on the streets of Toronto than there are beds and shelters, respite centres, drop-ins and shelter hotels. Front-line workers tell me there is nowhere, literally nowhere, for people to go. This situation is playing out across the city and across the province.

We are in desperate need of a moratorium on residential evictions and rent relief for people whose income has been lost to COVID so that we don't see a tsunami of evictions and thousands more unhoused people. We need it now. We need zero COVID evictions in Ontario.

DIWALI

Mr. Deepak Anand: Diwali is a festival of light celebrated with excitement across the globe. Last year—I still remember—I celebrated Diwali with family and friends, gathering for large meals and grand festivities. In contrast, this year, with the rising COVID cases, I celebrated Diwali only with my immediate family at home. We virtually connected and prayed with Ram Mandir, and along with that, with family and friends. Truth be told, Mr. Speaker, it wasn't the same. I was missing the excitement and the personal touch, the laughs and the emotions.

However, our experience wasn't unique. Thousands of families across Ontario did the same thing, and it is the right thing to do. Self-discipline and sacrifice are our best friends in this challenging time. With the festival season fast approaching, I urge all Ontarians to stay in and stop the spread.

At the same time, I want to press that COVID cannot take away our spirit to celebrate. I encourage every Ontarian to support our local small businesses by buying and ordering food online to celebrate the festivals and by buying and exchanging gifts. To help, our government has created the \$57-million Digital Main Street platform so that over 22,000 Ontarian businesses can create and enhance their online presence while generating 1,400 jobs.

Mr. Speaker, let's keep our celebrations virtual to stop the spread of COVID-19 so that we can go back to celebrating our festivals in person as soon as possible.

INDIGENOUS AFFAIRS

Ms. Laura Mae Lindo: I rise as the anti-racism critic for the official opposition, because I find it astounding that government after government has heard from Indigenous communities asking for something as basic as clean drinking water or houses free of mould and has done nothing.

It's astounding that a land back camp in my riding of Kitchener Centre set up camp in Victoria Park on June 20, where they remained for 122 days before moving to Waterloo Park, where they've been for 26 days, and the provincial government remains silent on the plight of urban Indigenous communities.

Today, when land defenders at 1492 Land Back Lane in Caledonia are fighting against colonial powers that

think the forcible removal of Haudenosaunee people from their own lands is a viable option to support developers, despite the rights of the Haudenosaunee people to that very land which are enshrined in the Haldimand treaty of 1784, I am astounded that this government can even speak about reconciliation and sleep well at night.

1020

To the constituents emailing my office and to the advocates, both federally and provincially, who consistently speak truth to power: I see you and, like you, I will not stop speaking out—not today, not ever.

And to the land defenders at 1492 Land Back Lane, the Haudenosaunee Confederacy Chiefs Council and the Six Nations Elected Council: I stand with you in your demand for a moratorium on all development to allow for a respectful nation-to-nation negotiation.

LONG-TERM CARE

Mr. Aris Babikian: Good morning, Mr. Speaker. We all want the best for our loved ones, and we especially want to be sure they are in a safe, modern space where they can receive the best quality of care. COVID-19 has emphasized the need for long-term care to be repaired, rebuilt and modernized. That's why our government has been taking historic steps to add capacity and upgrade Ontario's long-term-care homes.

When we began our work, many projects were being delayed due to an outdated funding model. That's why in July, Premier Ford and Minister Fullerton announced a modernized funding model, one designated to support both new developments and the upgrading of older homes to higher and more modern standards.

Through the new funding model, our government is investing an additional \$761 million to accelerate 74 development projects across the province. This will help create closer to 11,000 safe, modern spaces sooner for residents to call home.

Last Thursday, I was proud to join my Scarborough colleagues at Yee Hong Centre in Scarborough's Finch campus to announce additional investment to build 224 beds. In addition, the Hellenic Home will receive more funding to build 128 beds. So far, our government has committed to build 352 beds in Scarborough.

HOSPITAL FUNDING

Ms. Sara Singh: Good morning, Speaker. I would like to start off by thanking all of our front-line workers, especially in the Peel region. We're home to many manufacturing and logistics hubs, and those folks have been working in our warehouses, in retail, and in our trucking industry to make sure that folks across the province continue to receive goods.

But, Speaker, what's concerning is that Brampton is becoming—and is—a hot spot in the province of Ontario. Our COVID-19 numbers are increasing daily. However, the bigger concern here is that we just simply don't have

the health care capacity to manage the surge in cases that is happening.

As is no surprise to anyone in this chamber, Brampton has been underfunded and neglected by previous governments and this government, and we're still waiting for another hospital. We've been in code gridlock since the day that we opened and this is continuing throughout the pandemic.

The provincial average provides 2.19 beds per 1,000 residents across the province. Brampton only has 0.96 beds per 1,000 residents. That means for a population of well over 675,000 people, we simply do not have the capacity to serve those patients. Why is that still happening when we know that for decades Peel hasn't received its fair share in mental health services, in our health care services? Why is this government not committing to invest in our hospital?

We've heard it from the mayor, and we've heard it from council. So I'm going to ask this government: When is Brampton going to finally see the investments we need in our health care system?

HOSPITAL FUNDING

Mr. Jim Wilson: Speaker, next week I will be introducing a private member's resolution asking the government to continue to support planning work for the redevelopment and construction of both the Collingwood General and Marine Hospital and Stevenson Memorial Hospital in the town of New Tecumseth. As I've said many times in this House, these are old, outdated buildings that have seen virtually no upgrades since they were built more than half a century ago.

Modern, state-of-the-art hospital facilities in Collingwood and Alliston are vital to the sustainability of health care in one of the fastest-growing regions of our province. These projects are essential to meeting the government's goal of modernizing Ontario's health system, and they will help end hallway medicine.

While the current facilities have served my riding well for the last 60 years, both are housed in overcrowded buildings with outdated systems. In Collingwood, the General and Marine building is beyond reuse. Its deficiencies are innumerable. It needs to be rebuilt on a new greenfield site.

The emergency department at Stevenson was designed to serve 7,000 patients annually. It now sees close to 40,000 every year. The population of its service area will grow by almost 35% over the next decade.

I would also like to point out that during my 30 years as an MPP, all of the hospitals surrounding my riding have either been extensively redeveloped or had new builds. To date, Stevenson Memorial has received stage 1 approval and has been given the green light to move to stage 2. The Collingwood hospital is still waiting to hear on their stage 1 submission.

Mr. Speaker, next week I hope all members will see fit to support my private member's resolution in support of the hospitals in my riding.

BRANTFORD BLESSING CENTRE

Mr. Will Bouma: I rise today to recognize the truly amazing work and people from the Brantford Blessing Centre in my riding of Brantford–Brant. During COVID-19, we have seen many exemplify the Ontario spirit, and when I think about my riding, the Brantford Blessing Centre is just another example of this. Since 1982, through a partnership and collaboration between 14 local churches and many volunteers, the Brantford Blessing Centre has not only acted as a food charity serving the poor and those in need with food for their bellies, but with food for their souls as well.

The Brantford Blessing Centre is an effective, long-standing and necessary program in our community under the umbrella of Operation Blessing, an outreach program that provides aid to the poor and marginalized in various cities, including in Brantford. The Blessing Centre has become a well-known and safe place in Brantford for anyone to enjoy a hot meal, warmth and fellowship. Six days each week, groups of dedicated volunteers prepare, cook and serve food to those in need. When anyone walks into the Blessing Centre, they are greeted with friendly warmth, a hot meal and the love of Jesus Christ.

Pre-COVID-19, the Brantford Blessing Centre would serve roughly 1,700 people a month, and now, during the pandemic, that number has climbed to 2,400 people. For those who wish to donate, fundraise, volunteer or get involved with the Blessing Centre, please visit www.brantfordblessingcentre.org/get-involved or call 519-753-8030.

CLIMATE CHANGE

Ms. Marit Stiles: Mr. Speaker, while we collectively deal with the challenge of COVID-19, the climate crisis is looming. In my riding of Davenport, the impacts of a changing climate are increasingly felt year after year, with flash flooding and damage to homes. But instead of fighting climate change and taking action to protect our communities, this government is taking things from bad to worse, shamefully using the cover of a public health emergency to hand over vast tracts of sensitive wetlands to developers. The recently tabled budget bill includes measures that weaken our conservation authorities, hindering their ability to fulfill their mandate to protect watersheds and communities, an issue my constituents are deeply concerned with.

The Toronto and Region Conservation Authority has said that what is proposed in Bill 229 "would serve to diminish the effective integration of the legislative tools and undermine the ability of conservation authorities to meaningfully contribute to our collective responsibility for public safety and natural resource management." They also note that the amendments run counter to the very recommendations of the government's own flood adviser.

The work of the conservation authority directly impacts residents in my community, protecting them from the ravages of climate change and extreme weather. By continually putting the interests of developers and insiders

ahead of the interests of ordinary people, this government is putting my community at risk. On behalf of the people of Davenport, and the majority of Ontarians who want to see action on climate change, withdraw these harmful changes and work with us to protect our vital watersheds and our local communities.

INDIGENOUS AFFAIRS

Mr. Toby Barrett: On February 28, 2006, the Douglas Creek Estates subdivision was occupied by force. Over the past 14 years, area people and their institutions of policing, justice and government have done everything in their power to right this wrong, without success.

The use of force is not rewarded in a democratic society. Although occupied, ownership of Douglas Creek Estates lies with the people of Ontario, a fact guaranteed by the rule of law in accordance with all three levels of government. Regrettably, defending the rightful ownership of this subdivision has subjected my constituents, on all sides of the issue, to 14 years of violence, intimidation, lost economic activity and social disruption.

1030

In light of further blockades and this year's occupation of the McKenzie Meadows subdivision, injunctions have now been granted—in this case, with the support of the Ontario government—and dozens of arrests made, which have resulted in court appearances.

In Cayuga court proceedings, Justice John Harper noted there are several ways Indigenous people can address their concerns: through land claims tribunals, direct negotiations and getting involved in court cases.

The federal government, through crown-Indigenous relations minister Carolyn Bennett, has indicated its commitment to continuing to work collaboratively to address Six Nations historical claims and federal issues. By addressing these issues, the federal government can bring resolve and clarity not only to the members of Six Nations but also to my constituents.

MENTAL HEALTH

Mr. Rick Nicholls: For over 25 years, I travelled across Canada and the United States doing motivational speaking for many different business sectors, hoping to inspire them to lead better lives at work as well as at home. I developed a reputation of being known as the “entertrainer.”

But who would have ever thought that a worldwide pandemic would hit us? This pandemic has created stress, anger, frustration, loneliness, fear, anxiety—I could go on. But instead, I want to offer hope to those who need it. As bad as we may believe that our situations in life may seem, understand it could be worse. It's important to stay positive, especially during uncertain times. Don't focus on yourself; rather, focus on the needs of others.

You see, hope is the belief that things will get better, especially when it seems otherwise. Hope helps people stay calm and peaceful when something less desirable emerges. Hope believes you will get through it. Hope

remembers the times you made it through. Hope teams with faith and believes in the impossible. Here is an acrostic that I developed for hope:

The H stands for “help others.” That actually helps you, as well.

The O: Develop an optimistic heart. Your attitude, not your aptitude, will determine your altitude of success.

The P stands for “patience and perseverance.” Never give up.

And the E stands for “expect the best, prepare for the worst and capitalize on whatever results.”

Remember, you have been designed for accomplishment, engineered for success. You've been endowed with the seeds of greatness. You've been born to win.

So friends, all I ask is that you think on these things. I believe it will make your life easier to cope with. Hope will give you that belief.

Oh, by the way, while you're at it, keep looking up.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): That concludes our members' statements for this morning.

ALEX TREBEK

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I understand the member for Sudbury has a point of order.

Mr. Jamie West: I believe we have unanimous consent for the House to observe a moment of silence to acknowledge the passing of Sudbury's Alex Trebek.

I want to say, Speaker, that Alex was one of Sudbury's favourite sons. Like Sudbury, Alex was bilingual, humble about his success and was best known for being friendly and polite.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The member for Sudbury is seeking unanimous consent of the House to observe a moment of silence in memory of a great Canadian, Alex Trebek. Agreed? Agreed.

The House observed a moment's silence.

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

The member for London West has informed me that she has a point of order.

Ms. Peggy Sattler: I seek unanimous consent of the House for the official opposition to stand down our leads in question period.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The member for London West is seeking the unanimous consent of the House to stand down the official opposition lead questions. Agreed? I heard some noes.

QUESTION PERIOD

COVID-19 RESPONSE

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My first question is to the Premier.

This weekend, 49 more people lost their lives to COVID-19, and all projections show that things are going to get worse. Just over a week ago, the Premier told

Ontarians that his new COVID-19 framework was good enough, that it had the right balance. We now know his own experts disagreed.

Who was the Premier listening to when he ignored public health advice and gambled with people's lives?

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

Hon. Christine Elliott: In fact, advice was taken from many public health experts: our Chief Medical Officer of Health, the public health measures table, Public Health Ontario—and there are dozens and dozens of public health specialists behind all of those groups also offering advice. We also looked at data and evidence from other jurisdictions.

But as one of the doctors from Public Health Ontario indicated, she was only required to take a look at disease indicators, whereas in making decisions with respect to how to deal with COVID-19, as government, we also have to look at indicators such as social isolation, mental health and depression issues, and issues related to health other than just COVID-19.

So we're very clear. We have been clear from the beginning. We have been taking public health advice, but we also have other health indicators that we have to take a look at in making decisions with respect to the framework.

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

Ms. Andrea Horwath: The framework that this government released was not the one the experts recommended. In fact, experts went ballistic when they saw the framework that this government released. Instead of listening to doctors and scientists and health experts, the Premier ignored them and watered down their recommendations, and then pretended that he had their backing—shameful. He caved to political pressure from people who think that businesses should be open at all costs because he doesn't want to spend the money to support businesses and workers in this province.

So will the Premier admit that if public health officials had not come forward and blown the whistle on him, his original reckless and dangerous framework would still be in place?

Hon. Christine Elliott: Speaker, I would say to the leader of the official opposition, through you, that I strongly disagree with all of her assertions.

First of all, we have, from the beginning of this pandemic, taken the advice, taken the recommendations of the public health officials, and we continue to do that. Is every single recommendation by every single physician something that we're going to take into consideration? Yes, we take all of it into consideration, but then we have to come up with a framework. We have to come up with a framework that's going to make sense, both in terms of dealing with COVID-19 but also dealing with the mental health effects, with the suicides that are being brought forward by people who are losing their businesses or by virtue of social isolation.

That is what we have been listening to, and we will continue to listen to that public health advice going forward because this is a rapidly changing situation with

COVID, and we have to be adept and nimble to be able to change as well. If we stuck with the same framework from the beginning, we wouldn't be dealing with the situation that we're dealing with now. We have to keep moving forward with it in order to be able to get ahead of COVID-19 as much as—

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

Ms. Andrea Horwath: On November 3, the Premier himself said, "This framework was developed in consultation with the Chief Medical Officer of Health, the public health measures table, local medical officers of health, and other health system experts." On November 4: "Everyone had their input on it. I think they did an extremely good job." On November 5: "We have well over 100 docs giving us all this information. You know, it's not just Dr. Williams."

But Public Health Ontario and the Niagara chief medical officer have both disputed all of that. No one knows who the Premier is really listening to, but it's about time he starts listening to the experts. Why won't this government, this Premier, come clean about how—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Order.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: —he watered down the recommendations made by doctors and scientists to contain the second wave, and will he take responsibility for the mess that we're in because of his decisions?

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The Minister of Natural Resources and Forestry will come to order.

1040

The response? Minister of Health.

Hon. Christine Elliott: Well, I'm not quite sure what the leader of the official opposition is alluding to with respect to whom the Premier is consulting with, but I can assure her—through you, Speaker—that we are listening to the public officers of health. We are listening to Dr. Williams. We are listening to Public Health Ontario, the chief public health measures table and the local medical officers of health.

We've set up this framework to be flexible so that it can account for conditions across the province, but also to respond to individual conditions in individual regions. That's why we have to set it up that way, because, as the leader of the official opposition well knows, the situation in Peel right now is very different than the situation in northwestern Ontario. We have to be flexible, we have to be responsive, and we were responsive last week when we changed—not the entire framework; we changed some of the thresholds because that was what was requested by the local medical officers of health, who we listen to on a daily basis.

LONG-TERM CARE

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My next question is also for the Premier, but I can tell the Minister of Health that those

experts blew the whistle on this government, and that's why they had to can their initial thresholds.

But this question is about something else, Speaker. For families with loved ones in long-term care, the second wave is not merely an inconvenience, it's devastating: 229 seniors have lost their lives already in the second wave, and outbreaks are spreading rapidly, especially through for-profit facilities.

On Friday, the government claimed once again that they are building an iron ring around long-term care. This is the same empty promise that the Premier made back in the spring before the devastating loss and chaos that we saw then. So my question is, how can the Premier expect anyone to believe him this time?

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

Hon. Merrilee Fullerton: Thank you to the member opposite for the question. In terms of the outbreaks in wave 2, I think it's important for all of us to understand the anguish that families are going through, and residents and staff. My heart goes out to everyone. The world is reeling under the impact of COVID-19, and we see across Canada similar situations in other provinces. We are continuing to learn about COVID.

Ninety-two per cent of our long-term-care homes in Ontario have not a single resident case. I want to give my appreciation to all of the front-line staff, all of the people who are working so hard, round the clock, seven days a week for many, many months. I appreciate that dedication and perseverance and everyone knowing that they have a role to play in making our province resilient to COVID-19. My heart goes out to everyone. We will continue to put every measure, every tool in place and take the medical advice and scientific advice as we move forward.

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

Ms. Andrea Horwath: What people want, Speaker, is for the government to step up and fix long-term care, and not have more people die day after day because of their inaction. That's what people want. It's crystal clear to families of residents that are devastated by the failures of our long-term-care system that this Premier will not act to save their loved ones. He is not acting to save them.

Throughout the first wave, the Premier made empty promise after empty promise, but he left seniors in our long-term-care homes extremely vulnerable to COVID-19. Instead, he rewrote the laws so that private operators couldn't be sued for the failure to take care of residents and to protect them. Instead, he protected for-profit long-term-care chains and not the seniors that actually live in them.

Today, families of long-term-care residents have come to Queen's Park to protest the Ford government's plans. What does the Premier have to say to them?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The parliamentary assistant and member for Durham.

Ms. Lindsey Park: Let me be absolutely clear: Individuals and organizations that ignore public health guidance and act with gross negligence or intentional misconduct

will not be protected by this legislation. To be clear, the narrow, targeted civil liability protection in this legislation has only to do with the inadvertent transmission of COVID-19 and nothing else.

This legislation does not protect any other type of negligence that we heard from the opposition previously in the House, we're hearing about today and we heard about at committee, like a resident that's not given proper medication or if a long-term-care provider fails to provide the necessities of life. They also won't be protected if they fail to communicate adequately with families. Ontarians will continue to be able to file claims and seek justice in the courts for all of these matters, Speaker.

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

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Speaker, let me be perfectly clear: Everybody knows what this government is doing, that they are taking away justice for those families, that they are making it harder for people to get the justice and the accountability they deserve. Let me be very clear about that.

The first wave exposed the need to change our long-term-care system. We needed urgent investment to hire front-line staff and to boost infection control, and take vulnerable homes away from for-profit operators who have failed to protect residents. Residents in for-profit homes are three times more likely to catch COVID-19 than those in non-profit facilities. Instead of acting, the Premier's response was to make it impossible for residents to sue them.

Will the Premier take any action whatsoever to remove for-profit chains from long-term care and take the urgent action necessary to save people's lives?

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

Hon. Merrilee Fullerton: Thank you to the member opposite for the question. I know there are assertions being made about inaction, and I find it ironic that it's the previous government, supported by the opposition, who failed to act for many, many years.

Our government is taking action and has been taking action since day one. That is made clear by all the staffing efforts that have been put forward, not only to deal with the long-standing crisis that was neglected for so many years, but now to deal with the COVID-19 issue. The return of service, the fast-tracking, the resident support aids: All of this has been ongoing work by many, many people. That is why we have taken the IPAC expertise and made sure that our staff has training in IPAC, supporting our homes in terms of IPAC funding as well. That's why we put \$243 million early to provide staffing, support to provide infection control. That's why we added more than half a billion dollars to support our homes in long-term care with additional measures. That's why we continue to take every measure possible. Our action is—

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

The next question.

COVID-19 RESPONSE

M^{me} France G elinas: Ma question est pour le premier ministre.

With record-high COVID case counts almost daily, Ontario hospitals are in crisis. Many of them are full, at overcapacity, facing a 140,000-people surgical backlog and flu season right around the corner. Our hospitals have been left scrambling because the government has refused to listen to their advice.

Speaker, when the Ford government rushed to reopen, they claimed that they had the backing of health experts. Hospitals were really clear: They did not agree.

Why did the government ignore the advice of Ontario's hospitals?

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

Hon. Christine Elliott: In fact, we have been in constant communication with Ontario's hospitals. I have had numerous conversations with Mr. Dale, the head of the Ontario Hospital Association. I would just like to read a quote from the OHA with respect to the changes that were made to the framework last Friday: "The OHA thanks the provincial government for listening to the concerns of the hospital sector and its system partners, and for its leadership in responding rapidly to the alarming COVID-19 modelling data presented yesterday." That says it all, I believe, Mr. Speaker.

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

M^{me} France G elinas: We are at a critical time in this province's battle against COVID-19. I would say our hospitals have never been more important, but because of this government's underfunding and dragging their feet on adopting recommendations, our hospitals are vulnerable to being overrun with COVID-19 patients or influenza patients. They were sounding the alarm the whole time, but the Ford government caved to political pressure from people who think that businesses should be open at all costs.

Why are Ontario hospitals, along with physicians, nurses and many other front-line health care workers, routinely ignored by this government and reduced to having to plead publicly to get the government to do the right thing?

Hon. Christine Elliott: I would say that from the beginning of this pandemic, the health and well-being of Ontarians has been our government's primary and most important consideration and always will be. We will take whatever steps we need to take to protect people, and we have already done that.

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We have injected hundreds of millions of dollars into our health sector. Our budget that was presented several weeks ago—spending has increased by \$9.2 billion on health, a 14.4% increase. We've recently spent over \$116 million to create another 724 spaces. Since March, we have increased the number of hospital spaces by over 3,000 spaces, and that is in areas across the province but

particularly in the hot-spot areas. We know that they need additional resources, and we are supplying hospitals with the personal pandemic equipment, with additional capacity, with additional resources to make sure that they can help, in some cases, in our long-term-care homes.

We are going to support our hospital sector, because they are the front lines in this pandemic, and we will do whatever we need to do to help them.

AUTOMOTIVE INDUSTRY

Ms. Lindsey Park: Traits of the Ontario spirit, like innovation and entrepreneurship, have always been strong in Oshawa and in my constituency of Durham. For decades, our region has been home to good-quality, Ontario-made jobs. We have a world-class auto manufacturing sector with world-class auto workers.

Speaker, will the Minister of Economic Development, Job Creation and Trade outline to this House what the recent GM announcement means for Oshawa, Durham region and Ontario?

Hon. Victor Fedeli: In the last month, we've seen nearly \$5 billion in proposed auto investments in Ontario's world-class auto sector, from Ford, Fiat Chrysler and now General Motors. Speaker, when is the last time we've ever seen any investment like that?

GM's announcement of \$1.4 billion represents a significant investment in the region of Durham and is an important sign of confidence in Ontario's world-class auto sector. They've also announced an investment of \$109 million in their engine plant in St. Catharines and \$500,000 in their Woodstock parts distribution centre. GM has said it will create up to 1,700 new high-quality, Ontario-made jobs.

Our government welcomes this tremendous news, and we congratulate GM, their workers, Unifor, the people of Oshawa and Durham region and all of Ontario's world-class auto sector workers in this achievement.

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

Ms. Lindsey Park: I want to thank the minister for the work he has done on this file over the last two years to support our manufacturers in Ontario. There's really a buzz in Durham region with this announcement. There is an excitement and energy that this deal has brought to Oshawa and to the whole Durham region.

It's really great to see, also, that Ford and Fiat Chrysler, along with GM, continue to recognize the important role Ontario has played in the auto sector. It's also so very important for our parts producers, our mould makers and the entire supply chain.

Would the minister outline to this House some of that work that he's done over the past two years to support Ontario's world-class auto manufacturing sector in creating jobs and attracting investment?

Hon. Victor Fedeli: From day one, our government has worked to reduce the cost of doing business in Ontario, and this has influenced the auto sector in making their decisions. Businesses now save \$7 billion every single year

through lower WSIB premiums, an accelerated capital cost allowance, less red tape and, of course, lower taxes. New measures in budget 2020, such as significant business property tax and electricity reductions, enhance the conditions for economic growth and new investment.

Ontario's automotive manufacturing sector has provided jobs, opportunities and economic growth to our province for decades and will now again be key to our economic growth and recovery. We'll always continue to work with our federal colleagues, auto workers and the entire sector to ensure the right conditions are in place to protect and grow good-quality, Ontario-made jobs and ensure the auto sector remains sustainable and competitive for decades to come.

COVID-19 RESPONSE

Ms. Marit Stiles: This question is for the Premier. Last week, Ontarians were shocked to learn that the government ignored the advice of public health experts when developing its latest COVID-19 framework. But for parents, teachers and education workers, it was less surprising, because when it comes to schools, this government has ignored expert advice for months. Those experts said that to prevent outbreaks, classes should be kept at 15 students or fewer. Rather than put forward the funding to make that happen, this government has let classes grow larger—along with the risk to our kids and school staff.

With the pandemic surging out of control, will the Premier finally listen to the experts and stop collapsing smaller classes into bigger ones?

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

Hon. Stephen Lecce: I appreciate the question from the member opposite. I will note that our plan, brought forth and supported by the Chief Medical Officer of Health, has helped ensure we have reduced the risk within our schools. I will note, for colleagues, amongst the 1.5 million children within our schools today, there are roughly 664 active cases. When you compare and contrast Ontario's approach to reopening, following the advice and ensuring the resources and financing is in place with Quebec, an equal comparator, they have roughly 1 million fewer students—we have 50% more students; we have 30% more schools—and yet they have almost two times the rate of COVID transmission within their schools.

We have put in place every layer of prevention to mitigate the spread and to make sure that schools remain safe places. That's why in Toronto and in regions right across this province, in every school board, funding is up. And as you know, within the budget, there is additional funding put aside to ensure that our kids remain safe through the worst of this pandemic.

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

Ms. Marit Stiles: The minister has stood here and assured us for months that everything is running smoothly, but it's cold comfort for the anxious parents who are looking at exponential case increases. It feels more like

this government is asleep at the switch, offering zero—zero—new dollars in the budget to protect our schools. I am thinking today of the parents, students and staff at Turner Fenton Secondary School in Brampton, who got word on Friday that there was an outbreak at the school with five confirmed cases—five closed classrooms—or the families at 683 other schools across the province with reported cases right now.

After last week's colour-coded framework fail, the Premier reversed course. Will he do so again and fill the gaps in his school plan before any more families have to go through the stress and anxiety of an outbreak?

Hon. Stephen Lecce: I think we should be informed by the medical experts who have opined on the plan. In the words of Dr. Michael Silverman, the medical director of infectious diseases at St. Joseph's hospital in London, "For the vast majority of children and the vast majority of teachers, this has been a safe and effective intervention that has led to children restarting their education, which has led to long-term ... benefits for all of us."

Mr. Speaker, in this province, while we see transmissions rise, there is one school closed in Ontario, and 85% of schools have no reported active cases at all. Some 664 students have active cases of COVID amongst 1.5 million children.

I do not take for a moment the great levels of angst that all of us face as numbers rise—but within our schools, given the incredible work of public health and our school boards and our teachers, we are seeing rates of transmission remain low, and that is a good thing. That's why we invested \$1.3 billion, fully supported with a protocol endorsed by the Chief Medical Officer of Health. And we should have confidence within our front-line staff—teachers, doctors and nurses—to do everything they continue to do to keep COVID out of our schools.

COVID-19 RESPONSE

Mrs. Belinda C. Karahalios: Good morning. My question is for the Premier.

Late last week, the Premier imposed customer limits of 10 on businesses in Hamilton, Halton and York, making it impossible for many to operate. The Premier threatened, "We are staring down the barrel of another lockdown." But for the 7,658 Canadians who filed for bankruptcy in September, they have already seen enough, and bankruptcies are expected to continue to rise.

Shutting down businesses in regions has not reduced case numbers as promised. The only thing it has done is hit low-income Ontarians the hardest. They are most likely to lose their jobs and the last to recover. My question, then: When will the Premier let people get back to work?

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

Hon. Rod Phillips: I thank the member for her question. This government's approach has been very clear from the outset. We are focused on the right health outcomes, and that is also the right economic outcome.

As we have had to adapt through this crisis, through the global crisis, we have made sure that our response has

been to support business. I am pleased to say that today the portal to be able to accept applications for the \$300-million program to support those businesses is now open, and that will be part of the support that we're providing. But Mr. Speaker, we understand that the health concerns of individuals and the health concerns of business need to be at the forefront to make sure we have a functioning economy. So we will continue to make our judgments based on the best health advice, and we will continue to balance that with the needs of our economy and the needs of our small businesses.

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

Mrs. Belinda C. Karahalios: COVID-19 is a tragedy, and the Premier's measures in response are a travesty. But not everyone sees it that way. On September 29, the Premier's good friend, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, appeared on a United Nations video conference to state that he saw COVID-19 as an opportunity. I couldn't believe it. Prime Minister Trudeau said COVID-19 was an opportunity for a reset, to reimagine our economic system, and to meet the UN's 2030 agenda goals.

Since the Premier is following the Prime Minister in all policy areas, I'd like to know: Does the Premier agree with Prime Minister Trudeau and view COVID-19 as an opportunity for government to reset our economy? Yes or no?

Hon. Rod Phillips: Mr. Speaker, COVID-19 is clearly the challenge of our generation, both from an economic and from a health perspective, and we're very much treating it that way.

I'll take the opportunity to again inform the Legislature that the portal for the vital supports that we have talked about for businesses that are affected in the red and control areas is open now and that applications can begin to be accepted. This is to make sure that we're paying the property tax and the electricity bills. I'll just quote the website, if you don't mind, Mr. Speaker: ontario.ca/covidsupport.

This is part of a coordinated effort with the federal government, who have committed to providing both relief from a rent perspective—and I would again encourage all members, it's now in the Senate at the federal Parliament, to move that forward quickly. Our businesses do need the support of both the federal and the provincial governments. That support is coming, starting today with the opening of this portal.

We'll continue to support our small businesses and continue to support the health care of Ontarians.

SMALL BUSINESS

Mr. Will Bouma: My question is for the minister responsible for small business and red tape reduction.

Mr. Speaker, as the Minister of Finance just said, Ontario has never faced a challenge like the one we've experienced over the last few months. COVID-19 has made one thing abundantly clear: Small businesses are counting on all levels of government to take strong action to cut red

tape and respond to their needs through this crisis so they can focus on what's critically important.

Minister, can you please tell me how our government is supporting businesses as they respond to the challenges of COVID-19?

Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria: Thank you to the member for Brantford–Brant, who has been incredible in helping and facilitating conversations with small business owners not only in his riding but across the province.

As a government, we understand how important and essential small businesses are to our province's economy. Small business owners and entrepreneurs have overcome significant challenges and made sacrifices to continue contributing to our communities through these unprecedented times. We have to do our part to support them on their way to recovery.

In addition to putting forward billions of dollars of support, one part of that plan is the Ontario Main Street Recovery Act. This legislation introduced will support small businesses by modernizing rules to help them innovate and meet the challenges of today.

One major change that we'll be permanently implementing is off-peak delivery of goods across Ontario. This will help ensure our supply chains are healthy and strong as we go into the future.

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

Mr. Will Bouma: Speaker, through you, I'd like to say thank you very much for that answer, Minister. As you know, COVID-19 has resulted in new expenses for many different types of small businesses. Many businesses in my riding have seen their expenses increase due to the pandemic.

One of the biggest expenses is the cost of personal protective equipment, or, as we call it, PPE. PPE is essential as it protects staff and customers. Can the minister please explain how the government is helping businesses offset the costs of PPE?

Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria: Our government has been exploring ways to alleviate cost pressures on businesses as they recover from the impacts of COVID-19. That is why, in the main street recovery plan, we introduced a wide range of changes that will help small businesses with their costs. One of them is a \$1,000 PPE grant for eligible main street businesses in retail, food and other service sectors. This grant will be directed at the smallest businesses.

Ontario has never faced a challenge like the one we are facing. Businesses need PPE to protect their staff and customers. We will continue to take strong action and help our businesses respond to the challenges of the pandemic. As a government, we know small businesses face unique challenges. We're determined to hear directly from them, so they can focus on what's most important: rebuilding, rehiring and re-emerging stronger than ever before.

SMALL BUSINESS

Ms. Catherine Fife: My question is to the Premier. Over the weekend, the Premier told Ontarians to only

leave the house for essential trips. Meanwhile, thousands of non-essential businesses are allowed to remain open even in the red “control” framework.

The Premier can't have it both ways: He can't ask Ontarians to stay home and expect businesses who rely on in-person services to make money. Businesses have been waiting for five weeks for provincial support and more—months, actually—for the new rent relief program. With the Premier telling people to stay home, it's clear that businesses are going to need more than the \$300 million the government has currently offered them.

Is this government willing to spend more to save small businesses and also to keep people safe?

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

Hon. Rod Phillips: Of course, the answer is yes, as the member would have seen in the recent budget. Historic changes by this government to make fair the property tax system in this province, to make sure that businesses across the province benefit from lower education property tax, making permanent the employer health tax reduction—that alone is going to have 30,000 businesses paying less taxes. I'm sure that the member will reflect on that as she considers voting on the budget.

Additional supports, which the Associate Minister of Small Business has already spoken about, through the Digital Main Street program are helping businesses go online, making sure that they're able to support their customers, not just as storefronts but as digital businesses as well.

So Mr. Speaker, yes, there are many new supports. I have more to speak about in the supplementary, but we appreciate the opportunity from the member to speak about these.

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

Ms. Catherine Fife: I'd like to say the businesses in Ontario have been waiting too long for that money.

Speaker, this government is actually sitting on \$9.3 billion in unused funds. The Financial Accountability Officer recently confirmed this. We believe the Financial Accountability Officer. This is \$9.3 billion not going to schools, not going to long-term care and certainly not going to businesses. That money should be used to stop the spread of COVID-19 and keep businesses viable for our economic recovery. The house is on fire, and instead of using the tools at his disposal, this Premier is hoarding the money.

Speaker, to the Premier: Keeping people safe is actually good for the economy. How many more businesses have to close before this government steps up to support them through this challenging time?

Hon. Rod Phillips: Mr. Speaker, I know that the member would never wilfully misrepresent things, so I can only assume she has not read the budget, where it's indicated that \$2.6 billion is the amount of contingencies left. But that's at the back of the budget, so I'm sure she'll get to it.

Let me talk about what people in her own region have talked about in terms of support. This is Karen Redman, the regional chair of Waterloo region: “I'd like to”—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The member for Waterloo, come to order.

The Minister of Finance has the floor.

Hon. Rod Phillips: “I'd like to join MPPs Mike Harris and Amy Fee outside Waterloo headquarters in announcing the tax relief for businesses” that they're receiving in the region of Waterloo.

The mayor of Waterloo—the member just talked about mental health—on the topic of mental health and small business investments: “COVID-19's impacts” have been “wide-ranging. I am very thankful that the government has made additional investments in mental health, our arts sector, and small business supports. Every bit helps as we all try to” get our way “through the pandemic.”

Mr. Speaker, PPE—

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

The next question.

LONG-TERM CARE

Ms. Mitzie Hunter: My question is to the Premier. People are dying from COVID-19 in Ontario, and it seems like we're breaking records in positive cases nearly every day. With testing numbers down at an alarmingly high rate, the positivity rate is at 4.5% across Ontario. In pockets of my riding of Scarborough–Guildwood, the rate is above 11%. As a result, COVID-19 is re-entering our long-term-care system with devastating effects.

Scarborough is facing two of the worst outbreaks. At Rockcliffe Care Community, where over two thirds of the residents have come down with COVID, seven have died. At Kennedy Lodge nursing home, just around the corner from where I grew up, 30 residents have died since the second wave took hold. Many staff are also infected.

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Speaker, through you to the Premier, why has he downloaded the responsibility of fighting this pandemic to the local public health units, but in his budget he has not provided them with any new investments? Why is the Premier stiffing the public—

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Thank you. Minister of Long-Term Care.

Hon. Merrilee Fullerton: Thank you to the member opposite for the question. Our government's number one commitment is to the safety and well-being of Ontarians, and our top priority is long-term care as we fight a virus—very similar to other countries that are struggling with long-term care.

Our integrated approach is really designed to make sure that we assess and access the expertise of so many groups, whether it's Ontario Health, the medical officers of health, the Chief Medical Officer of Health, Toronto Public Health or the Scarborough Health Network, which is assisting with the Rockcliffe home. And the others are

integrated with hospitals to provide the IPAC expertise, to provide the support. This is an integrated process, and it's actually multi-government as well. It's taking everybody to be responsible, to do what they can to resolve this threat that is happening around the world. We will continue to take every measure and advance long-term care.

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

Ms. Mitzie Hunter: I really want this minister to hear that what you're doing in hot spots is not working, because people are dying. You have to change and you have to do more.

The second wave is taking hold across this province. It's not just in Ottawa or the GTA. Last week, Waterloo region asked to move to a higher tier of restrictions. Kingston saw 10 new cases in one day in a region that only reports 26 active cases. Hospitals are on track to exceed their ICU thresholds for cancelling elective surgeries in a matter of weeks.

The second wave could be controlled if the government was willing to reset its approach and to take decisive action, but sadly your budget, tabled in the midst of a second-wave pandemic, is a budget of prudence when Ontarians are looking for action. Speaker, through you, what will it take for this government to act? Is it more deaths in long-term care or a complete collapse of the health care system?

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

Hon. Rod Phillips: Again, and I know it takes time to read, but there's almost \$800 million more invested in our long-term-care sector; \$270 million for public health and support for community health services; \$2.5 billion more this year for hospitals. We respect and understand what our front-line health care workers are going through. That's why we've provided \$1.1 billion of support to purchase PPE, to make sure that that's available.

It is a severe misreading of that budget to say anything but that it is making historic investments, as we've committed to. This government will do what it takes to support Ontarians, to support our health care heroes, to support our long-term-care sector.

VETERANS

Mr. Kaleed Rasheed: COVID-19 has challenged all of us in many unprecedented ways. Unfortunately, some of the most affected have been our veterans. The pandemic has increased mental health challenges and feelings of isolation, in addition to the dire financial circumstances facing our Legions.

Remembrance Day looked different this year, but our government continues to support those who serve. My question is for the Minister of Heritage, Sport, Tourism and Culture Industries. Minister, can you tell us how the province is supporting and honouring our brave veterans, who fearlessly and unconditionally sacrificed for our freedom?

Hon. Lisa MacLeod: My thanks to the member from Mississauga East–Cooksville for raising this important

issue. As you know, on the Friday prior to Remembrance Day, Whole Foods in the nation's capital and elsewhere across Ontario decided that they were going to ban employees from wearing the poppy. So I think first and foremost, I stand here with, I know, all members of the Legislative Assembly in preserving and protecting the right of Ontario workers to wear the poppy, regardless of where they work.

I was with the Premier at an announcement in Ottawa, the first post-budget, where the Premier amplified his disgust. That's why our government will be bringing in legislation to open up the Remembrance Week Act to protect the rights of Ontario workers.

But that's not all, Speaker. Our ministry and our government worked together to launch a media campaign through digital and online video. We've also announced supports through the Ontario Trillium Foundation to support our local Legions. We announced a Helmets to Hardhats campaign when I was with the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing to announce houses for heroes in the city of Kingston so that we can support our homeless veterans.

Speaker, this is a very important issue for us. I'll have more to say on two other significant—

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

Mr. Kaleed Rasheed: Thank you to the minister for the answer. While that is great news, another concern I will highlight is the fact that our Canadian service members and veterans face significant challenges when returning from deployment or transitioning back to civilian life.

In the past, and especially during COVID, we have seen first-hand the healing power of sport. Our veterans are some of the most talented and driven in the world. However, there is a need for more opportunity for their talents to be showcased here at home.

Will the minister tell the House what the government is doing to assist our veterans with their rehabilitation and reintegration into community life?

Hon. Lisa MacLeod: Thank you very much. It was a very important question. Our veterans have fought to liberate nations, they've kept the peace a world away and, of course, they fought tyranny in Afghanistan and the Taliban.

I think it's only fitting that last week, on behalf of the Legislative Assembly, myself and the Premier as well as Her Honour Elizabeth Dowdeswell unveiled the Afghan war memorial, of which you were a part, Speaker. I thank you and your team for being an important part of that.

We also announced a \$300-million investment into the Valour Games to support over 500 veterans and participants who fought and lost either limbs or were wounded or are suffering from PTSD to deal with those challenges through the healing power of sport. We were with a former Master Corporal Mike Trauner who lost his legs in Afghanistan. He went on to compete at the Invictus Games, and he is now going to compete for Canada in Tokyo 2021.

This is the type of investment this government is prepared to make in order to support our serving men and

women as well as our veterans, who have kept us safe time and time again.

ANTI-RACISM ACTIVITIES

Ms. Laura Mae Lindo: My question is to the Premier. It is becoming increasingly clear that this government's pandemic response is leaving vulnerable Ontarians behind. A report from the Toronto Foundation has shown that COVID-19 is deepening the divide between the rich and poor along racialized lines, disproportionately impacting the lives of Black, Indigenous and racialized Ontarians.

Years of Liberal neglect and the Conservative government's failure to invest in these communities have left vulnerable Ontarians alone to navigate the impacts of COVID-19. Racialized communities are in crisis, and there are no targeted supports in sight from this government. We need a provincial strategy to address this deepening divide.

Mr. Speaker, will the Premier commit to creating a provincial strategy to address the root causes of racism that have left racialized communities more vulnerable during this pandemic?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The Minister of Children, Community and Social Services.

Hon. Todd Smith: Thanks to the member opposite for the important question. We've been working extremely hard throughout the pandemic to ensure that we're getting supports to those who need it most, and many come from the area that the individual across the aisle has just mentioned.

My colleague the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing and I were very quick to act early on in the pandemic. Around March 22 or 23, we introduced the social services relief fund. That was a lot of money: \$200 million that went to support people who were in need during a very, very crucial time in the pandemic. There was so much uncertainty in those opening weeks. People didn't know if they were going to have a job the next day.

Those from racialized communities were also feeling challenges during that time. Those in our Indigenous communities were also extremely challenged in that time. That's why we brought forward even more funding, focused on those individuals. We also increased funding in the Black Youth Action Plan, which I think is very, very important, and there was a substantial increase in—

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

Ms. Laura Mae Lindo: Back to the Premier. The connection between structural racism and the pandemic is being recognized across Ontario. In 2011, under the Liberal government, public health planners in Kitchener warned that there were five neighbourhoods at risk of poor health outcomes due to high poverty rates, among other social factors. These neighbourhoods are highly racialized, and these are neighbourhoods where newcomers can afford to settle in Kitchener.

Now, under the Conservatives, residents from these five neighbourhoods, a combined population of 85,000 people, have been hit harder by this pandemic than the

people living in more affluent parts of the region. Waterloo Record reporters call this “disturbing.” I call this “structural racism.”

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We need a coordinated provincial strategy to invest in, protect and support racialized communities. I will ask again: Will the Premier commit to a provincial strategy to address the disproportionate impacts of COVID-19 on Black, Indigenous and racialized Ontarians?

Hon. Todd Smith: Thanks again to the member opposite for the question. That's exactly what we're doing, Mr. Speaker, and I think it was evidenced in the budget delivered by the Minister of Finance a couple of weeks ago when we made a substantial investment into the Black Youth Action Plan, doubling the funding to \$60 million. We're very, very proud of that investment.

We're very proud of the Premier's Council on Equality of Opportunity, headed up by Jamil Jivani, who is doing an outstanding job at making sure we're looking into all of those critical circumstances on the ground and ensuring that those individuals, particularly those young people from those communities, have the opportunities that we had, Mr. Speaker. That's why we're making the investments that we are—substantial investments.

The budget also included a significant amount of money to support homelessness. We want to make sure that everyone from every community has an equal opportunity in Ontario.

COVID-19 RESPONSE

M^{lle} Amanda Simard: Ma question s'adresse au premier ministre.

Last week, we learned that the Premier and his government ignored the advice of Ontario's top doctors, resulting in skyrocketing COVID-19 cases and a new wave of deaths in long-term-care homes.

For months, public health experts, nurses, doctors and concerned Ontarians have been pleading with this government to take action to curb the spread of COVID-19 before it got out of control. Instead, the Premier pledged to loosen public health restrictions in hot zones across the province. The Premier has betrayed the trust of Ontarians, especially our most vulnerable and their families.

How can the Premier justify ignoring the advice of public health officials, taking so long to listen to health care experts and not taking action to curb the spread of COVID-19, bringing us to the alarming situation we are in today?

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

Hon. Christine Elliott: In fact, we have been taking the advice of public health experts since this pandemic began because the health and safety of all Ontarians is our number one priority; it has been and always will be. We have been listening to public health experts, Dr. Williams and his team, Public Health Ontario, the public health measures table, backed up by a number of experts behind all of them.

We've been listening to their advice. That's how we created the framework. The framework has been set up to allow communities to know where they stand, public health units to know where they stand: to know when they're in danger, when they are going to be moved from one category to another. People need to know where we're headed and what precautions they need to take.

But the public health measures that are most important are the ones that are the simplest: Make sure you continue with physical distancing, wear a face covering where you can't do that, wash your hands thoroughly and carefully, and stay home if you don't feel well. Everybody has a responsibility here. Everyone has a role to play to keep people—

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

M^{lle} Amanda Simard: Encore au premier ministre: The Premier's delayed decision-making and confusing contradictory messaging has clearly been contributing to the significant spread of COVID-19. I've spoken to hundreds of people in the past week, and every single one of them expressed frustration with this government's lack of clarity. How can Ontarians follow public health measures when people can't even understand them?

Mr. Speaker, updated modelling outlined last week showed that we could have upwards of 6,500 COVID-19 cases per day by mid-December if immediate action is not taken to dramatically curb the spread. Health care associations are all saying that this is putting too much strain on our hospital system and could result in cancelling or delaying elective surgeries once again.

How can Ontarians trust that the Premier's current public health measures announced on Friday are enough to prevent this from happening again when his last actions—or, rather, inactions—were a complete flop?

Hon. Christine Elliott: We have been taking decisive action and quick action since the beginning of this pandemic, but this is an unprecedented time and the pandemic is making its way across the entire world. It's not just in Ontario.

We have been taking action, listening to what the public health experts have had to say and being transparent with the people of Ontario with what's going on. We have released the modelling; we're the first province to release modelling. We have weekly updates for people to understand how many cases there are in their public health unit, what the case count is, how many deaths, unfortunately, the numbers resolved and so on. We have Dr. Williams and his team coming out twice a week to let people know what's happening.

We have been completely open, transparent and accountable with all of the information regarding COVID-19. But I think it's also really important to bear this in some sort of context. When you look at the number of cases per 100,000: Ontario, 649, compared to places like Florida, 4,089, or even Quebec—

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

LONG-TERM CARE

Ms. Bhutla Karpoche: My question is to the Premier.

Lakeside long-term-care home in my riding of Parkdale–High Park has been in outbreak for a month. There have now been six deaths, 29 resident cases, 13 staff cases, and the situation is only getting worse. Lakeside desperately needs more trained front-line staff and faster testing results.

It's been a month since I asked the minister to take action. Why hasn't the minister acted?

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

Hon. Merrilee Fullerton: Thank you to the member for the question. I can assure the member that Lakeside is improving. There are many eyes on this, and I personally assess and scrutinize all the homes to understand where the issues are and to work as a team across ministries, across government, across public health agencies, working with our medical officers of health, working with Ontario Health, working with our hospital partners to make sure that these homes get the support they need.

There is no home in Ontario right now in critical shortage. Is the situation long-standing in terms of staffing? Yes. But this wave 2 is very different from wave 1, and our homes are holding. That doesn't mean we stop with our diligence and our relentless efforts to make sure that these homes get every support possible. Lakeside is stabilizing. It is getting the support that it needs. We will continue to take every measure that's necessary to address the concerns that the member has.

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

Ms. Bhutla Karpoche: This is not what families, residents and staff at Lakeside are saying. In the words of Christiane, whose mother is at Lakeside and who has written to the minister, "Please don't insult us with the public relations approach."

An iron ring was promised around long-term care and the government has had months to prepare for a second wave. Instead, the Premier and the minister are busy protecting private, for-profit long-term-care chains.

The Ford government failed seniors in the first wave and is failing seniors again in the second wave. How much worse does it have to get before the minister acts?

Hon. Merrilee Fullerton: I take exception to those remarks. We need to understand the tragedy that is in long-term-care homes in wave 1, understand the lessons that have been learned. In wave 2, our homes are doing much, much better thanks to the lessons that we have learned and thanks to the collective efforts of thousands of people.

The staffing is being addressed not only on an emergency basis because of COVID, but also the long-standing issues that were neglected for many, many years—for decades, specifically for 10 years, where we could have had the runway to address this. That previous government, supported by your group, did nothing, absolutely nothing, to address it.

We are taking action with the staffing return to service, with the resident support aids, with rapid training, with

making sure that they are supported with the proper PPE and IPAC. Our homes are holding, and we will continue to take every measure, putting at the heart of our concerns the residents in long-term care, which overreach absolutely everything. It must be about the residents and the—

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

SCHOOL FACILITIES

Mr. Jim Wilson: My question today is for the Minister of Education. I want to thank the minister for his recent announcements regarding funding for elementary schools within the Simcoe County District School Board. However, my constituents are disappointed that little progress is being made on the much-needed replacement of Banting Memorial High School in Alliston.

The building is over 70 years old. It's been at or near the top of the board's capital priority list for at least five years now, and I've been encouraging its replacement for almost a decade. Structurally, the building is beyond repair. It would require major mechanical and electrical upgrades. It's full of asbestos.

1130

So I ask the minister, will he ensure that Banting Memorial High School is assessed in the coming months, so that its replacement will be properly considered in the spring round of funding announcements for new schools in Ontario?

Hon. Stephen Lecce: I thank the member opposite for the question.

I do know that the particular school, in 2011, 2019, received over \$2.2 million of funding to at least incrementally improve the state of that facility, recognizing that there's growth in your community and there's a need for renewal.

We can certainly work offline to better understand the needs of your community.

Obviously, there are billions of dollars of requests that come before the Ministry of Education for capital. I'm very proud that amid the pandemic, we've now unveiled two rounds of investment—roughly a billion dollars of monies flowing to improve schools right across this province, including in rural parts of the province.

But I recognize that there's plenty more to do, and I look forward to working with the member to ensure schools across our province receive the upgrades that our parents deserve.

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

Mr. Jim Wilson: Thank you for that answer.

Mr. Speaker, to the minister: I am a proud graduate of Banting Memorial. My first elected office—I was Prime Minister in grade 9. The Honourable Pauline McGibbon, the Lieutenant Governor, came and opened our model Parliament that year. That's how big a deal it was. But a lot has changed in 40 years.

Banting not only serves Alliston; as the minister may know, it draws students from Beeton, Tottenham, Hockley Valley and Adjala township. These are all communities in Simcoe county that are rapidly growing.

I invite the minister to come up and see the school for himself. Take a tour. That would be real offline—that would be out of here and down there. I think you'll see that the school, which is 50 years old, is long due for replacement.

And while you're at it, can you bring along the Minister of Health and take a look at the hospital?

Hon. Stephen Lecce: I know that all members of the cabinet stand ready to support all members of this House in improving the state of infrastructure—over \$100 billion of infrastructure planned by the government.

In the context of schools, we have \$12 billion set aside over the next decade to renew schools, given that under the former government we saw too many of them not receive the repair that I think parents, kids and educators deserve. That's why we're working to remediate that backlog, putting more monies in place.

In the context of your school board—I know, with respect to COVID-19, we provided them with just shy of \$11 million in net new funding for Simcoe board.

Obviously, in the context of this school, I'd be happy to join the Minister of Health and others to visit, to better understand that need and work with you to ensure that that school receives the funding it deserves.

EDUCATION FUNDING

Ms. Peggy Sattler: My question is to the Premier.

Speaker, this morning the kindergarten at Byron Southwood Public School in London is being collapsed. A much-loved ECE is being reassigned online after nine years in the classroom, and eight new students are joining the class.

Parent Andrea Henning wrote, "It is not the year to be enforcing the changing ratios in the classroom. Please prioritize the safety of the children going to school in person."

Parent Marsi Broomhaar wrote, "How are [the children] supposed to social distance with more kids in the class?"

Parent Tonia Siemon wrote, "Children from age three to five struggle to grasp the significance and concept of social distancing; adding more bodies into the classroom makes this even more of an impossible task."

Speaker, why is the safety of kindergarten students at Byron Southwood and in collapsed classrooms across the province not a priority for this government?

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

Hon. Stephen Lecce: Speaker, we are fully committed to ensuring that kids remain safe in our schools. That's why the plan we've unveiled in this province stands alone in this country. It's fully endorsed, fully funded—but endorsed by the Chief Medical Officer of Health, which I think in itself should provide confidence to parents that we are following the medical expertise of the leading pediatric

doctors in the country, who have informed us to put in place every layer of prevention to reduce the risk.

In the context of classroom sizes, I will note that 2,700 more teachers are working today because of government investment to enable the smallest classroom sizes in the province. It is not a coincidence that there are 2,700 net new teachers, that there are well over 470 ECEs, well over 1,285 more custodians. That is because we have thoughtfully put in place the funding to ensure schools remain safe, to ensure we do everything possible to reduce the risk for our kids.

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

Ms. Peggy Sattler: It's not just Byron Southwood. An additional 1,000 Thames Valley District School Board students are beginning to learn from home today after making the switch from in-class instruction to virtual learning. With 35 schools in outbreak in the Middlesex-London Health Unit, the decision by parents to keep kids at home is completely understandable, but the collapse of classrooms and the reassignment of staff is causing major disruption, chaos and upset across the system. It is also, as noted by school board director Mark Fisher, not "in the best interest of either staff or students."

Will the Premier admit that his refusal to follow the advice of experts for the safe re-opening of schools and to fund smaller classrooms has put the well-being of students at risk?

Hon. Stephen Lecce: In the London District Catholic School Board, for example, the class size there, as reported to the ministry, in kindergarten is roughly around 20; in grades 1 to 3, it's 20.5 students; and in grade 4, it's 24.5, which, as the member knows, is well below the provincial average.

We have put in place a locking \$1.3 billion of investment. We lead Canada with the most significant financial investment in the safe reopening of school. We have put in place a high threshold, a very strong protocol informed by the best medical and scientific minds in this country to ensure our kids remain safe. I think it underscores, as reported by SickKids, the need for all layers of prevention. We accept that premise, which is why we put that in place. The fact that there are 2,700 more teachers to enable smaller classrooms, which has helped us to reduce the risk of COVID in our school, underscores that we are doing what is absolutely necessary to protect all families and all students in Ontario.

DEFERRED VOTES

PROTECTING RENTERS FROM ILLEGAL EVICTIONS ACT, 2020

LOI DE 2020 VISANT À PROTÉGER LES LOCATAIRES CONTRE LES EXPULSIONS ILLÉGALES

Deferred vote on the motion for second reading of the following bill:

Bill 205, An Act to amend the Residential Tenancies Act, 2006 and other Acts with respect to certain categories of evictions and the provision of legal representation with respect to such evictions / *Projet de loi 205, Loi modifiant la Loi de 2006 sur la location à usage d'habitation et d'autres lois en ce qui concerne certaines catégories d'expulsions et la représentation juridique en cas d'expulsions de ce genre.*

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): We now have a deferred vote on the motion for second reading of Bill 205, An Act to amend the Residential Tenancies Act, 2006 and other Acts with respect to certain categories of evictions and the provision of legal representation with respect to such evictions.

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

The division bells rang from 1137 to 1207.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The vote has been held on the motion for second reading of Bill 205, An Act to amend the Residential Tenancies Act, 2006 and other Acts with respect to certain categories of evictions and the provision of legal representation with respect to such evictions.

The Deputy Clerk (Mr. Trevor Day): The ayes are 31; the nays are 56.

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

Second reading negatived.

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

The House recessed from 1209 to 1300.

REPORTS BY COMMITTEES

STANDING COMMITTEE ON JUSTICE POLICY

Mr. Roman Baber: I beg leave to present a report from the Standing Committee on Justice Policy and move its adoption.

The Acting Clerk-at-the-Table (Mr. Christopher Tyrell): Your committee begs to report the following bill, as amended:

Bill 218, An Act to enact the Supporting Ontario's Recovery Act, 2020 respecting certain proceedings relating to the coronavirus (COVID-19), to amend the Municipal Elections Act, 1996 and to revoke a regulation / *Projet de loi 218, Loi édictant la Loi de 2020 visant à soutenir la relance en Ontario concernant certaines instances liées au coronavirus (COVID-19), modifiant la Loi de 1996 sur les municipalités et abrogeant un règlement.*

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

Report adopted.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Pursuant to the order of the House dated October 28, 2020, the bill is ordered for third reading.

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 Acting Clerk-at-the-Table (Mr. Christopher Tyrell): Your committee begs to report the following bill, as amended:

Bill 118, An Act to amend the Occupiers' Liability Act / Projet de loi 118, Loi modifiant la Loi sur la responsabilité des occupants.

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

Report adopted.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The bill is therefore ordered for third reading.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

FRONT-LINE AND ESSENTIAL SERVICE WORKER WEEK ACT, 2020

LOI DE 2020 SUR LA SEMAINE DE RECONNAISSANCE DU PERSONNEL DES SERVICES DE PREMIÈRE LIGNE ET DES SERVICES ESSENTIELS

Mr. Rasheed moved first reading of the following bill:
Bill 230, An Act to proclaim Front-line and Essential Service Worker Week / Projet de loi 230, Loi proclamant la Semaine de reconnaissance du personnel des services de première ligne et des services essentiels.

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

First reading agreed to.

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

Mr. Kaleed Rasheed: The bill proclaims the third full week of March in each year as Front-line and Essential Service Worker Week.

PROTECTING ONTARIANS BY ENHANCING GAS STATION SAFETY TO PREVENT GAS AND DASH ACT, 2020

LOI DE 2020 VISANT À PROTÉGER LES ONTARIENS ET ONTARIENNES EN RENFORÇANT LA SÉCURITÉ DANS LES STATIONS-SERVICE POUR EMPÊCHER LE VOL D'ESSENCE À LA POMPE

Mr. Anand moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 231, An Act to amend the Occupational Health and Safety Act to provide safety measures in respect of workers at gas stations / Projet de loi 231, Loi modifiant la Loi sur la santé et la sécurité au travail afin d'établir des mesures de sécurité à l'égard des travailleurs des stations-service.

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'd like to invite the member to briefly explain his bill.

Mr. Deepak Anand: This bill amends the Occupational Health and Safety Act to require employers at gas stations to require customers to prepay before giving gasoline. The employer is required to give notice of the requirement to prepay for gasoline. The act is also amended to require employers to provide training to workers involved in the sale of gasoline.

Through this bill, what we're trying to intend is to change the mindset of the consumers, but we want to add a few things. Number one, there is no additional cost to the gas station owners, and all those with a manual pump will stay as is under the grandfather clause. There is going to be a step-by-step implementation, starting with the GTA first, then the towns and municipalities over 5,000 and finally to the rural in a few years.

STATEMENTS BY THE MINISTRY AND RESPONSES

ANTI-BULLYING INITIATIVES PRÉVENTION DE L'INTIMIDATION

Hon. Stephen Lecce: I'm honoured to stand in the House on behalf of two million students to recognize Bullying Awareness and Prevention Week, which is taking place between November 15 and 21 this year. We know that a safe and inclusive school environment is essential to student well-being and achievement, and that every student has an unassailable right to feel safe and protected in school so that they can reach their full potential and achieve lifelong success. That is why we are always clear that bullying is never acceptable.

L'intimidation n'est jamais acceptable.

Yet, Speaker, too many kids face this grim reality. Students who are bullied can often experience social anxiety, loneliness, withdrawal, physical illness and low self-esteem. Bullying can take many forms, including verbal, physical, social and electronic, also known as cyberbullying.

Bullying should never be considered just part of growing up in this country. Research and experience have shown that bullying is a serious issue with far-reaching consequences for our students, their families, peers and the communities around them. Bullying can result in someone being hurt or harmed either by words or actions by one group or one person. It is meant to cause harm, fear or

distress, or to create a negative environment for another student or group of students, and it happens anywhere, not just at schools. It occurs in situations where there is a real or perceived power imbalance.

That is why I'm proud that our government is taking action this week and throughout the entire school year to help promote safe and inclusive schools and positive learning environments. Similarly, we are proud that students, educators and families across this province are taking this issue seriously and working hard to ensure that our schools are welcoming places for all students and all staff. In fact, I believe Ontario is leading the way.

L'Ontario montre la voie.

We are at the forefront of the battle against this terrible and damaging menace that is this global problem. We're combatting bullying head-on with legislation, policies and resources to help ensure safe and inclusive learning environments exist in every school community.

I want to note, Mr. Speaker, a new law in this province, the Stop Cyberbullying in Ontario Day Act—as you know, it has received royal assent; it is the law of the land—brought in and introduced by a father, a parent and a hard-working member of our team. The member from Mississauga East—Cooksville brought this forth; I want to thank him.

The third Friday in June will be an awareness day, where we build awareness and knowledge for this and we work, really, together with all of our partners in education to combat it within our schools. I think it is a demonstration that we are working hard to root out bullying in our schools with one aim, and that is to keep our kids safe. For instance, last year, I also announced the assignment of the MPP for Scarborough Centre, a former educator, as you know, to advise me on education matters for folks on bullying prevention. We launched a province-wide survey to better understand how pervasive this issue is and to receive input that will be used to better understand this issue and to find ways to make school safer and more inclusive.

We also are undertaking a review of school reporting practices on bullying and an evaluation of the definition of bullying in the ministry, to ensure it reflects the reality of today's challenges within our schools.

We're working to change the culture to one where everyone sees the inherent dignity and value of a person, irrespective of their faith, heritage, sexual orientation, race, income or place of birth.

1310

Further, I'm proud that our government is making mental health a top priority for our government.

Je suis fier que le gouvernement accorde une priorité absolue à la santé mentale de nos enfants.

Recently, we provided \$24.3 million to hire additional staff, increase access to counselling and therapy and create programs to help manage stress, depression and anxiety and address eating disorders and other challenges facing our kids. This funding is part of the government's \$176-million investment in the Roadmap to Wellness, as announced by the Minister of Mental Health and

Addictions, part of a comprehensive plan to build a fully connected mental health and addictions system right across this province.

In the context of our ongoing battle with COVID-19, we also know that this has been a particularly difficult year for our children and students during this unprecedented school year, as students engage peers more frequently in online learning through various social media platforms as well. It is so important to raise awareness around cyberbullying.

In fact, we know that this has been an ongoing problem even before COVID-19 began. CAMH stated in a 2017 report that 21% of students reported being bullied over the Internet, a staggering figure. It's why, in addition to providing school boards with resources to assist in planning for Bullying Awareness and Prevention Week, the ministry released a parent resource. This parent resource has been developed to highlight instances of cyberbullying and provide information to those caregivers to support their children's success and to arm them with the information they need to counter it.

Speaker, it is imperative that our schools provide learning environments that are physically, culturally and emotionally safe and nurture students with acceptance, support and respect for every single one of them. It's why we're committed to providing and ensuring students from all backgrounds feel safe and free from bullying, violence, harassment and discrimination. Hate and systemic racism have no place in our schools or anywhere within our society. I think everyone, no matter what party you're from or where you sit in this House, agrees on this principle. But according to a 2019 CBC survey of more than 4,000 young Canadians aged 14 to 21, more than 50% of those who identified as visible minorities say that they've been subjected to racism, name-calling or comments.

Last month, a young black student in Pickering found that his high school yearbook message paying tribute to his late grandmother had been replaced with a racial slur. To this young man, and to all students who face racism, discrimination and bullying, we see you, we value you and we stand with you.

We also think of LGBTQ children and youth who face discrimination, knowing that they have faced a disproportionately high rate of youth suicide. We think of Black, brown and racialized children, beautiful and innocent kids from every faith and heritage, who are targeted because of their "difference." We think of those who have been lost to this senseless reality that too many kids confront every day. We think of a world, of an education system and societal culture where we respect everyone on their merit, where we debate our ideas and where we welcome our differences as a source of strength in this country.

What is remarkable about Canada is the unity we derive from our diversity. Our shared values unite us, irrespective of difference, behind the maple leaf, a global symbol of freedom, of justice and hope. But here at home, as we work to completely counter bullying in all of its forms, we redouble our commitment to do more, to build confidence

and build a society where our greatest currency is the civility and respect we share amongst our fellow citizens.

I promise you that our government will stand with you and all students on this journey to advance respect, dignity and opportunity, because the effects of racism, of discrimination, bullying and cyberbullying can be pervasive and devastating and have long-lasting impacts on the mental health and confidence of our kids.

But Speaker, I remain hopeful. Now, more than ever, educators are involved in combatting this problem. In our approach, school boards are required to provide programs, interventions or other supports for students who have been bullied, witnessed bullying or engaged in bullying themselves. All schools and boards must have policies to prevent and address bullying. They must have bullying prevention intervention plans, and they must have policies for progressive discipline and equity and inclusion education.

Speaker, bullying prevention and intervention is more than just eliminating bullying. Bullying prevention promotes the development of healthy relationships that involve respectful interactions between people, face to face and online. The goal is to help ensure that our students have healthy, safe, respectful, caring relationships with everyone in their lives, and this involves the entire school community, our staff, our parents and our students.

In a whole-school approach, all education and community partners are needed to bring about the necessary systemic change. A whole-school approach is comprehensive and includes policies, school climate and other curricula. We know that, in a positive school climate, students are encouraged and given support to be positive leaders and role models within their school community.

Educators and school staff have a key role in fostering a positive learning environment, with parents and caregivers as key partners in bullying prevention and intervention. When parents and caregivers work with their schools to help their children, they are leading by example and giving a clear message that bullying is wrong. I'm proud that students are stepping up to promote kindness and respect within their schools.

Through our government's actions, we're empowering students and we're giving them the lift that they need to rid our schools of this threat and to ensure that they can compete and succeed. For example, Speaker, I will note that the health and physical education curriculum that our government unveiled in the summer of 2019 helps students develop the skills they need to identify, prevent, address and resolve issues such as bullying—including cyberbullying—child abuse, harassment and violence within relationships.

It's about strong leadership to set positive examples. This is why our government continues to support our school leaders who make a difference within our classrooms. Every school in Ontario is required to have a safe school team that is responsible for fostering that safe, inclusive environment we seek. Each team is made up of parent representatives, students, the school principal, teachers, non-teaching staff and a community partner. The

team helps to promote a positive school climate, reviews the results and takes action accordingly.

Speaker, a positive school climate exists when all members of the school feel safe and included, and actively promote positive behaviours and interactions. As we mark Bullying Awareness and Prevention Week today—and every day, for that matter—I am encouraging educators, administrators and students across the province to continue to spend time with each other so that they can work to stop bullying and promote that safe, inclusive school community that all kids deserve. Because we know that when students are equipped with the knowledge to make safe and healthy choices and the skills to build a strong relationship, the foundation is laid for them to become positive, constructive leaders and role models in our schools, in our communities and across our country.

I'd also like to encourage every member in the House today to participate in the anti-bullying activities planned this week in your respective communities and within your school boards. Use the opportunity to promote respectful, healthy relationships and take a visible stand against bullying. Everyone suffers when bullying occurs and everyone can help to prevent it.

In 85% of cases, bullying takes place in front of a witness. The witness may be afraid or may not want to get involved because they're afraid of becoming a target themselves, or of making things worse for the students being bullied. But I'm confident that everyone in this House and in Ontario will step up and help reinforce things that everyone can do to promote respect between each other.

In closing, I am proud that Ontario remains a leader in bullying and cyberbullying awareness and prevention. But this is only the beginning, not the end of our actions. There's more we can do to address this serious issue and we will continue to support our province's vulnerable students and fight discrimination, fight racism and threats to safety and personal well-being in every region of this province.

I'm confident that by participating in bullying awareness week and promoting safe and inclusive learning environments throughout the school year, schools are creating a real, positive change in their environment and in the achievement of our kids.

We are all responsible for starting conversations, taking action and working together to make a difference in the lives of Ontario students and children, so let's do that and stand united and remain steadfast, so that we ensure that our schools are safe and accepting for all.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Responses?

Ms. Marit Stiles: Schools are a place where every student should feel safe, comfortable and welcome, but bullying and harassment rob kids of their right to learn in a positive and healthy environment. It makes going to school a high-stress and even fearful experience.

Bullying Awareness and Prevention Week offers us the opportunity to name bullying behaviours, bring them out into the light and work together to stop them from happening. On behalf of the official opposition, I want to

recognize the hard work of our school communities to raise awareness and combat bullying. Whether it's programming to recognize Pink Shirt Day or peer-led groups to offer support and organize against harassment and discrimination, we are all grateful for their efforts.

1320

This year, students are facing more stress and anxiety about school than ever before. In addition to the general concern for their health and that of their families, the pandemic has resulted in constantly changing schedules for students and has separated them from their friends. A lack of sufficient provincial support for the schools has meant staffing shortages and changes that have removed favourite teachers and collapsed classes.

In boards forced to move to simultaneous virtual and in-person learning, it means teachers have less time or attention to support students who need it most. For kids in crisis, that means the first early warning system of trouble is that much further away.

Cyberbullying, already a serious threat to our students, has also taken on a new dimension with the massive expansion of virtual learning. Collaborative tools for online learning can be easily turned into forums for bullying, and when students are required to be on camera, it can reveal information about their home or their living situation that they might not be comfortable sharing. These new venues for bullying call for new ways to support students in trouble and will require special attention from school administrators, school boards and government.

The Ministry of Education needs to closely evaluate the impacts of this pandemic on our students and should be prepared to offer more support. As it stands, we have thousands of students who are unaccounted for across the system, and it's not clear what ongoing or coordinated evaluation is taking place. That must change.

Stamping out bullying and addressing the mental health needs of our students will also take resources. But regrettably, last week's provincial budget failed to deliver on that. Children's Mental Health Ontario said the budget "ignores the crisis identified by mental health care providers that Ontario children, youth and families are facing due to COVID-19 and the pre-pandemic wait of 28,000 kids of up to 2.5 years" for support.

CEO Kim Moran said, "This is a matter of life and death for some children, youth and their families."

Glen Canning, the father of Rehtaeh Parsons, whose life was cut short by bullying in 2013, echoed the CMHO, saying, "This is a time when mental health services are needed more than ever. Especially for children caught in the middle of a pandemic."

On Bullying Awareness and Prevention Week, we owe it to all victims and survivors of bullying to attach action to these words.

We also owe it to students to recognize that bullying is not a random act. Lesbian, bisexual, gay, queer and trans students are more likely to be the victims of harassment and discrimination at school and are more at risk of suicide because of it. If those students are also Black, Indigenous or racialized, the experience can be compounded.

Right now, those students are getting some mixed messaging. They're hearing the Minister of Education just now committing to ending bullying in schools and ensuring they're safe. But at the same time, they're seeing their Premier defend and reward a man who promotes homophobia, transphobia and Islamophobia.

I challenge all members here to lead by example. Speak out on behalf of vulnerable queer, trans and Muslim students in our schools and revoke the sections of Bill 213 that would reward hate with new powers.

In closing, Mr. Speaker, I want to again share my sincere thanks to all those working hard to make our schools welcoming and healthy spaces free of bullying and harassment. Making that happen will take action on many fronts, from developing a curriculum that reflects the experience of all students and the diversity of Ontario to ensuring that barriers to full participation in school are removed and that more caring adults are there to support our students. We can do it, but we have to aim much higher than we have been.

M^{me} Lucille Collard: L'intimidation—que ce soit physique, verbal, social ou électronique—n'a aucune place dans notre société, et surtout pas dans nos écoles. Je trouve donc important de reconnaître et de souligner l'importance de la Semaine de la sensibilisation à l'intimidation et de la prévention.

I would like to take this moment to thank our amazing teachers, principals and school boards for their hard work to eliminate bullying from our institutions. You are helping to create a safe and inclusive learning environment for every child in Ontario, and your work is important and appreciated.

Bullying has significant consequences on the well-being of Ontario students, particularly from the perspective of mental health. Children who are bullied suffer from increased headaches, depression and anxiety and are at higher risk for suicide. These negative consequences are not restricted to the bullied but extend to the bullies themselves as well. Children who bully are also at a higher risk of suicide and are more likely to become involved in criminal activities.

Ce sont des conséquences très sérieuses, et la pandémie actuelle ne fait qu'aggraver ces impacts négatifs. L'attente pour des soins et services en santé mentale est trop longue, et les besoins sont nombreux. Avec le stress et l'isolement de cette pandémie, la ligne d'attente continue de s'allonger. Nous devons agir maintenant pour aider nos jeunes et leurs familles à passer à travers la crise qu'ils vivent. Il s'agit d'une menace sur toute notre société.

Earlier this year, the government released its Roadmap to Wellness plan to strengthen Ontario's mental health and addictions support system. Ontario's mental health and addiction care providers welcomed this plan but warned that in order to have a significant impact, it would have to be supported by substantial investment in the 2020 Ontario budget. Sadly, the budget released 10 days ago includes no new funding for children's mental health services in Ontario.

The government announced \$12 million in new funding back in October, but it is not enough. While Ontario's

mental health care professionals welcome such investment, they also estimate that an annual investment of \$150 million is needed to substantially reduce wait times for children and youth.

Nous avons dédié cette semaine à la sensibilisation à l'intimidation et à sa prévention. Je salue tous les Ontariens et Ontariennes qui travaillent pour créer un environnement d'apprentissage ouvert et inclusif. Nous ne pouvons pas nous permettre de soutenir nos enfants seulement avec des mots vides. Il faut agir ensemble et maintenant pour fournir à nos enfants les services dont ils ont besoin.

Mr. Mike Schreiner: I rise today to recognize Bullying Awareness and Prevention Week and to speak out against bullying in all its forms.

The stats are clear: Sadly, bullying and discrimination are far too prevalent in our schools and online. Some 47% of Canadian parents report having a child who is a victim of bullying. At least one in three adolescent students in Canada has reported being bullied. These experiences can be traumatic and have lifelong impacts.

We know now that more of us are online. Bullying has also moved online. That's why the slogan for this week, "Don't Be Mean Behind the Screen," is more important than ever.

We also know that education workers in schools have led the charge in promoting anti-bullying campaigns. And now more than ever, educators are on the front lines, working hard to create safe, healthy and inclusive spaces for all children. On behalf of Greens, I want to say thank you to these educators. But they need more support. We need more mental health workers in our schools, and we must—as a matter of fact, we have a moral responsibility to reduce the wait times to access children's mental health services.

The mental health supports provided in this year's budget are far below what Children's Mental Health Ontario called for to reduce wait times pre-pandemic, let alone the additional demands because of COVID-19. We have to provide the resources needed to reduce wait times so that our children have the services they need and deserve. Eliminating bullying and discrimination is not an easy task, and so it is crucial now more than ever that we provide these supports. The words that all of us have said today make a difference, but they ring hollow if we don't provide the funding and supports that our children need and deserve.

MOTIONS

HOUSE SITTINGS

Hon. Paul Calandra: I move that, pursuant to standing order 7(c), the House shall continue to meet past the ordinary hour of adjournment until midnight on the following days: Monday, November 16, 2020; Tuesday, November 17, 2020; Wednesday, November 18, 2020; Thursday, November 19, 2020; Monday, November 23, 2020; Tuesday, November 24, 2020; Wednesday,

November 25, 2020; Thursday, November 26, 2020; Monday, November 30, 2020; Tuesday, December 1, 2020; Wednesday, December 2, 2020; Thursday, December 3, 2020; Monday, December 7, 2020; Tuesday, December 8, 2020; Wednesday, December 9, 2020; and Thursday, December 10, 2020, for the purpose of considering government business.

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The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Mr. Calandra has moved that, pursuant to standing order 7(c), the House shall continue to meet past the ordinary hour of adjournment until midnight on the following dates—

Interjection: Dispense.

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

Motion agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The member for London West has a point of order.

Ms. Peggy Sattler: Thank you, Speaker. I seek unanimous consent for opposition day 2, in the name of Ms. Horwath, scheduled to be debated on Wednesday, November 18, 2020, to be rescheduled to be debated on Tuesday, November 17, 2020.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Agreed? I heard a no.

Point of order again, the member for London West.

Ms. Peggy Sattler: I seek unanimous consent for the member from Brampton Centre to move opposition day two in place of Ms. Horwath.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Agreed? I heard a no.

PETITIONS

EDUCATION FUNDING

M^{me} France Gélinas: I would like to thank Nicholas Forand from Val Caron in my riding for this petition. It reads as follows:

“Safe Return to School.

“Whereas the Ford government has announced that schools will reopen in September; and

“Whereas school boards across the province” prepared “for students to return and to adapt to learning during COVID-19; and

Whereas school boards are scrambling to meet the government's ever-changing guidelines;

They call upon the Ford government “to implement an action plan to safely reopen and keep our schools open that includes smaller, safer class sizes; hire more teachers and education workers; support online learning including affordable, reliable Internet access; provide immediate funding for urgent school repairs and upgrades such as ventilation systems; provide more funding for school buses to allow for distancing; and provide additional supports for students with special needs.”

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

COMMUNITY PLANNING

Mr. Aris Babikian: Before reading the petition, I would like to thank Rev. Matthew Chiu from the Scarborough Chinese Alliance Church and its 1,300 members for organizing this petition. The petition reads:

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas Green Bud Inc. has applied to the AGCO to obtain a licence to open a cannabis retail store at 63 Silver Star Boulevard, unit C6;

“Whereas the store mentioned above is located in close proximity to:

—Yahu Community Association of Canada (dance programs for youth aged five to 12) 63 Silver Star Boulevard, units E2 and E3;

—Music of May (music lessons for youth aged five to 12) 63 Silver Star Boulevard, unit D3;

—Toronto Chinese Christian Short Term Mission Training Centre, 63 Silver Star Boulevard, unit D6;

—Scarborough Community Alliance Church (youth and seniors programs) 139 Silver Star Boulevard;

—Scarborough Community Alliance Church (youth and seniors programs) 135 Silver Star Boulevard;

—Scarborough Chinese Baptist Church (youth and seniors program) 3223 Kennedy Road;

—Sylvan Learning Centre (children and youth programs ages five to 15) 3320 Midland Avenue, units 201-203;

—Brainchild Education Centre (children and youth programs ages five to 15) 3320 Midland Avenue, units 205 and 218;

—Light and Love Home in Toronto (seniors program) 3320 Midland Avenue, units 215- 216 and 223-225;

—Scholars 101 Education Centre (children and youth programs ages five to 15) 3320 Midland Avenue, unit 120;

—Positive Tutorial School (children and youth programs ages five to 15) 3300 Midland Avenue, unit 211;

—Iron Tutor (children and youth programs ages five to 15) 3300 Midland Avenue, suites 208 and 218;

—Tamarack Day Care Centre, 3315 Midland Avenue;

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

“To disallow the opening of Green Bud Inc. at 63 Silver Star Boulevard, unit C6, due to the potential health and safety risk it poses to youth, children, tenants, and seniors. Furthermore, this location is not in the interest of the public.”

I support this petition and affix my signature to it.

OPTOMETRY SERVICES

Ms. Catherine Fife: I’d like to thank Pierce Family Vision for collecting signatures. This petition reads as follows:

“Petition to Save Eye Care in Ontario.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas the Ontario government has underfunded optometric eye care for 30 years; and

“Whereas optometrists now subsidize the delivery of OHIP-covered eye care by \$173 million a year; and

“Whereas COVID-19 forced optometrists to close their doors, resulting in a 75%-plus drop in revenue; and

“Whereas optometrists will see patient volumes reduced between 40% and 60%, resulting in more than two million comprehensive eye exams being wiped out over the next 12 months; and

“Whereas communities across Ontario are in danger of losing access to optometric care;

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

“To instruct the Ontario government to immediately establish a timetable and a process for renewed negotiations concerning optometry fees.”

It’s my pleasure to affix my signature to this petition, and I will pass it along to the table.

EDUCATION FUNDING

Ms. Marit Stiles: I’m pleased to present the following petition on behalf of my constituent Amy Lester. It reads as follows:

“Demand a Safe Return to Schools.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas the COVID-19 pandemic continues to pose a real risk to our communities;

“Whereas the Ford government’s failure to provide the funding or the plan needed to ensure our schools are as safe as possible means that kids are returning to crowded classrooms and buses;

“Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to create an action plan that includes:

—funding to ensure smaller, safer classes of no more than 15 students;

—hiring thousands more teachers, educational assistants, custodians and support workers;

—paid sick leave and parental leave in any modified return;

—increased funding for busing, protective support equipment, school repairs and cleaning;

—action to address the disproportionate impact of COVID-19 on racialized and Indigenous students and students from low-income backgrounds;

—real collaboration with front-line education workers, students, parents and school boards through a COVID-19 recovery school advisory group.”

I’m very pleased to affix my signature to this petition, and I’ll be passing it to the Clerks.

COMMUNITY PLANNING

Mr. Rick Nicholls: “To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas Green Bud Inc. has applied to the AGCO to obtain a licence to open a cannabis retail store at 63 Silver Star Boulevard, unit C6;

“Whereas the store mentioned above is located in close proximity to:

“—Yahu Community Association of Canada (dance programs for youth aged five to 12) 63 Silver Star Boulevard, units E2 and E3;

“—Music of May (music lessons for youth aged five to 12) 63 Silver Star Boulevard, unit D3;

“—Toronto Chinese Christian Short Term Mission Training Centre, 63 Silver Star Boulevard, unit D6;

“—Scarborough Community Alliance Church (youth and seniors programs) 139 Silver Star Boulevard;

“—Scarborough Community Alliance Church (youth and seniors programs) 135 Silver Star Boulevard;

“—Scarborough Chinese Baptist Church (youth and seniors program) 3223 Kennedy Road;

“—Sylvan Learning Centre (children and youth programs ages five to 15) 3320 Midland Avenue, units 201-203;

“—Brainchild Education Centre (children and youth programs ages five to 15) 3320 Midland Avenue, units 205 and 218;

“—Light and Love Home in Toronto (seniors program) 3320 Midland Avenue, units 215- 216 and 223-225;

“—Scholars 101 Education Centre (children and youth programs ages five to 15) 3320 Midland Avenue, unit 120;

“—Positive Tutorial School (children and youth programs ages five to 15) 3300 Midland Avenue, unit 211;

“—Iron Tutor (children and youth programs ages five to 15) 3300 Midland Avenue, suites 208 and 218;

“—Tamarack Day Care Centre, 3315 Midland Avenue;

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

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

“To disallow the opening of Green Bud Inc. at 63 Silver Star Boulevard, unit C6, due to the potential health and safety risk it poses to youth, children, tenants, and seniors. Furthermore, this location is not in the interest of the public.”

Speaker, I approve of this petition, will affix my name to it and hand it to the appropriate personnel.

ADDICTION SERVICES

Ms. Bhutla Karpoche: This petition is titled “End the Delay of Ontario’s Overdose Prevention Sites.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas overdose prevention sites have saved at least” hundreds of “lives since they began operating in mid-2017, yet” thousands “have lost their lives to overdose since the Ford government paused the opening of further overdose prevention sites;

“Whereas extensive research and the experience of harm reduction workers have shown that overdose prevention sites play an integral role in preventing opioid-related deaths;

“Whereas overdose prevention sites also play a vital role in connecting people with mental health and addiction services, and help keep communities safe;

“Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to immediately approve overdose prevention sites in cities with pending applications, while allowing additional cities to apply ... so harm reduction workers can continue to supervise consumption, prevent overdoses and deaths by overdose, and direct people to appropriate services.”

I fully support this petition and will affix my signature to it.

LONG-TERM CARE

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: I have a very important petition, and there’s an urgency to this 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 fully support this petition, sign it and pass it to the usher to deliver to the table.

LONG-TERM CARE

Miss Monique Taylor: I have a petition titled “Time to Care.

“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 full support this petition, will be affixing my name to it and giving it to the page to bring to the Clerk.

COMMUNITY PLANNING

Mr. Toby Barrett: “Petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas Green Bud Inc. has applied to the AGCO to obtain a licence to open a cannabis retail store at 63 Silver Star Boulevard, unit C6;

“Whereas the store mentioned above is located in close proximity to:

“—Yahu Community Association of Canada (dance programs for youth aged five to 12) 63 Silver Star Boulevard, units E2 and E3;

“—Music of May (music lessons for youth aged five to 12) 63 Silver Star Boulevard, unit D3;

“—Toronto Chinese Christian Short Term Mission Training Centre, 63 Silver Star Boulevard, unit D6;

“—Scarborough Community Alliance Church (youth and seniors programs) 139 Silver Star Boulevard;

“—Scarborough Community Alliance Church (youth and seniors programs) 135 Silver Star Boulevard;

“—Scarborough Chinese Baptist Church (youth and seniors program) 3223 Kennedy Road;

“—Sylvan Learning Centre (children and youth programs ages five to 15) 3320 Midland Avenue, units 201-203;

“—Brainchild Education Centre (children and youth programs ages five to 15) 3320 Midland Avenue, units 205 and 218;

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“—Scholars 101 Education Centre (children and youth programs ages five to 15) 3320 Midland Avenue, unit 120;

“—Positive Tutorial School (children and youth programs ages five to 15) 3300 Midland Avenue, unit 211;

“—Iron Tutor (children and youth programs ages five to 15) 3300 Midland Avenue, suites 208 and 218;

“—Tamarack Day Care Centre, 3315 Midland Avenue;

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

“To disallow the opening of Green Bud Inc. at 63 Silver Star Boulevard, unit C6, due to the potential health and safety risk it poses to youth, children, tenants, and seniors. Furthermore, this location is not in the interest of the public.”

I agree with the sentiments contained herein and affix my signature.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

SUPPORTING ONTARIO’S RECOVERY
AND MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS ACT, 2020LOI DE 2020 VISANT À SOUTENIR
LA RELANCE EN ONTARIO
ET SUR LES ÉLECTIONS MUNICIPALES

Mr. Downey moved third reading of the following bill:
Bill 218, An Act to enact the Supporting Ontario’s Recovery Act, 2020 respecting certain proceedings

relating to the coronavirus (COVID-19), to amend the Municipal Elections Act, 1996 and to revoke a regulation /
Projet de loi 218, Loi édictant la Loi de 2020 visant à soutenir la relance en Ontario concernant certaines instances liées au coronavirus (COVID-19), modifiant la Loi de 1996 sur les municipalités et abrogeant un règlement.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Back to the Attorney General.

Hon. Doug Downey: Good afternoon. I’m honoured to rise in the House today to speak to the third reading of Supporting Ontario’s Recovery Act, 2020. This bill, if passed, would support thousands of Ontario workers, employers, volunteers, non-profits and other organizations who make an honest effort to follow public health advice, follow public health guidance and law as Ontario responds to the COVID-19 pandemic.

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Speaker, this bill responds to the unprecedented challenges that Ontario workers, volunteers, community organizations, businesses and non-profits are facing during the second wave of COVID-19. Each day, thousands of front-line workers and volunteers put their own health and safety at risk to contribute to the recovery of Ontario. But the level of risk does not end there. These workers and volunteers also risk significant civil liability in the event of COVID-19 transmission to third parties. This applies even if workers make good faith efforts to follow public health advice.

Front-line workers are under an incredible amount of stress. Each day, they serve our communities while doing their best to minimize the spread of the virus. They do this for the safety of the people they serve, their families and their loved ones. They do this important work to support their communities. They should be able to do this work without facing uncertainty and fear regarding civil liability when they’re making honest efforts to follow public health guidance.

We need to ensure that our PSWs, volunteers, mental health service providers, grocery store clerks and small businesses are all protected when they’re making an honest effort to follow public health guidance and laws respecting COVID-19. We need Ontarians to have the confidence to show up and provide support for our loved ones in congregate care settings and hospitals, operate their businesses that provide jobs and services to our communities and volunteer to make a difference in the lives of those in need.

We listened to the concerns of individuals and organizations across Ontario. These are people who are relied upon by their communities to lead their community’s recovery. Speaker, we’re taking informed, responsible and decisive action to help. This legislation will support the volunteers, front-line workers, charities and community partners who are essential to Ontario’s recovery. We are doing everything we can to help support Ontario’s recovery as we face these unprecedented times. Our government is sending a clear message that we will be there to support Ontarians when volunteers want to give their time, when

businesses want to rehire staff and open their doors, and when charities want to help those in need, despite these extraordinary challenges.

We will not allow COVID-19 and its impacts to discourage entrepreneurs who want to hire our neighbours. We will not allow this virus to prevent volunteers from offering their unique experience and knowledge to help life get back to normal at the local rink, the curling club or the Legion. We need these volunteers to help ensure our 4-H clubs, our cadet squadrons, our Boys and Girls Clubs, Big Brothers Big Sisters and countless others come back strong and continue making essential contributions. And we cannot afford to allow local charities to fear holding that annual fundraising event or programming that will help them reach the lives of people who need their help.

If we are to recover as a province, we need to support Ontarians who act in good faith by making an honest effort to follow public health guidance. We need Ontarians to have the confidence to show up and provide support for our loved ones in congregate care, hospitals, while they operate their businesses and provide jobs and services to our communities and volunteer to make a difference in the lives of those in need.

This is why, after listening to the concerns of Ontarians, our government has introduced legislation to stand up for our province's front-line workers and the important institutions they serve so they can focus on their work with a clear understanding of their responsibilities and liability. In fact, we believe this legislation will promote adherence to public health guidance and laws respecting COVID-19. With this legislation, Ontarians will know that if they make a good-faith effort to follow these rules, they will be protected.

If passed, the proposed Supporting Ontario's Recovery Act, 2020, would provide targeted, enhanced liability protection to front-line workers if they are sued by third parties, while ensuring people are also able to pursue claims related to gross negligence and intentional misconduct regarding the transmission of COVID-19.

I want to reiterate that the proposed legislation will not impede Ontarians' ability to hold bad actors accountable. When I say "bad actors," I mean individuals and organizations who deliberately ignore public health guidance or act with gross negligence. Those bad actors will not be protected by this legislation. Under no circumstances will this bill affect criminal charges related to the exposure or transmission of COVID-19. The civil liability protection in this legislation is only to do with the unintentional transmission of COVID-19, and nothing else.

Before I go any further, I would like to acknowledge the tenacity and drive of the Ontarians who inspired this legislation. Madam Speaker, I'm talking about the thousands of workers and volunteers who provide essential services and contribute value to their communities. From health care workers to restaurant staff and clerks at grocery stores, coffee shops and pharmacies, to minor hockey and figure-skating coaches and volunteers at local Legions and charities, these are the everyday heroes who keep our communities moving and growing.

The proposed legislation is designed to support these people who work on the front lines and the important enterprises that employ them, if they make an honest effort to follow public health guidance and laws relating to COVID-19. They are a driving force behind our province's success and they are relied on during Ontario's recovery: the coaches and volunteers who keep our kids engaged through minor sports associations; the restaurant staff prepping takeout orders; local business owners and the people who work for them; the hard-working prison guards working in correctional facilities; the child care providers who care for our children; and of course the thousands of dedicated health-care and personal support workers who provide care for our loved ones in their greatest time of need. It is thanks to their work on the front lines that we are able to continue our day-to-day activities like getting groceries, sending our kids to school or participating in community activities.

My cabinet and caucus colleagues and I have spoken with many of these workers and business owners firsthand since the wave hit back in March. I know how passionate they are about the work they do and the careful measures they take to keep the people around them safe. Speaker, these people should not be discouraged from continuing to make a positive contribution to their communities. We need this legislation so they can continue to make these contributions without facing uncertainty and the fear of liability.

The proposed legislation protects good-faith efforts to follow applicable public health guidance and laws related to COVID-19. It is important protection, but with significant safeguards. This legislation will only provide protection for those who made honest, good-faith efforts to follow public health guidance and laws and honestly believed that they followed those rules.

A key aspect to this legislation is that it will not protect individuals and organizations that deliberately ignore public health guidance or laws relating to COVID-19, or that act with gross negligence. All those who acted in good faith by making an honest effort to follow the rules will be immune from civil liability unless a court determines that they were grossly negligent.

This should not be taken to mean that Ontarians can stand by and knowingly disregard the rules or make up their own. They have to make a good-faith effort to follow the rules. We understand that especially during the early days of the pandemic, it wasn't always easy to narrow down the rules and apply them in one community or another amid the sometimes conflicting reports. This immunity applies to people who make a good-faith effort to follow the guidance and the law, even if it turns out that they tried to follow the wrong set of rules or outdated rules, and even where they misunderstood what the rules required of them, as long as they acted without gross negligence. An organization might learn of one set of public health guidance from a municipality and a different set from a regulator. They might conflict on certain points. That's why the legislation provides immunity where such a conflict exists. Our courts are well-equipped to judge each case within these parameters.

When I talk about good-faith efforts, I'm talking about an honest effort made by a person or a business or an organization to follow the public health guidance and laws relating to COVID-19. The legislation would also ensure Ontarians are able to take legal action in cases of gross negligence, intentional misconduct and the failure to make honest efforts to follow COVID-19 rules.

Before I continue, let me be clear about another important consideration. This legislation would not hinder a worker's current right to sue a person, other than their own employer, for work-related COVID infection under workers' compensation legislation. To ensure that workers are protected, the proposed changes will not interfere with workers' rights as they relate to the Workplace Safety and Insurance Act. It would not stop workers from accessing their rights under WSIA or change the existing system in any way. In addition, workers and others such as independent contractors who are not covered by the Workplace Safety and Insurance Act would be able to sue their employer and any other person for work-related COVID-19 losses, just as they are able to now.

Speaker, COVID-19 has had a devastating effect on residents and staff at long-term-care homes in Ontario. Our government has launched an independent commission into this matter. We feel strongly that the people of Ontario deserve a timely, transparent and non-partisan investigation. This proposed legislation would not prevent individuals in long-term-care homes and their loved ones from seeking justice against bad actors. The safety and well-being of the residents and staff in Ontario's long-term-care homes is and continues to be our government's top priority.

Let me be clear: We are not going easy on those who do not make a good-faith effort to comply with public health advice or who act with gross negligence. Our government is committed to holding bad actors accountable for their actions, and this legislation would not protect those individuals or organizations.

1400

While the independent commission continues its work, we've introduced this bill to make it easier for our workers to continue showing up to work each day and support Ontario families across dozens of sectors, including in long-term-care homes. We want all Ontarians to know that individuals and organizations that deliberately ignore public health guidance, act with gross negligence or commit intentional misconduct will not be protected by this legislation.

To this point, I want to share the vote of support we received from AdvantAge Ontario, a community-based, not-for-profit organization dedicated to advancing senior care. In a letter, they expressed their support for this bill by saying, "We are pleased that the liability protection we have advocated for will cover persons in long-term-care homes, assisted living in supportive housing, retirement homes and senior care settings, and believe this legislation will be extremely helpful."

Ontario is not the only province to put forward legislation to provide workers and businesses protection

from civil liability related to the unintentional transmission of COVID-19. In fact, both NDP and Liberal governments have introduced similar protections. The NDP government in British Columbia passed legislation that protects people and businesses who can prove they followed, or reasonably believed that they were following, all emergency and public health guidance. The Liberal government in Nova Scotia issued a ministerial direction specifically to protect long-term-care workers who act, or reasonably believe that they acted, in accordance with public health guidance. In addition, more than 30 US states have enacted some type of civil immunity protection for front-line workers. Our government is proud to join these jurisdictions in standing up for the people who make important contributions to their communities and play a key role in the COVID-19 recovery.

The COVID-19 outbreak has had an unprecedented impact on Ontario's court system. Now more than ever, we need to be responsive to ensure that Ontario's court resources are used where they're needed most: to hold accountable bad actors who deliberately ignore public health guidance and laws or act with gross negligence. That's why we're taking action now. This legislation would make it easier to direct court resources to address matters where people, businesses or organizations have harmed others because they either failed to make good-faith efforts to follow applicable public health advice and laws respecting COVID-19 or they acted with gross negligence.

If passed, the proposed legislation would be retroactive to March 17, 2020—when the province declared a state of emergency in response to the COVID-19 outbreak. As of that date, in spite of the emergency, many front-line workers, volunteers, community groups, businesses and organizations continued to provide essential services to Ontarians while at the same time attempting to follow public health advice in relation to protection against the spread of COVID-19. Making the bill retroactive to March reflects the intent of this legislation: to provide civil liability protection from lawsuits arising out of the inadvertent transmission of COVID-19 if Ontarians made an honest effort to follow applicable public health guidelines and laws relating to COVID-19.

Speaker, I also want to highlight one important amendment to this bill we made since I last spoke in the House about this legislation during second reading debate. During public hearings, a number of stakeholders wrote in expressing concerns about vicarious liability, meaning an employer is liable for the wrongful actions—or torts, as they're known in the legal world—of its employees. Our government put forward an amendment at committee to address this very issue. With the amendment we introduced, as an employer, you would not be vicariously liable for your employee's conduct if your employee met the good-faith standard set out in Bill 218. However, if your employee failed to meet that standard—for example, if the employee acted with gross negligence—you as an employer would be vicariously liable for that employee's conduct.

Speaker, this is the right thing to do. Through this amendment, we are ensuring that corporate players are legally responsible for their employees' actions, their bad faith or gross negligence regarding the exposure of COVID-19. This reinforces and supports our commitment to ensure people can seek redress against gross negligence, intentional misconduct and failure to make an honest effort to follow COVID-19 guidance and laws.

COVID-19 has created a great deal of strain and unanswered questions for thousands of workers, volunteers, community organizations and businesses across the province. This bill would be a lifeline for so many because it provides a clear understanding of the civil liability that people and organizations accept when they contribute to Ontario's recovery in these uncertain times. Whether they are providing care in hospitals, long-term care, primary care clinics, home or community care—correctional facilities are also included—or in public health units, all the work that they do is vital.

We've continued to consult with health care workers, businesses, grocery and retail store workers, the charitable sector, non-profit organizations and sport organizations—the list goes on. They have all told us that, despite being informed, acting in good faith and taking prescribed measures, they still fear the implications of litigation related to COVID-19 infection or exposure. They are very concerned that litigation could impact their ability to continue to serve their communities, or bring in employees to help them do so.

Speaker, consider what we heard from the Registered Practical Nurses Association of Ontario. They represent 47,000 registered practical nurses in Ontario, and they said this: "All front-line workers are doing their very best in a rapidly changing environment to adhere to the latest guidance and tools that are available to them. The last thing they should have to worry about is the future threat of being held personally or professionally liable after the pandemic for outcomes beyond their control."

We received another letter, from Family Services Perth-Huron and Family Counselling and Support Services for Guelph-Wellington. They called on the government and said, "Immediately pass an emergency order providing good Samaritan COVID-related liability protection to non-profits if they have followed all public health guidelines in order to avoid catastrophic loss/damage to our organization."

Speaker, this legislation would support Ontario's continued recovery. It would make sure public health and workplace safety remain the top priority of people and businesses, without adding an unnecessary burden to Ontarians who make an honest effort to follow the rules.

The Ontario Hospital Association told us, "The COVID-19 pandemic continues to represent an unprecedented challenge for hospitals in Ontario. Hospitals are working hard to balance their duties towards patients and the public with the potential risks associated with their operational decision-making. The Ontario Hospital Association thanks the government for its ongoing efforts to support the health care sector with legislative measures in the face of the evolving pandemic."

I'd like to highlight some of the additional input we received. The Canadian Generic Pharmaceutical Association wrote us a letter that states, "Throughout the pandemic, CGPA member company employees have worked tirelessly to overcome numerous challenges to ensure that Ontarians and all Canadians have access to the prescription medicines they need." They informed us that their members were concerned about the challenges in providing essential services with the liability risk during the pandemic. It is their view that legal liability should be limited to instances of gross negligence, to ensure the supply of prescription medicine can continue uninterrupted during these challenging times.

We also heard from Canada's largest physician organization, the Canadian Medical Protective Association, with over 40,000 members in Ontario. They told us, "The CMPA is supportive of Bill 218. In terms of statutory liability protection, the CMPA believes it is a positive step in providing reassurance to our valuable front-line health care workers."

Speaker, we've also heard strong support from workers and the businesses who employ them. Across the board, stakeholders representing these groups agreed that the proposed changes would decrease the likelihood of lawsuits for good-faith conduct and would go a long way towards protecting workers. For example, we heard from the Canadian Federation of Independent Business, which represents 42,000 small and medium-sized businesses across Ontario. They voiced their support for this proposed legislation.

Earlier, I highlighted the importance of coaches and volunteers in sports and recreation who are helping to build up our physical and mental health at a time when, quite frankly, we need it the most. As we engaged on these important issues, we received very strong input and insights from individuals and organizations in the community, sports and entertainment sectors. We know that in Ontario, we are passionate about youth and amateur sport. It's a passion that draws athletes and coaches and volunteers who add so much to the fabric of our communities. The proposed legislation would allow everyone involved in youth and amateur sport to safely return to play without fearing legal action.

Think of how important sport is to our community life here in Ontario. Our communities would suffer a disservice if the uncertainty that has developed around COVID-19 was allowed to relegate these skilled and experienced volunteers to the sidelines this winter and in the following seasons. It's why we have taken action to develop the Supporting Ontario's Recovery Act with the helpful advice of so many athletic and sport organizations.

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The Ontario Cheerleading Federation wrote to tell us, "The Ontario Cheerleading Federation is the PSO responsible for the sport of cheerleading in Ontario. Having our PSO entirely responsible for governing commercial businesses creates significant liability concerns. The passage of this bill will relieve this pressure. It will allow us to make decisions with confidence and without fear."

If passed, this legislation would provide the clarity and reassurance needed to ensure we are offering our young people the very best knowledge and expertise that communities have to offer. We heard it could even assist with the economic recovery of the sector, encouraging clubs to offer paid programming.

Our government has also heard from organizations in the non-profit arts and heritage sector. Last week, we received a supportive letter from the Ontario Nonprofit Network, who said, “In our view, this legislation provides the protection that non-profits urgently need to support the recovery and continue to serve our communities.” The support of these organizations has helped to ensure we are proposing legislation that will tangibly support arts and culture sectors as they recover.

Our government remains committed to providing stability and support to our sport and culture industries as our province continues to rebuild. And I can’t tell you how many times I’ve heard from somebody involved in minor sports, whether it be hockey or lacrosse or dance or otherwise, who have said that this is such a relief for them trying to navigate their way through these unprecedented times. They want to give to their community. They want the young people to engage. They want to be able to move past, into the recovery.

But it’s not just sports. It’s not just arts. It’s not just heritage. It’s not just front-line workers. It’s not just front-line workers in health care. It’s broader than that. Agencies that provide social services to families have asked for legislation to protect organizations that have followed public health guidelines. It is important that agencies are protected from litigation that could affect their ability to deliver these important services in the future.

Non-profit organizations are under an exceptional amount of pressure. They’re facing increased caseloads, with many families dealing with financial issues, unemployment and other difficulties as a result of COVID-19. I urge all members, when they talk to their constituency staff, these are the calls that are coming in. These are the people of their community who are struggling. These are the people who are receiving the relief because of this bill.

We want to ensure that Ontario’s municipalities are also equipped with the tools they need to face their most pressing challenges. Municipalities are on the front lines, delivering critical services that people and businesses depend on. From public health and child care to housing and homelessness supports, our municipal partners need flexibility to continue delivering these services, even when they’re facing challenging circumstances.

I know my colleague the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing will have more to say on this a little later. Municipalities across the province have added their voices to help develop legislation that will ensure communities can find creative and safe ways to come together, to recover and grow despite these unprecedented challenges. These same municipalities have expressed strong concerns if the proposed legislation is not passed.

I would like to share what the Association of Municipalities of Ontario told us: “AMO strongly supports the limited liability protection for good-faith efforts of individuals and organizations working to preserve health and safety during the pandemic.” This could impact non-profit and for-profit providers that are funded by municipalities to deliver services on their behalf. This includes local housing corporations, housing and homelessness non-profits, and service providers operating emergency shelters or housing projects.

I think we can all agree these vital services need to be protected. AMO’s letter to us concludes this way: “The COVID-19 pandemic is not over.... As it evolves, good-faith liability protection will help protect municipalities to make the best decisions to serve our residents. We welcome this change.”

Ontarians living in retirement community homes have been hit hard by the COVID-19 outbreak. As we drafted the proposed legislation, we invited input from stakeholder groups, including the Ontario Retirement Communities Association, or ORCA, as it’s known. ORCA represents 95% of all licensed retirement community suites in Ontario, with members caring for nearly 60,000 seniors who live in retirement homes. Its membership also includes over 250 partners who provide products and services to retirement communities throughout the province.

ORCA also wrote to our government and spoke in favour of the changes we’re proposing today. They said, “ORCA welcomes and supports the introduction of Bill 218 and applauds the government’s initiative to provide protection to the hard-working men and women who have been making essential contributions to our communities. Throughout the pandemic, the front-line staff in retirement homes have gone above and beyond to keep our residents and their family members safe while augmenting their services to meet enhanced protocols while ensuring a sense of normalcy in these unprecedented times.”

The health and well-being of Ontario’s retirement home residents, staff and their visitors have guided every step of our government’s response to COVID-19. Throughout the pandemic, we’ve taken action to respond to, prevent and contain the spread of infection in retirement homes. Among the initiatives taken, the government is allocating \$20 million over two years to protect seniors in licensed retirement homes through increased infection control and active screening procedures.

Public Health Ontario has identified priority groups for testing, including retirement home residents, health care providers and others seen as critical.

The government has also established orders to:

—provide retirement homes with more flexibility to recruit and assign staff;

—restrict retirement home employees from working in more than one retirement home, long-term-care home or health care setting; and

—provide the Retirement Homes Regulatory Authority with expanded powers to address outbreaks in retirement homes quickly to address potential management issues.

Ontario has also supported homes in accessing PPE from government supply when needed.

We have also invested over \$118 million in temporary premium pandemic pay for our front-line workers in retirement homes.

Speaker, workers in this sector provide essential care to people across the province. Now, more than ever, we need to ensure that they have all the tools they need to feel safe and supported at work. The proposed legislation builds on our commitment to continue supporting these workers as Ontario safely and gradually opens.

Speaker, I want to be absolutely clear in expressing our government's support for businesses that drive our economy forward and define the character of our communities. We're all well aware that COVID-19 has had a significant impact on small businesses in communities across our province, including many that have put Ontario's vibrant hospitality sector the global map. We stand shoulder to shoulder with small and independent businesses and their workers.

Small businesses account for 98% of all businesses across the province.

We know that in small towns and big cities alike local restaurants are not only huge economic engines but also important cultural and community anchors and places where we gather to reconnect with our friends and family.

The recovery of these businesses is critical for Ontario's recovery. And we knew that many of the impacts of COVID-19 could threaten businesses and the livelihoods they support. That is why we acted swiftly to bring forward supportive measures for the restaurant and foodservice industry.

Beginning in March, I worked with the AGCO to begin identifying and implementing opportunities to support Ontario's vibrant hospitality sector in unprecedented ways. We took responsible actions to make it easier for those skilled professionals and experienced entrepreneurs to do what they do best: serve their loyal customers and communities. The unprecedented challenges our communities, these workers and businesses were facing required a new perspective and an innovative approach.

So we amended a regulation under the Liquor Licence Act to temporarily allow licensed bars and restaurants to sell wine, beer and spirits as part of a food order for takeout or delivery. This introduced an additional revenue option for these businesses at a time when it was greatly needed. We've heard loud and clear that Ontarians appreciate this opportunity to support local businesses. Takeout and delivery options also helped to support social distancing measures—and to be frank, it is simple and convenient for many of us. This was originally intended as a temporary measure to help workers and businesses impacted by COVID-19. I am proud to say that our government is committed to exploring avenues to make this change permanent. We are encouraging everyone to support local restaurants and the foodservice industry now more than ever.

We need these businesses, and these businesses need us. To that end, and recognizing the need to continue

practising social distancing, our government also amended our liquor laws to provide customers with even more delivery options. We made it possible for popular rapid delivery services, such as Uber Eats, to deliver alcohol from the LCBO, the Beer Store or any local manufacturer's retail shop.

We've introduced a number of amendments crafted specifically to support the small businesses that we know are enduring tremendous hardship. In June, we made amendments to the Liquor Licence Act to allow licensees the flexibility to create temporary patio extensions, provided there was no objection from the municipality. Many local businesses took advantage of this change well into the fall, using heaters and blankets to keep their customers warm as the weather got colder. We had a bit of a warm snap last week, and of course the patios were being well used.

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Speaker, these temporary patio extensions were a lifeline for many establishments, allowing them to accommodate more patrons while allowing for safe social distancing. It also provided Ontarians with an additional opportunity to safely visit a licensed bar or restaurant and support these community businesses. I'd like to think this will be one of the enduring images of our community during this difficult time.

Our government has been committed to supporting the hospitality sector since day one. Illustrative of that are the steps we took in December of 2019 to bring Ontario up to date with other jurisdictions in Canada and around the world with respect to serving hours at licensed bars and restaurants at commercial airports. These establishments in certain airports after security are now allowed to serve alcohol 24 hours a day, as they would be in most jurisdictions around the world. Supporting these businesses and jobs—and, importantly, keeping our hospitality workers safe—remains a top priority for our government.

Much like the hospitality industry, the COVID-19 outbreak is taking a toll on the construction sector. Just before I turn to the construction sector, I want to say one more thing about restaurants and bars and the hospitality industry. The changes that we've made have had some positive spin-off. It got communities thinking about how they operate their main streets. I know of several communities—I talked to a mayor just a couple of days ago about how they started to have patios, and the streetscape—they closed the streets so that people could come down on a Friday night and they could experience, in a safe environment, all that the downtown had to offer.

People really took hold. It has captured their imagination. Now they're thinking about next year already. They're already thinking, "Hey, we did that once; why don't we do it again? Why don't we get out there? When it's safe to bring people from farther away, we've got a venue here that we're really proud of." So we're going to continue to work with that sector, with the bars and restaurants and the hospitality sector, to continue to showcase everything that Ontario has to offer, especially in some of the downtowns.

But the other positive spin-off—and this comes with the food delivery and alcohol with food delivery. I can tell you, we have so many—you talk to Spirits Canada, and so many of their members are here. Whether it be vodka out of Alliston, whisky out of Collingwood or wine out of Niagara—or Prince Edward county, for that matter—we've got such a vibrant and growing industry. This has allowed, with delivery, to have local products sent to people. They have greater choice. I can tell you, I've seen, more than once, where individuals have gone in and they've purchased a local product that they otherwise may not have purchased and they got to try it. It might be Vodkwo now even; who knows? It's all over the province. We have these tremendous, tremendous providers, so I'm very proud that we're able to support that.

But I do want to turn to the construction industry. We've taken action and we're continuing to take action to ensure our workers in construction can continue to do the work of building Ontario and doing it safely.

When the government responded to COVID-19's unprecedented impact on the justice system, we suspended limitation periods and the time periods when a step must be taken in a legal matter. This was a necessary measure to help minimize uncertainty for people involved in legal proceedings during a time when normal court proceedings were not possible. However, the order could have had the consequence of delaying payments from being made in the construction sector, possibly leaving many workers without paycheques to cash.

To explain briefly, Madam Speaker, under the Construction Act, a construction project owner is expected to do a lien holdback—a certain payment from a contractor—until specified time periods associated with construction liens expire. There's a 45-day period and a 90-day period—it's a particularly complicated area of law—but similar rules apply to other payers, as the time periods were suspended by the emergency order. Many of the payments to workers would not have been made.

We heard from key stakeholders in the construction sector, and our government took immediate action to ensure payments in the industry were not impacted as a result of the order. We lifted a suspension of limitation periods under the Construction Act, allowing the release of holdback payments to contractors and subcontractors. This helped resolve what could have been a significant cash flow problem in the construction industry.

The COVID-19 outbreak has altered nearly every part of our life in the province, and this government has been very surgical in some of its intentional moves, like this bill—a very targeted, very intentional way to move Ontario into and through recovery. At the Ministry of the Attorney General, we've worked around the clock to ensure that justice not only remains accessible but that our justice system evolves and modernizes—and stays that way.

The Ministry of the Attorney General has the second-largest front-line service staff department in government. It's the second-largest property manager in the government. But we've acted quickly to make investments in

technology, from laptops to conference lines, VPNs. We've provided access to Zoom and other digital platforms to allow the courts to transition to remote proceedings. We accelerated a number of the ministry's modernization plans. We brought them forward—things like e-filing, which the profession has called on for decades. We took the opportunity to move that forward as our government is looking for other ways to modernize.

Speaker, I'm happy to say, in addition to that, Ontario now offers e-filing for more than 400 documents in civil and family matters. We've rolled out a new online court case search service to make it easier for people to access information. They previously had to call the court office or go to the court office, line up and look at the kiosk. It's all online now. We put so much more of it online so that the public can see it. This is an access-to-justice issue as well. It's a transparency issue. So we're not just modernizing and moving it forward and making it better for the people who are accessing the system, we're making it more transparent and we're making it more accessible.

We're gradually rolling out access to Thomson Reuters CaseLines, which is a document-sharing e-hearing platform that facilitates remote and in-person hearings. This is a major investment in the future of Ontario's courts. It's easier to show on a screen how this works—

M^{me} Lucille Collard: Point of order.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): I recognize the member for Ottawa–Vanier on a point of order.

M^{me} Lucille Collard: I'm not sure I understand what the Attorney General is talking about. Bill 218 is about municipal elections—he hasn't mentioned that at all—and it's about civil liability. We're talking about construction, about alcohol. I don't understand.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): I'll just remind members to make sure their remarks tie back to the bill.

Back to the Attorney General.

Hon. Doug Downey: Absolutely, Madam Speaker. My colleague the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing will deal with one part of the bill that was queried.

But I guess I'll recap, because maybe it was missed: The Ministry of the Attorney General is the second-largest employer of front-line employees in the government. So the things we're doing in terms of modernizing and bringing online and bringing the system forward is dealing with front-line staff and making sure that it's a safe place for them to be. And notwithstanding these things—and I do want to talk about a few more—things that help those front-line staff, help the people who are interacting with the service—it's the front-line staff where some of these liability concerns come. These are major investments. They're not only helping with the liability concerns of people working the front lines—because we need not only to protect them, we need to encourage them to show up for work, and liability is a major factor. So this bill will help with that liability.

We want to make sure that justice services are available when needed. It's critical for Ontarians and businesses. We've moved away from in-person service of documents

for civil cases—again, where people are connecting, so the in-service doesn't have to happen. We changed it so that people can email and serve on the crown electronically.

We've fast-tracked legislation for remote commissioning and expanding notary services, again, so you don't have to be face to face. Lawyers were meeting clients in parking lots and signing across a car hood because they wanted to be outside and they didn't want to have direct contact. I heard all sorts of stories around people doing workarounds so that they could be safe. Well, we brought forward online commissioning so that it became a non-issue if a lawyer or a client wanted the ability to do that.

We've paved the way for documents to be commissioned remotely. The legislation also expanded the services to better serve Ontarians, including in rural and remote communities, so they don't even have to travel out of their community for some of these services. They can do it remotely, do it online. That helps protect people, and it helps protect front-line service providers. Front-line service providers are afraid of liability—

Ms. Peggy Sattler: Point of order.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): I recognize the member from London West on a point of order.

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Ms. Peggy Sattler: I'm listening to the Attorney General, and I have to point out that there was nothing in the bill dealing with online services. Bill 218 deals with protection for for-profit long-term-care-home operators and eliminating ranked ballots in municipal elections.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Thank you for the point of order. I'm going to remind the Attorney General to make sure his remarks are tied to the bill and that it's clear to everyone in the House.

Hon. Doug Downey: Well, Madam Speaker, I will do my best to tie to the bill, but I don't know if they understand what I'm saying, because I'm talking about front-line service providers who are afraid of being sued because they're front-line service providers. That's exactly what Bill 218 is. We've taken so many measures. Bill 218 is part of the measures of protecting individuals who will feel safe, who will go to work; they will show up for work and they will do their jobs and they will provide service to Ontario as we go through a recovery.

Madam Speaker, we are talking about people who are nervous about engaging in their communities. They're nervous about going and receiving services. This is exactly what Bill 218 is about. This is about giving people a sense of security and a sense of protection so that if they follow public health advice in good faith, with an honest effort, if they take public health advice and apply it and believe they're doing so—the test; I've said it many, many times—if they do that, if they have a level of protection. That includes front-line service workers who work for the government, that includes court workers, that includes restaurant workers, it includes sports organizations. We've talked about all of this, Madam Speaker.

I don't know why the opposition is discounting front-line service workers just because they work for the government. We need to evolve our systems. We need to

improve our services. We need remote services. We need to modernize. We need to let people be able to access services in a safe way. When they can't access service in a remote way, then we want to make sure that those providing that front-line service have the protection that they need to feel safe and protected, as we all would want them to do.

As we continue to respond to the dangers of COVID-19, the health and safety of Ontarians remains our first priority. We cannot let our guard down as our province takes every step to contain the second wave of COVID-19. The severity of this wave depends on all of us—all of us—following the public health measures to stop the spread, and I want to thank and acknowledge the thousands of workers and volunteers across the province who have put their own health at risk to keep others and their families safe.

The proposed legislation would provide protection for those workers who make an honest effort to follow public health guidance and laws related to COVID-19. This would allow workers and volunteers to focus on their jobs and supporting their communities and not about worrying about liability for unintentional transmission of COVID-19.

I also want to state again that this does not impact anyone's ability to take legal actions against persons who committed gross negligence or intentional misconduct, the truly bad actors: those who are deliberately ignoring public health guidance. Our government does not believe in providing protection for those who engage in this type of behaviour and threaten our province's recovery.

As we work to stop the spread of COVID-19 and rebuild our economy, we are taking measures to ensure that front-line health care workers, local businesses and volunteers who act in good faith have the support they need to continue doing their job.

Speaker, as I've stated today, we cannot afford to allow the valuable expertise, experience and knowledge Ontarians have to be left on the sidelines as communities work to rebuild and recover.

When volunteers want to give of their time, when businesses want to help rehire staff and when charities want to help those in need, we need to be there to encourage them with clarity, with reassurance and with support. Thanks to the input and insights we have heard from across Ontario, that is exactly what we are proposing to do through this legislation to support Ontario's recovery. I urge all members of the House to stand up for workers, volunteers, non-profits and businesses across the province by voicing their support for this bill.

Thank you. I look forward to hearing from the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Further debate?

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: I was thinking the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing was going to take his rotation, but I guess he's going to speak later.

I rise on behalf of my constituents of London-Fanshawe to speak on Bill 218. There was a rally this morning. We had families at Queen's Park who have had

loved ones in long-term care. They were out there filled with sadness and frustration, expressing themselves to tell this government that they oppose Bill 218. Over 2,000 long-term-care residents and staff who have cared for them have died of COVID-19 in this province. That's 2,000 lives cut short, 2,000 grieving families, 2,000 communities left without vital members. And that's 2,000 lives that could have been saved, because evidence has repeatedly shown that if swifter, earlier action was taken, families would not be grieving today the way they have been.

This morning we all woke up to the same inboxes filled with Ontarians sharing their heartbreaking stories in hopes that Bill 218 wouldn't pass. This morning we all saw, heard or joined the rally of families whose parent, grandparent, sibling or friend was left to suffer alone through this pandemic. They shared story after story of deplorable conditions, delayed care and failures to meet standards. Our most vulnerable were left to live in inhumane conditions. Where can they find justice? Who will be held accountable? Who will pay the price?

This government could have and should have done better. I feel the families' frustrations today because this government has shown in rushing Bill 218 through the legislative process that it is capable of moving fast. It's just always choosing to move fast in the wrong direction.

Instead of tabling this legislation that protects the very bad actors the Premier seems to call out in his daily press briefings, he could have passed the Time to Care Act, which would legislate a minimum standard of care.

He could have passed my Windsor West colleague's bill, the More Than a Visitor Act, that would enshrine caregivers' rights.

He could have passed my Kitchener Centre colleague's seniors' advocate bill, a much-needed office to protect our province's growing population of vulnerable seniors.

He could have followed the example set by the BC government and hired thousands of staff over the summer, made those full-time jobs with benefits and paid staff a living wage.

He could have ensured that all homes had the PPE they needed back in March.

He could have included the long-term-care sector in the initial pandemic planning.

He could have made sure to never lock families out of long-term-care homes and separate them from their loved ones.

He could have done what he needed to do to properly care for vulnerable residents and alleviate the burden of exhausted staff. Instead, this government continues to prioritize profits over care.

I'm going to just read from the Toronto Star on November 13 this year: "That investigation found that residents in for-profit facilities are about twice as likely to catch COVID-19 and die than residents in non-profits, and ... four times as likely to become infected and die from the virus as those in a municipally owned home.

"In a follow-up report, the Star found that, while all long-term-care facilities receive government funding

using the same formula, over the last decade public and non-profit homes have topped up their government funding and for-profit homes paid out more than \$1.5 billion to shareholders and executives."

The opposition tabled amendments that would exempt both the government and long-term-care operators from liability protections. The government chose to vote those down. It is inappropriate for the government to insulate itself from the consequences of its own negligence.

In the Premier's press briefings, he speaks earnestly about protecting vulnerable seniors, but his words don't match the actions of this government. We keep hearing about the iron ring in long-term-care homes. People question whether it even existed.

We heard that all long-term-care homes had the PPE they needed, but not all of them did; they didn't have it.

We heard that bad actors would be held accountable. This bill is proof that they never will be.

The government's own commission said that the hardest-hit homes had "insufficient leadership capacity," staffing shortages and weak infection prevention and control.

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In addition to calling for more full-time positions in long-term-care homes, the commission also recommended better collaboration between the most vulnerable care homes, public health units and local hospitals, and urged the province to formalize these relationships proactively. Where in Bill 218 are those systemic issues addressed?

The Ontarians who live and work in long-term care and their families need action today, not words.

Once again, residents in for-profit homes are experiencing worse COVID-19 outcomes in cases and deaths. We are seeing a repeat of what happened in the first wave. We should know better. And when we know better, we should do better.

This is largely, in part, because for-profit homes had the lowest proportion of single-occupancy rooms, had older design standards and higher levels of chain ownership. None of the government's new legislation does anything to mitigate those risks. Instead of holding for-profit homes accountable and mandating that they modernize, Bill 218 further lets them off the hook.

Speaker, every day I hear from Ontarians who are crying out for accountability. Their parent, grandparent, spouse or friend died alone and in pain. They died confused and missing their loved one. Workers were forced to work in extremely heartbreaking and challenging conditions. Instead of spending the time to listen to these grieving families, this government chose to speed this bill through the legislative process. Why was it protecting the for-profit long-term-care-home lobby more than the important part of this whole pandemic— these families— and giving them the courtesy to listen?

I just want to read some emails that I had.

From Andrew:

"At my mom's funeral, she looked like she went through hell! I had to stay six feet from her. I was not allowed to kiss my mom goodbye.

“All who lost loved ones at these COVID-19-ridden long-term-care homes should be allowed to get truth, full, open and fair justice.”

Annie’s mom was also in Orchard Villa. She wrote:

“We are heartbroken that our mom’s last two months of life were so distressing. Mom was doing well, it was far from her time to go. Her death was a needless and avoidable loss.

“We live in a society governed by laws and rules. If we follow them, there’s no consequences, but if we don’t there are.

“By passing Bill 218 you are acknowledging that it is permissible for” long-term-care “facilities to break rules and not be punished or be held accountable for their wrongdoing.”

Diane from Port Sydney wrote in an email to me, “I am trying to protect my mom in rejecting Bill 218. Together we must protect our vulnerable seniors over the multi-million dollar long-term-care industry and their high-priced lobbyists.”

Speaker, I am not sure what else this government needs as proof that people have been suffering under COVID-19 and that families deserve to have answers. They refused a public inquiry in order to give families those answers. And now, they’ve put this bill, Bill 218, and have made it so difficult to hold for-profit long-term-care homes accountable in the court system. They truly have turned their back on families. I thought I’d seen it all when this government enacted the “notwithstanding” clause. But this is truly not what I expected from the COVID-19—

Hon. Paul Calandra: We didn’t use the “notwithstanding” clause.

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: That was in the Toronto act.

Hon. Paul Calandra: We didn’t enact it. You’ve got it completely wrong.

Interjection.

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: Yes—threatened to use it; that’s correct.

Hon. Paul Calandra: Thank you.

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: You’re welcome.

Regardless, I thought I’d seen it all when they threatened to use the “notwithstanding” clause, but this tops that—to not give families justice, seek justice for the negligence that had occurred under COVID-19, to give their families some peace of mind for the loved ones they lost.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Further debate?

M^{me} Lucille Collard: Today, I’m rising to voice my continued opposition to Bill 218 as it currently stands and make a last call for caution before this government implements heavy-handed changes, which reduce both access to justice and local democracy for Ontarians.

As I have warned throughout this process, it is inappropriate to apply the same standard of care to both long-term-care operators who care for the elderly and small businesses engaging in voluntary transactions with customers.

Ontarians put their faith in long-term-care-home operators to provide humane and appropriate care for some of the most vulnerable members of our society. This caregiving duty has been accepted willingly by providers, and it should be reflected in higher expectations for the standard of care provided to their residents. Put simply, we should not be holding those who care for our most vulnerable to the same legal standards that we expect of sports leagues and small businesses. It is an overly broad approach that will undermine the ability of those families who have suffered through the loss of their loved ones from seeking justice through our courts. It’s the undermining of access to justice for convenience.

Further, this is occurring before we even have a final report from the Long-Term Care COVID-19 Commission. What happens if this commission finds systemic negligence that led to preventable loss of life for Ontarians after we’ve made it essentially impossible for Ontarians to sue long-term-care providers. Whose interest would that be in? It wouldn’t benefit Ontarians. It wouldn’t benefit long-term-care providers who took the appropriate precautions to care for and protect their residents in these very different past few months.

What we know is that the residents of Ontario’s for-profit long-term-care homes have been experiencing significantly worse outcomes during the pandemic generally, both in terms of caseloads and deaths, than those living in municipal or non-profit care facilities. This suggests that there may be a systemic cause which is resulting in different health outcomes, which is in the control of individual providers. To strip Ontarians of the ability to seek justice before we even have further information about such disparities is reckless and unjustified in the circumstances.

Schedule 2 of Bill 218 is about municipal elections— and it’s too bad the Attorney General didn’t speak to this instead of talking about items not in the bill. Bill 218’s heavy-handed removal of municipal ranked ballot elections is an attack on local democracy and on the autonomy of municipalities. Municipalities have had the freedom to evaluate whether ranked ballots work for them. Those who have explored them further, such as London, have done so thoughtfully and carefully. They found that these elections enhance diversity in government and elect officials who better represent the democratic interests of their constituents. To pretend that the only relevant factors at play are cost and administrative consistency is to ignore these incredible benefits for local democracy.

We should never say that democratic expression is too expensive or inconvenient to pursue, but that’s exactly what this bill is doing. And what’s more, it’s doing it in the face of municipal governments who have been screaming that they want to run ranked ballot elections. Municipalities such as Kitchener and Cambridge have invested considerable effort, time and money into studying whether ranked ballots work for them and have held referendums on making the change.

When we talk about cost, it will be an incredible waste of time and money for municipalities, such as London,

Kitchener and Cambridge, to be blocked from practising ranked ballot elections. The mayor of London even came to committee to ask for an exception for London, owing to their having already gone through this process, but this government rejected my amendment to exempt London from this change. What that means is that this legislation is giving priority to administrative convenience over local democracy. It's giving priority to very big government heavy-handedness that the Premier has always complained about over the ability of municipalities to choose a system of democracy which improves participation and diversity.

For these reasons, Madam Speaker, I cannot support this bill and will be voting against it.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Further debate?

Hon. Steve Clark: It's a pleasure to rise in the House to continue debate on the proposed Supporting Ontario's Recovery and Municipal Elections Act, 2020. I want to thank Attorney General Downey for giving me some time to put some comments on the record regarding municipalities.

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I want to take this opportunity again, as I have done prior in the House, to really congratulate Ontario's 444 municipalities on how they've been able to respond during the pandemic. From the onset, we've been working in partnership with municipalities to ensure that they have the tools that they need to adapt to the new challenges that COVID-19 has presented, and also to maintain the critical services that people rely on.

Our government wants to ensure that our front-line workers can continue to effectively provide those critical services to the people of Ontario. That's why our government has taken action to provide municipalities and front-line workers across our province with peace of mind so that they can focus on the important work that they have in front of them to getting our communities back on track.

We want our municipal partners to continue to keep our communities safe. We want that to be their top priority. Our proposed changes that are in this bill bring predictability and will ensure that the electoral process is more consistent across municipal, provincial and federal elections. Also, as we've said many times in this House, it will respect taxpayers' dollars.

Mr. Speaker, there have been a number of comments made this afternoon regarding the Municipal Elections Act, so I thought that I would take people not just through the proposed changes, but really for them to understand what is included in the Municipal Elections Act, because it's an act that we put a lot of time and effort in, but also to move forward with the proposed changes so that we can get municipalities back to some of the other initiatives that we're working with them on.

I think most members know that the Municipal Elections Act sets out the rules for voters and for candidates who want to participate in a local election. It regulates the conduct of municipal council and school board elections as well. The act goes through some specific rules for a variety of aspects of the municipal election, including who

is ultimately eligible to vote, details for candidates and deadlines for candidates and for voters for required documents to participate in the election. There is also a process for voting in a traditional voting place; campaign finance rules which are certainly extremely important not just for our municipal election candidates but also people who want to contribute to elections; and also compliance and enforcement provisions that are around the act.

I believe, as I think most members of the Legislature would agree, that having an election that's run efficiently is something that we all want. In fact, one of the major pieces that this government has acted upon, a long-standing request of municipal clerks and treasurers, organizations like AMO and our own independent Chief Electoral Officer, was a change that this government made earlier this year, and I firmly believe this is the most important change that we're making.

Some might disagree, that the ranked ballot is more important, but I firmly—and I've said this in the House many, many times. Moving towards a single list of electors for both municipalities and the province, something for which many, many calls to previous governments were ignored, is such an important effort, and I want to thank the members of the government for supporting me on moving towards this. I want to thank the Chief Electoral Officer for his advocacy for this. I've met with him many times, not just since our election as a government in 2018, but prior when I was in opposition.

The single voters list is going to be more accurate. It's going to result in fewer corrections. It's going to result in fewer delays on election day. Just generally, anyone who runs an election needs to have the right information. Too many times, we would finish an election either at the provincial level or at the municipal level and we would have complaints. In fact, I remember soliciting support from all parties. I actually got signatures from all parties, calling on the government to move forward to the single list of electors. Again, I want to thank all of the partners at AMO and AMCTO and also the Chief Electoral Officer for this.

Beginning on January 1, 2024, the Chief Electoral Officer for Ontario is going to be responsible for establishing the single list of electors, or the single voters list, for electors for both of our elections. It's going to cut red tape, it's going to save municipalities money, and it's going to make voting easier. Again, I want to thank all those municipal clerks out there. As someone who served briefly as a chief administrative officer before I became an MPP and also prior, when I was a mayor, I just want to thank them all. They do such a tremendous job during the municipal election period, and I want them to know how much we appreciate the work that they do and how we want to continue to work with them.

Our proposed changes regarding ranked ballots would ensure the way that people vote in the provincial and in the federal elections is the same way that they vote in municipal elections. I believe that having consistency in the election process is very, very important. Our change would ensure that the electoral system in our province

remains the same no matter whether you're electing a member of Parliament, a member of provincial Parliament, or a local mayor or a local councillor.

It makes sense for taxpayers to not bear the unnecessary cost of changing an election. We're in the middle of a pandemic. There are a number of priorities that our municipal partners need to focus on. We're working in partnership with them. But having a patchwork approach to changing the way that we select mayors and councillors should not be the priority of our municipal partners at this time. We want them focused on the health and safety of Ontarians, and that's why we presented this change. I know that we might disagree in that approach, but to have a system that's consistent, I think, is very important.

I also want to touch on some other very important measures that municipalities are working on right now that I do want to highlight, because a number of municipalities throughout the last month have been asking me about these processes. We stand firm in our commitment to improve local service delivery and ensure taxpayers' dollars are used efficiently. I just want to touch on, in a couple of minutes, a few of the information items that we've sent out to municipalities recently.

We're helping our municipal partners find better ways to operate. We've made up to \$350 million available to all 444 municipalities through two programs that will help them lower costs and help them improve services for residents over the long term. I want to thank the 39 large urban municipalities. We had 100% uptake on our Audit and Accountability Fund. The Municipal Modernization Fund is for our smaller and more rural municipalities. Through these two programs, we're ensuring that every municipality receives funding to find efficiencies and modernize their service—very important in the middle of the pandemic. We've had a number of conversations with them about those priorities, and I want to thank many of them for implementing this.

Earlier this year, in January at the ROMA conference, we announced 27 joint projects that involved more than 130 municipalities to find improved service delivery. I want to highlight a couple of them just to give them a shout-out for the work that they've done. In Wellington county, there were seven municipalities that worked together to identify potential savings and provide better services for sharing IT. They funded a number of local projects that focused on streamlining development approvals. Again, I want to thank those municipalities. I'm going to highlight one in a few minutes that—really, I want to thank them for the work that they've done.

We've also announced up to \$8.1 million to help small—

Ms. Catherine Fife: Is that in the bill?

Hon. Steve Clark: Well, I want to give municipalities recognition.

Ms. Catherine Fife: But it's not in Bill 218.

Hon. Steve Clark: But you're asking about municipalities.

I'm going to give a shout-out to a couple of municipalities, if the opposition would allow me, because I value the

work that they've done. I think they deserve recognition. The municipality of Brockton is examining their municipal facilities, including energy, water use and space requirements, to identify ways to meet community needs. The municipality of Tweed found \$90,000 in potential savings through a third-party review that made recommendations about going digital. I think that's the one issue that we've heard from municipalities that our government needs to put some time and some effort to, and I hope the information that we've sent out to municipalities will result in some savings.

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The community that I want to shout-out to—because the President of the Treasury Board is leading our digital initiative—is the city of Pickering. They used part of the funding we've given them to complete a review of their paper-based building permit system. The review resulted in a recommendation to adopt an online system, which the city has already implemented.

The city of Guelph—I see the leader of the Green Party—has used some funding recently to review the time, attendance and scheduling performance systems they have in the city. The mayor, Cam Guthrie, said that the city would be using that review as part of a larger project that looks into updating their human resources process.

One of the things that we've heard countless times from municipalities during COVID-19 is the fact that we need to respond better in a digital environment, and many municipalities are looking for all parties in the Legislature to really gear towards providing that opportunity for them.

I want everyone in the House to know that we'll be launching the new intake of the fund very soon, so that on the Audit and Accountability Fund, larger municipalities will be able to apply and use them to find savings in the 2021 municipal budget cycle. I think that new intake is critical. Municipalities are facing the new realities that COVID-19 has brought, and it's more important than ever that we need to help them find savings and provide the municipal support.

With the success of the first round of the Audit and Accountability Fund, we're very excited about the second intake that will come out soon—\$6 million have been available in this round.

In closing, again, I just want to highlight the work that municipalities have done, the feedback they've given us. Last month, we provided the second phase of the Social Services Relief Fund. It provides a total of \$510 million to help our municipal partners and to help 110,000 Ontarians who are very vulnerable at this time.

Our government recognizes how important those funds are. I want to thank Minister Phillips for his recent announcement of the Ontario Municipal Partnership Fund. We made a promise that we would provide that information for municipalities as soon as we can, and I thank him for his ongoing engagement from municipalities. I think it's very important that we give them these budget decisions so that they can plan well in advance for this opportunity.

The other thing—

Ms. Catherine Fife: They were planning for ranked ballots.

Hon. Steve Clark: —and I'm glad that the member for Waterloo brought this up. We were pleased, and again, the Premier led the way with the federal government on providing the money under the Safe Restart Agreement. It provided a lot of dollars for municipalities to help them lead the recovery. Again, I firmly believe that municipalities will be leading the recovery.

I'm pleased to announce and to share that all municipalities have now received their initial allocation under the Safe Restart Agreement. We're currently reviewing applications for phase 2 so that we can identify those municipalities that require additional funding to help with their operating pressures because of COVID-19.

Speaker, this was a historic agreement. Ontario's 444 municipalities have the support and the flexibility they need to address the budget shortfalls that they will deal with as part of COVID-19, to help limit the spread of the virus, to chart a path for a very, very strong recovery in our communities. Again, I firmly believe that municipalities will be leading in the recovery.

Speaker, just in conclusion in the few seconds I have left, our government believes it's very important that the way people vote in provincial and federal elections is the same way that they vote in municipal elections. Under the current system, voters understand where their vote is going and how it's going to be counted, and I think that's vitally important.

We are bringing forward these changes to maintain people's confidence in the system. Again, I believe that the decision we made on the single voters list is tremendously important, one that so many people have supported and called for, for many, many years. But again, our proposal on ranked ballots provides consistency for municipal elections. That's so very important.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Further debate?

Ms. Peggy Sattler: I rise to participate in this fast-tracked third reading debate on Bill 218 to talk about what this legislation really does, because we have not heard that from the other side of this Legislature.

I want to refer to the public input that was provided on Wednesday, November 4, and I want to refer in particular to one panel of those five hours of public hearings. The Ontario Nonprofit Network was there, and they, of course, represent 58,000 non-profits and charities around this province. They were seeking good Samaritan protection for the thousands—hundreds of thousands—of volunteers and volunteer boards of directors who do such amazing, good work in our communities. We have all heard from those non-profits and those charitable organizations, and we support their request for good Samaritan protection so that they are not held liable for good-faith efforts that their volunteers may have made during the pandemic.

But at that same panel, Speaker, Gary Will was there from Will Davidson, which is a law firm that represents 2,000 grieving families in this province who are taking legal action. They are engaged in class action lawsuits

against long-term-care-home operators for negligence that they allege against the residents of these long-term-care homes. Gary Will was there along with two of these families, who spoke about what it felt like to see this government bringing in legislation that is going to protect these long-term-care-home operators from legal liability.

The third presenter on that panel was London mayor Ed Holder. Now, London is the only municipality in the province that has run a ranked ballot election, in 2018, a highly, highly successful ranked ballot election that has been acclaimed across the country. Other municipalities were looking at London as a leader on local democracy and making democratic processes at the local level more participatory. He was there as the only deputant of the 15 people who appeared before MPPs to talk specifically about schedule 2 of Bill 218, which eliminates the ability of municipalities to conduct ranked ballot elections.

So you can imagine, Speaker, that having these three deputants on the same panel—the Ontario Nonprofit Network is seeking good Samaritan protection for those terrific, well-meaning volunteers who are engaged in swim clubs, hockey clubs, skating clubs etc., along with a lawyer who is representing 2,000 families who are taking legal action against negligent long-term-care-home operators, and along with the mayor of London, the only city to conduct a ranked ballot election. It just shows you how horribly wrong, how absurd this bill really is, and what it is truly about.

If the government was actually interested in good Samaritan protection for all of those worthy volunteers and those amazing charitable organizations, then it would have brought in good Samaritan legislation. But it did not. It has brought in legislation that is going to protect for-profit long-term-care-home operators from legal liability, for damages that may have been caused, and it is going to remove the ability of locally elected councils and municipalities across this province to determine for themselves how they will govern, how they will elect the people who are going to represent the people in their communities. Speaker, to suggest that there is any kind of a level playing field between the long-term-care-home chains and those thousands of non-profit organizations is ludicrous. It is ludicrous to suggest that the government, that entities of the crown, should be held to the same standard of care as a hockey coach, as a swim coach, as a skating coach. It's ridiculous, Speaker, and we saw that in the presentations that were made to this committee.

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Speaker, in the short time I have, I did want to speak specifically about ranked ballots, because, as I mentioned, my community of London is the only municipality in Ontario to have conducted a ranked ballot election, and we did it very, very effectively. We did it in a way that garnered attention and interest from across the country from other municipalities and other provinces, in fact, who want to do something similar in their communities. I asked the mayor of London, "Did the government consult with you before they introduced this legislation?" No, it did not.

The Association of Municipalities of Ontario did a written presentation. They indicated that there was zero

consultation with any one of the 444 municipalities in this province. We know that under the Municipal Act, the province, the government of Ontario, has a responsibility to consult with municipalities on matters of mutual interest. Surely decisions about how municipalities govern themselves are a matter of mutual interest, but this government chose not to consult.

Whether you believe in ranked ballots, whether you support ranked ballots, that's not the issue. The issue is respect for local autonomy. The issue is respect for local decision-making. It's allowing local municipalities to make those decisions for themselves about how they are going to elect the people who represent their communities.

The government's justification for moving ahead with eliminating ranked ballots is that there is a need for consistency, that it's too confusing for municipal voters to have to face ranked ballots in the voting booth. But in London, 68% of the voters who voted in 2018 understood very clearly what a ranked ballot was. They took the opportunity to rank their choices on that ballot. They knew exactly what they were doing.

We know that even within municipal elections there is already no consistency across this province. Some municipalities elect councillors at large. Other municipalities group wards and they elect one, two or three councillors per grouping of wards. Some municipalities elect regional councillors; others do not. Some municipalities directly elect deputy mayors; the city of London does not. There's no consistency even within the municipal sector, and there is no need to have municipal ballots look exactly like provincial and federal ballots. That decision about how democratically elected local councillors are going to be elected should be a decision that is made at the local level.

The other reason that we heard from this government for Bill 218's schedule 2 was that they didn't want irresponsible municipalities making frivolous spending decisions about going down the "rabbit hole"—which is what the Attorney General referred to it as—of ranked ballot voting. Speaker, I can't tell you how disrespectful that is to the locally elected people who serve at the front lines, who have been doing everything they can to help Ontarians get through this pandemic.

Municipalities like London—in fact, it's going to cost London \$51,000 to revert back to first past the post after having run a ranked ballot election in 2018. And when we moved an amendment to exempt London from Bill 218, the government refused to support it. Speaker, I think that is so telling. It is so telling about what Bill 218 is really about. As I said earlier, it's about protecting long-term-care-home chains, and it's about undermining local democracy. It's this big government stepping in and telling locally elected councillors what they can do. Speaker, municipalities like Kingston and Cambridge have already passed referendums in which their citizens have said, "Yes, we want to move ahead with ranked balloting," and they should be allowed to do so.

We know that 14 municipalities sent input to this committee stating their support for allowing municipalities to go in that direction and we know municipalities are

responsible fiscal managers. They will do what's in the best interests of their communities and they should have the right to do so.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Stan Cho): Further debate?

Mr. Percy Hatfield: Over here, Speaker. Over here.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Stan Cho): Sorry. I recognize the member for Guelph.

Mr. Mike Schreiner: Speaker, it's nice to see you in the chair. It's the first time you've been in the chair when I have spoken in the House today.

I rise to contribute to the debate on Bill 218. Speaker, you know what? The government has tried to pass off a lot of things as COVID recovery over the past few months. I was disappointed but not surprised to see so many bills attacking environmental protections, but what truly shocked me was to see the government attack local democracy in the name of COVID recovery.

So I ask the members opposite, how can you sit here at Queen's Park in good conscience and tell residents, mayors and city councils that they cannot take steps to improve their democracy? How dare the Premier use the iron hand of big government to stop people from making elections more democratic, healthier and inclusive? How can the government even consider that less democracy is somehow better for fighting COVID-19? How is it part of anything to do with COVID recovery?

It's so disheartening to me to see COVID being weaponized to attack local democracy and to attack improvements around electoral reform.

London was the first city in Ontario to use ranked ballots, and it was a huge success. According to a study by Unlock Democracy, London council, elected under a ranked ballot system, has a stronger democratic mandate, based on a mathematical model of voter preferences, than any city in Ontario. No wonder London city council voted 14 to 1 to oppose the Premier's attack on local elections.

Fifteen city councils now in just the few weeks we've been able to debate this have passed resolutions condemning the Ontario government for banning ranked ballots in Bill 218 and for micromanaging local elections. Barrie, Brantford, Cambridge, Cobourg, Grey Highlands, Kingston, London, Moonbeam, Mono, Peterborough, Prince Edward county and Thunder Bay have all passed resolutions saying, "Let us make our own decision when it comes to improving our democracy."

Ranked ballots are one of the best tools we have to increase diversity on municipal councils. We saw this in London. And the government is taking that tool away from local governments. Numerous studies have shown that voting systems using ranked ballots leads to more cooperation and less confrontation, more working together and less hyper-partisanship on city councils. Yet the government is taking that away.

The irony for me is that the government, right now, when it comes to addressing COVID, is saying, "We're going to take our hands off the wheel and let local municipalities and local medical health officers make more decisions, but when it comes to your democracy,

we're going to tell you that can't make your own decisions."

They want to jump in and micromanage local democracy. One of the excuses for this is that the government is putting a price on democracy. I ask the members opposite; I ask the people of Ontario: It costs 10 cents for London to conduct a ranked ballot election. Is democracy worth 10 cents? I'd say it's worth a heck of a lot more than 10 cents. I'd actually say democracy is priceless.

1520

Dave Meslin, the creative director of Unlock Democracy said it best: "As America begins to recover from four years of attacks on democracy, decency and truth, this government is about to become the first and only government in Canada to ban a common voting system that was already in use. With zero consultation." A form of voting, frankly, that was good enough for the members opposite to elect their own leader, but somehow is not good enough for the residents of municipalities all across this province to elect their mayors and councillors.

You know, Speaker, democracy is fragile—

Hon. Paul Calandra: It's working. You're changing my mind

Mr. Mike Schreiner: I'm working on changing the House leader's mind on this one. Give me a few more minutes, here, and I'll have it changed.

Democracy is fragile, Speaker. We have seen that. That is one lesson we have learned over the last few years: the fragility of democracies. I would argue that we, as legislators, as elected members of this House, should do everything we can to improve democracy, to empower citizens to improve democracy, to enable and assist local citizens to determine the best way their local democracy should be conducted. Why are we taking it away? Nobody is saying they have to use ranked ballots. Nobody is saying that, but why are we taking away their democratic ability to improve their local democracy? Speaker, it's wrong, and I'm encouraging the members opposite to recognize that and vote against Bill 218 today.

I want to shift briefly in the little bit of time I have—I want to leave my colleague here a bit of time, but I want to spend a little bit of time talking about long-term care. The budget that just came out was a test, a real test to the government's commitment to long-term care, their commitment to funding a minimum standard of four hours of care so we can begin to fix the tragedy that so many families went through in the spring, the heartbreaking stories we heard about what happened in our long-term-care homes. Not only did we not see money to fund staff for our long-term-care in the budget, now we're debating a bill that actually provides a get-out-of-jail-free card for negligent bad actors.

I think it's wrong. Anybody who has been listening to—or reading, I should say, because they're not happening publicly—anybody who has been reading what's coming out of the public commission on long-term care, anybody who just had to go through the heartbreaking reading of the military reports of what happened in negligent long-term care testimony that came from the

Canadian military knows that we cannot allow bad actors a get-out-of-jail-free card.

I want to just quote one of the stories that really touched me, and it speaks to what was happening in long-term care prior to the pandemic. One of the stories that was told to the commission: Carol Wells said, "My dad was admitted ... November 5th, 2018.

"And the next day we got a call that he had a lesion on his arm. He fell the day he was admitted.

"On November 15th, he fell out of bed, and he hit his right elbow.

"November 27th, he had a skin tear on his right hand. He was in the TV room and tried to stand."

Later, "He was found ... in the parking lot. And my dad could not walk. He was in a wheelchair. He had had a major stroke. So he was found out in the parking lot."

Speaker, some of these homes knew, prior to COVID-19, that they were underserving their residents. They knew that one RN per floor was not enough. They knew that the minimum standards of care were not enough. They knew that there were not enough staff to provide the care their residents deserved. No wonder when COVID-19 hit we saw the tragic consequences. And now the government is proposing to provide immunity for those negligent actors.

There is no reason that a bill that should be written to provide—I think we talked about the Ontario Nonprofit Network saying that we need immunity for non-profits. We need some support for small businesses and sports clubs and community organizations and, I would even argue, well-run long-term-care homes. There's no reason to use the cover to provide some legal support to non-profits and small businesses as a way to excuse negligent care. Our elders deserve better. Our loved ones deserve better.

I'd ask the government not to use the support that non-profits legitimately need to provide cover for those long-term-care homes that don't deserve this. Their actions and the results of their actions don't deserve this. So I'd ask the members opposite to stand up today and vote against Bill 218, because our elders deserve to know that we have their back.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Stan Cho): Further debate?

Ms. Bhutla Karpoche: I rise today, on behalf of the people of Parkdale–High Park, to speak to this bill.

Right now, Ontarians are rightly criticizing this government for their handling of the COVID-19 pandemic. Because of the government's confusing messaging, the government's refusal to invest in necessary resources to improve testing, support front-line workers and make our schools and long-term-care homes safe, we are now seeing case counts, hospitalizations and deaths increase across the province.

The second wave has spread like wildfire in long-term-care homes again. Just last week alone, 71 residents died, and that adds to the thousands who have already died in long-term-care homes during this pandemic, shattering thousands of families. These seniors who died from COVID-19 died alone, without any family to comfort them. Thousands more have experienced neglect and

abuse caused by this government's cuts to inspections, insufficient staffing in long-term-care homes and lax enforcement of regulations.

The Premier hasn't done much to support Ontario seniors, and now, with this bill, he's making it clear that he has instead chosen to protect the very companies that have been negligent in providing proper care to seniors who live in horrible conditions. That's what this bill is about.

In my riding of Parkdale–High Park, we had outbreaks in several homes in the first wave and, sadly, many deaths. In the second wave now, Unity Health Toronto has been tasked with taking over Norwood nursing home to curb the spread of the virus. There are currently 18 resident cases and six staff cases at Norwood, and the situation is getting worse. There is also an outbreak at Lakeside long-term-care home—an outbreak that I raised in this House last month and that is still getting worse. Lakeside has 29 resident cases and 13 staff cases, and six residents have tragically died. The families of residents at Norwood and Lakeside are calling on this government to provide more trained staff and faster testing results. They have been asking for this for months, to no avail. This is not new.

According to the government's own long-term-care commission, chronic understaffing leading to resident neglect has been hurting residents and staff in long-term-care homes for years. This has only gotten worse as for-profit corporations have cut more corners to pocket bigger profits over the last two decades.

Even the Ministry of Long-Term Care has admitted that the government knew over the summer that the system was short as many as 6,000 personal support workers, and yet the government is still trying to save a buck by allowing devastating understaffing in nursing homes to continue.

And now the Conservative government is bringing in legislation to give their political allies protection and preserve the profits of these large corporations that run the long-term-care-home chains.

The Premier needs to stop pretending that this crisis is something that he can sweep under the rug without justice and accountability for families.

I'd also like to speak about the way in which Bill 218 aims to obstruct local democracy by preventing municipalities from using the system that they choose to elect their councils. This is not the first time Premier Ford has interfered with municipal democracy and it likely won't be the last. But it is bizarre and inappropriate to include this in what is ostensibly a COVID recovery bill. There is no reason for the province to interfere in how a municipality chooses to make decisions. With this bill, the Ford government is trampling on the democratic rights of Ontarians. It is simply indefensible, and so I cannot support this bill. Thank you.

1530

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Stan Cho): Further debate?

Ms. Catherine Fife: I have to say, I listened to the government's side very closely. I was very disappointed with the Attorney General and his rationalization for Bill 218. He knows as well as everyone in this room that the

bill, retroactively to March 17, bans any court action related to an individual being or potentially being infected with or exposed to coronavirus, so long as the person being sued made a good-faith effort to follow the relevant laws and public health direction at the time and was not grossly negligent.

The key piece is that "person" is defined expansively in the bill and specifically includes corporations and government. The definition of "good-faith effort" is torqued by the government here. It is no longer required that the effort be reasonable in the circumstances—a keystone of negligence law in Canada for the past 100 years. Instead, the standard is now subjective: Was the effort honest? In the words of one practitioner, "the definition is not only confusing but also vacuous, given that the defendant must only establish an honest effort in meeting deficient standards."

"Gross negligence" is also not a concept in Canadian negligence law. Courts considered looking at using this standard in some circumstances 30 or 40 years ago, and in the end, they declined to do so. In other areas of law, this has been interpreted to mean an extreme departure from the standards a reasonable person in the circumstances would uphold. Any action related to COVID that does not satisfy these requirements of this law is deemed to be dismissed from the date this law comes into force.

Bill 218 prevents families from seeking justice in the court system. It prevents them from putting their grief into action. Right now, their grief has no place to go. It is a shameful day in this province to see this government go down this route.

The Attorney General quoted some groups. I'm going to quote Amir Attaran. He's a law professor from the University of Ottawa. He says, "This bill is a backwards, cruel and possibly illegal attack on families who lost loved ones to COVID-19 because care homes were negligent. It erases their legal rights to compensation. The virus took lives, and now the ... government takes the rights of survivors."

The Ontario Health Coalition says this legislation "would make it significantly harder for residents and families to hold long-term-care homes liable." The new standard is bad, it is poor. What's worse is that this law acts retroactively, throwing out all court actions, including class actions against long-term-care homes that have not plead the new standard of bad faith: lack of honest effort. So not only is this government preventing families from seeking legal action when clearly a huge amount—I mean, what happened in these homes, what the Canadian Armed Forces reported, we must act on. We should not protect those corporate long-term-care homes.

Also, if you read the Toronto Star today and Moira Welsh, it paired where Bill 218 takes us and where this government is looking at long-term-care homes and the corporatization of long-term care in Ontario. "A new type of corporate ownership has emerged: private companies, like Arch, that buy homes and hire outside management firms to provide the day-to-day care of medically fragile seniors."

Arch is actually buying bed licences from Chartwell to further privatize and create an equity fund off the poor health and the care of seniors in the province of Ontario. “You can’t blame private equity for doing what private equity does, which is squeeze every single dollar out of what they invest. But that is not what we want for residents in long-term care. And that is the critical problem.” That was Laura Tamblyn Watts. She’s the CEO of the national seniors’ organization CanAge.

Arch Corporation also, Mr. Speaker, just for your education, is owned by a group of Saudi Arabian companies—an umbrella group, if you will—that is looking to Ontario, specifically Ontario, to make money off of an aging demographic in nursing and long-term-care homes. That’s where this government is going. At the same time, you’re protecting these corporations from legal liability. It’s a breach of ethics, to be going down this route.

We will not support Bill 218, and at the first opportunity, we will undo it.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Stan Cho): Further debate?

Mr. John Fraser: I’ll try to be brief. I won’t be supporting Bill 218. I know it’s called the COVID recovery and municipal elections act, but it’s really the “under the cover of COVID” act that this government is removing ranked ballots. I don’t understand. It feels a bit like 2018, when the government interfered and meddled in the city of Toronto here. Right now, I think that there are probably a lot more important things that we should be doing rather than taking away municipalities’ decision whether to have a ranked ballot or not.

Ranked ballots provide access to elections to a lot of people who would otherwise not have access, and some municipalities have chosen to do that. I think that’s a good thing. We elect leaders that way. That’s a pretty important point that the leader of the Green Party just made a while ago; in fact, I think that’s the way that we all do it.

I’m not quite so sure that we should be spending our time during this period of COVID when we’re, as the Premier likes to put it, “staring down the barrel of another lockdown,” talking about ranked ballots. Unfortunately, we have to, because it’s buried inside a bill, but that’s another issue altogether.

Interjection.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Stan Cho): Order.

Mr. John Fraser: Thank you, Speaker. I think I just heard the government House leader say he was going to withdraw the ranked ballot schedule in this bill, so I want to thank him for that. If I’d known it was that easy, I would have gotten up a lot earlier.

Interjection.

Mr. John Fraser: Okay. Well, just treat them like a mature level of government, like most provincial governments do.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Yes, just have a conversation.

Mr. John Fraser: Just have a conversation with them. It’s not the most important thing that we need to be doing right now.

I think the thing that really concerns all of us here is limiting the liability, especially of those corporations that

are in the business of delivering long-term care in this province. I think if we take a look at the report of the Canadian military and the transcripts from the commission, people have some very, very serious concerns. The fact that we didn’t do a full public inquiry and now we’re looking at limiting liability is really reducing the access to justice for those people, and I think that’s the thing that’s most disturbing about this bill. I don’t know how that’s part of a COVID recovery act.

I get concerned when all we’re talking about is—some of those sports teams and community organizations: Yes, there’s a way to protect them, but you’re trying to make it sound like that’s the only reason that you’re doing it. The reality is the blunt instrument that you’re using is protecting a whole bunch of people. So if you were just trying to protect sports clubs and seniors’ clubs and all those people who deliver really important things in their community—and they should be protected—you wouldn’t have used a blunt instrument; you would have used legislation to isolate and protect those people because, literally, they don’t have the money. They’re volunteers. They’re not protected from liability. Corporations have insurance. Corporations have responsibilities. By lifting it up to the level of gross negligence, you’ve just made it a lot harder for people to find justice.

Do you know one of the things that we found when we changed the laws around how hospitals had to report critical incidents? What they found is, when a hospital was open about what happened, why it happened and what they were doing to correct it, people didn’t enter litigation as much. They were satisfied that whatever had happened to their family was acknowledged and addressed. In the case of long-term care right now, that’s not happening, and this bill is not going to make it happen. It’s going to take that access to justice away. I don’t think it’s appropriate the way the government has handled this protection from liability. It’s a very blunt instrument.

1540

Now, the Integrity Commissioner is going to look at all those relationships that exist out there. I don’t want to talk about those. The basic fact of the matter is, you’re changing the law and you’re making it harder for those families to access justice for what happened to them, because they haven’t got access to justice in terms of an acknowledgement or a remedy. What do you expect them to do?

Speaker, that’s all I have to say to say on Bill 218. I’m not going to be supporting this bill, and I encourage all members of this House not to support it.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Stan Cho): Further debate?

Ms. Jennifer K. French: I am glad to again have the opportunity to speak on behalf of families in Oshawa and across Durham region, especially those who are struggling emotionally in the wake of the death of their loved ones in long-term care. I have said many things in this House on the record in bringing their voices here, and I’m going to continue that today.

I wanted to share the important voices of those who are living in the reality that this government is creating, as

well as the reality of a pandemic which is not of our creation. We are all doing our best to respond accordingly. This government, however, I would say, needs to do better. This bill is a huge problem, and the government knows it and can feel it. It's not just out in the media; it's all over the place with community members who recognize on its face that it is not okay to make it harder for grieving families to access justice.

One of those families is the family of Paul Parkes, a gentleman who died at Orchard Villa Long Term Care in Pickering. His daughter, Cathy Parkes, has had to become an advocate and activist, not just for her own family but for the other grieving families and community.

She writes, "Last week I spoke with the legislative committee about my concerns regarding Bill 218...."

"As I stated to the committee, I feel that long-term care has no place in Bill 218.... None of the 'reasonable measures' or terms of 'gross neglect' found in Bill 218 should be applied to long-term care.

"This past weekend we had 20 deaths in long-term care alone in Ontario. We are in the second wave and it seems we have learned very little. This year has shown that we have marginalized our vulnerable citizens to the point of death and we have allowed it to go on too long...."

"I would like to send you a quote that was spoken last week by a senior executive of Chartwell homes to its investors:

"The new legislation from" this "government mitigates the risk from lawsuits against the company and makes the threshold for proving damages very high."

She continues, "With a statement like that I am shocked that Bill 218 still exists."

That's from Cathy Parkes of Pickering.

Cathy and other families right now, Speaker, if you're following the news, are very concerned that the causes of death on death certificates may not actually reflect the actual circumstances of their death. Right now, they want an investigation of all certificates and records relating to death at that home. That's just more insult to the original injury. This continues to be an unfolding circumstance.

I want to share from a legal opinion of Bill 218: The Death of Memory, written by Marvin Zuker, who is a judge of the Ontario Court of Justice. He presided there for a long time and retired in 2016. This is shared in the Lawyer's Daily, and I'm pulling pieces:

"The World Health Organization defines elder abuse as 'a single or repeated act, or lack of appropriate action, occurring within any relationship where there is an expectation of trust that causes harm or distress to an older person.' The UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities provides us with an underlying duty to protect these vulnerable people in care...."

"Bill 218 may well add another denial, the right to enforce their own human rights. It was not that long ago that we experimented with human lives and we 'committed' those with mental illness allegedly to secure facilities.

"No due process. No rights and no humanity. This legacy and the intended wiping out of the memories of

loved ones who have died because of the negligence of long-term care providers is surely unacceptable to say the least. One would expect that our laws are there to promote and protect the well-being of our citizenry."

He says that the Premier "has suggested that Bill 218 will not shield negligent providers. The problem, of course, is that this is not what Bill 218 says. With its immunity provisions, this bill arguably bars actions alleging ordinary negligence. Negligent care, with respect, may not equate with being grossly negligent...."

"With respect to what has happened in our long-term care facilities and the history of poor quality of care and even infection control procedures, there is a strong argument to be made that these tragedies could have been foreseeable even though COVID-19 may not have been. Long-time deficiencies in these facilities have been documented...."

"Those families affected by the deaths of ones they loved who were in long-term care facilities have the human right to expect accountability and to be able to find out how they died, and we have a responsibility to keep their memories alive."

It's really worth a read in its entirety. I'm happy to share it with the Attorney General, because it gets into the grit and specifics of the bill, and there is time for the government to reverse course.

And Speaker, while I have just a few seconds, I wanted to share just one quick quote from the comments—they say not to read the comments, but in a CBC article, there are a couple of comments, one of them is—Rob Brucer says, "Those who write these bills may one day find themselves in said homes... I suggest you rethink your position, gov."

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Further debate?

Mr. Joel Harden: What is Bill 218? My friends in government are saying that it's an opportunity to help sports clubs. Speaker, through you to the government: Can the government show me one lawsuit being waged in Ontario right now against a minor sports organization or local charitable groups that are trying to do caremongering to help people? Name me one. I'm willing to pause and hear heckling. Is there one? There's none. But do you know what there is, Speaker? There's a lawsuit right now bringing 200 people together against the big three in the for-profit long-term-care sector: Revera, Sienna Senior Living and Chartwell. And as much as my friends over here want to say, "Oh, don't worry, Joel. They'll still be on the hook for negligence"—you can say whatever you want to say today; the truth is going to come out when families seek justice.

I'm going to tell you something very clearly, Speaker, through you to over there: If you deny these families justice, the epitaph of your government is written today. Conservatives that I had the good fortune to visit back in Ottawa Centre when I went around for Remembrance Day told me that clearly—veterans. They're ashamed and disgusted that this party's vice-president, Melissa Lantsman, is the lobbyist for Extendicare in this building. Extendicare

Starwood back in Ottawa has seen 131 residents and 21 staff infected by the virus and 21 people dead in this facility. If your bill prevents justice for families and profits Extendicare, you're going down over this. Mark my words.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Further debate?

Mr. Wayne Gates: I want to say to my colleague here: There have been no lawsuits for any hockey coach or any organization in the province of Ontario.

But I want to say to the Conservatives very clearly—

Hon. Lisa MacLeod: Point of order.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): I recognize the Minister of Tourism, Culture and Sport on a point of order.

Hon. Lisa MacLeod: I'm just concerned with what's happening here, Speaker, because I've had the opportunity over the past nine months to work with sport organizations who have demanded this, who have requested it, who have asked, in order for them to be able to return to playing sport, that they actually have this. It's not just sport; it's also not-for-profits, and to actually—

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): It's not a point of order. Thank you.

I return to member for Niagara Falls.

Mr. Wayne Gates: I want to say to my colleagues on the Conservative side: People died; 2,000 people died, and, you know what, for an hour—you had an hour to talk today, and not one of them talked about what was going on in long-term care. Nobody talked about the rotten food that they were being served, the type of service they were getting, the PSWs, where they only had one who had to take over the whole shift. Not one of you guys raised that issue.

And I don't know if I can say this, Speaker, but you can correct me: The long-term minister is here, and you're a very smart may—you've been a doctor. You know that if these long-term-care facilities are left off the hook, they will—

Ms. Lindsey Park: Point of order.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Stop the clock, please. I recognize the member for Durham.

Ms. Lindsey Park: I think the member opposite should apologize for his unparliamentary language. I believe he just called the Minister of Long-Term Care a maid.

1550

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): That is not what I heard. That is not a point of order.

Back to the member for Niagara Falls.

Mr. Wayne Gates: I have too much respect to call her a name, quite frankly.

But I'm going to tell you, she knows very clearly that if they do not sue the people that are killing our grandmothers and our grandparents and our aunts and uncles in long-term-care facilities—Chartwell has already said it: "Once Bill 218 is passed, we're home free."

Do you know what is going to happen in long-term-care facilities? I think the doctor knows this. We're going to have more people die. That's what's going to happen.

Think about that, and the horrible deaths that they died. I know because I had a long-term-care facility in my area where almost 20 people died. A mom and a dad died within 24 hours—not one; two sets of moms and dads.

Take long-term care and retirement homes out of the bill. That's what has to happen here. You owe it to our parents, our grandparents, our moms, our dads, our aunts and uncles. What are you doing? I don't know how any of you guys are going to sleep tonight if you vote for this bill.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Further debate?

Mr. Percy Hatfield: I have to say, watching the aftermath of the presidential election in the United States, I am so proud to be a Canadian. Most of the time, our municipal, provincial and federal elections go relatively smoothly compared to our American neighbours, with their court challenges and wild accusations about fraudulent ballots. Pretty well everything we saw on television news for a few days was people saying, "Stop the count" or "Count the votes." People supporting Mr. Trump and the Republicans didn't want the legal ballots of people who voted to be counted because their candidate was starting to lose. I would think most of us in the chamber today would disagree with what was happening in those American swing states where this was taking place.

Here, Speaker, is where I feel we have a similar problem with Bill 218 because of a similar situation here. The way that I see it, the Conservative government doesn't want a winner chosen by a full and final tabulation of all the ballots cast in future municipal elections. I wonder why? Unless, of course, they fear that if a ranked balloting system takes hold at the municipal level, there would be pressure to hold ranked ballot elections at the provincial level.

I'm not imputing motives, Speaker, just speculating, and wondering why, during a pandemic and a bill outlining ways to recover from a financial crisis, out of the blue we today are dealing with a ban on the ranked balloting system for municipalities. Aren't we told time and time again that every vote counts? Don't we tell our constituents, "Make sure you vote"?

We just held a municipal by-election in my old ward in Windsor, ward 7. There are 19,000 people who could have voted; 5,000 actually did. Voter turnout was 28%. There were 12 candidates. Jeewen Gill won, as he captured 19.7% of the ballots cast, with 1,015 votes. He was 134 votes ahead of his closest competitor. Would a ranked balloting system change the results? Very possibly. I know it's all in theory, all a matter for debate, but that's what we're doing today.

Another example: I won't mention her name but I have a friend across the aisle who was once a city councillor for a short time. She won her seat in a municipal by-election ahead of 21 other candidates. She captured almost 2,000 votes, or 19.6% of the ballots cast. There were 41,000 people could have voted. The turnout was 24%, so only 10,000 people actually voted. Her closest competitor was 92 votes behind her. Would a ranked balloting system

have changed the result? Possibly; not necessarily, but quite possibly. Don't get me wrong, Speaker. My friend won that election fair and square by the first-past-the-post system used in municipal by-elections.

Municipal leaders, councillors and mayors hold referendums to gauge the will of their taxpayers before they undertake a major change in policy. They did that in London and held a ranked balloting municipal election four years ago. In ward 13, Arielle Kayabaga won—not on the first ballot, although she was in the lead on the first—but after the ranked votes were counted, becoming the first Black woman ever to be elected to city council in London. She says she never would have run, except after attending a seminar explaining the ranked balloting system she thought it would be a fair test of democracy to count as many choices as possible if your first choice didn't win outright.

Kingston residents voted 63% to test a ranked balloting system in their next municipal election. Other communities were thinking about it. In fact, 14 city councillors and the mayor of Toronto favoured a switch to ranked ballots here. Then the provincial hammer came down out of the blue—no municipal input—squashing electoral reform in Ontario.

Speaker, the other day, I saw the Premier on TV answering a media question: what his response would be if Ottawa invoked the Emergencies Act for a total lockdown to get ahead of the COVID-19 curve. The Premier said, "We don't need the nanny state telling us what to do," yet on Bill 218, we have the provincial nanny state telling municipalities what they can and can't do when it comes to running their own local elections.

Ted McMeekin was the Liberal Minister of Municipal Affairs who brought in the bill to allow municipalities the right of choice in how they run their own elections. He was quoted recently as saying some of the current members of the government who were in opposition at the time told him they would never support it at the provincial level because it would mean the Conservatives would never elect a government under ranked ballots.

Again, I'm not imputing motive, but I do question why, when we could be dealing with so many other things, such as the lawsuits in long-term-care homes, what really matters to people during this pandemic, we're even talking about this. In America, if they don't like an unfolding vote count, a democratic wave of change rolling across the States, they will stop the count. In Ontario, the nanny state thinking ranked ballots might be the wave of the future get ahead of that curve by outlawing municipal democratic process. They ban a switch to the ranked balloting system because it might not be in their favour somewhere down the road. For that, I say, shame on them.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Further debate?

Ms. Marit Stiles: It's always an honour to rise in this House to speak on behalf of the people of Davenport. It's an active and engaged community, and people watch really closely what is happening here in the people's House.

Right now, they're watching to see what this government and we, as MPPs, are going to do to get this pandemic under control and protect their loved ones and their livelihoods. I can tell you, Madam Speaker, that they aren't liking what they're seeing, especially with respect to this bill before us today: Bill 218, the so-called Supporting Ontario's Recovery and Municipal Elections Act.

My inbox is overflowing with emails from outraged constituents. They cannot believe that in the midst of this pandemic that has cost so many lives, this government's priorities are, let's be clear, (1) shielding for-profit long-term-care homes from liability; and (2) meddling in municipal elections again.

I would venture to say that the bewilderment and anger over this is not limited to Davenport. I expect that PC members across the aisle are hearing much the same thing from their constituents. But in case they haven't, here is a sample of what I'm hearing, for the record. Richard wrote, "From reading the documented cases of neglect, poor hygiene, lack of protection from infection of our most vulnerable seniors, it is clear that private facilities need more oversight and accountability, not less. I ask you to please withdraw Bill 218 and completely rethink how we care for our aging and vulnerable population."

Monique wrote, "I don't understand how blanket immunity is even being considered. I know most senior residences acted in their best capacity but there obviously are some that did not. The court system should decide who acted in good faith and who didn't. Giving them all a free pass is disgusting and amounts to telling families their loved ones' lives did not matter. A home that disregarded precautions should face repercussions."

I have to agree, Madam Speaker, and there are hundreds of emails like that. In fact, as the emails that I read show, people were looking for more accountability for long-term-care operators, not less. They're also hoping, yes, for some accountability from this government, but it seems like, through this legislation, it's pretty clear they're not going to get that.

There's also a veritable, as my colleagues have mentioned previously, small army of former staffers in the government who are now actively lobbying for these for-profit homes, and that number of those former staffers doing that lobbying is very concerning. We are talking about people who had direct access to cabinet members just months before the pandemic now lobbying their former colleagues on behalf of these very private companies. It is a context to this bill that we cannot ignore.

Madam Speaker, I cannot in good conscience support this bill in its current form. Thousand of families who lost loved ones deserve justice, and bad actors in the long-term-care sector deserve to be held to account.

Speaker, with the time I have left, I want to once again share the utter dismay that my constituents feel about the fact that this government is once again meddling in our local democracy by banning the use of ranked ballots in municipal elections.

1600

Toronto has already seen our local representation cut in half by this government. We're seeing our municipal services pushed to the breaking point by a one-two punch of provincial underfunding and COVID-19.

Whether members on the other side of this House want to see ranked ballots or a continuation of the flawed first-past-the-post system—whatever—doesn't really matter. The decision about how municipalities should conduct their elections should be made by the voters in those municipalities, full stop. Moving this change during a pandemic is a big slap in the face to cities across this province.

So to be as clear as possible: Torontonians want the provincial government to step up support to save lives and get us through this pandemic, and to fund transit, housing and social programs, and to stay out of our local democracy.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Further debate?

Miss Monique Taylor: I am pleased to have the opportunity today to speak to Bill 218. Let's be clear: This is a terrible bill. It only has two schedules, and they're both damaging to the people of Ontario.

The first schedule of this bill seems designed to protect this government's friends in the world of corporate, for-profit health care. It provides retroactive legal protection to long-term-care homes where residents contracted, or possibly died from, COVID-19. The home or company is free from any legal liability as long as, according to this bill, they made a good-faith effort to follow public health guidance. The long-term-care company only has to show that they provided an honest effort. That's shameful.

It is clear to everyone who has seen this bill that this provision is a huge gift to the private long-term-care companies and an attack on anyone looking for justice for their loved ones. Even worse, this law is retroactive back to March. That means all the court proceedings that are already in motion will be thrown out. The reaction to this has been definitely negative. Most people are interpreting this as the government's attempt to stop people from suing long-term-care homes. It is clear to many that this government is protecting companies over people. That's why Natalie Mehra of the Ontario Health Coalition has called this bill "morally reprehensible."

The Premier has said that this bill would not stop people from suing bad actors who are negligent, but the reaction from the legal community is that the negligence that this bill requires is both vague and very hard to prove.

About this bill, Graham Webb, the executive director of the Advocacy Centre for the Elderly, has said this: "When the Premier says this is not about protecting negligent long-term-care-home operators, that's all it's about, because long-term-care-home operators who weren't negligent would have no civil liability whatsoever."

Everyone out there knows this bill is about protecting the Premier's friends in long-term care and not about protecting families who lost loved ones to COVID-19. Instead of bringing legislation to fix long-term care, this

government brings in a bill to protect the financial interests of private long-term care.

As you can hear, on this side of the House, we are amazed by this measure. It is a slap in the face to the families who have suffered a loss of a loved one due to the poor practices of private long-term-care homes.

There were families here today on the lawn and participating in a car parade around Queen's Park, demonstrating against this government's handling of long-term care. They want an end to Bill 218. These are families who lost loved ones in long-term-care homes, and they were here specifically to voice their opposition to this bill. This bill adds insult to injury. These families are still grieving, and now they have to watch the provincial government protect those same long-term-care homes instead of protecting the vulnerable seniors who live in those homes.

The opposition has provided ample material to draw from for fixing long-term-care homes. Recently, we held a vote to end for-profit long-term care, because we know that private, for-profit long-term-care homes and retirement homes had the majority of COVID-19 deaths. Of course, the government members opposite voted it down.

My colleague from Kitchener Centre introduced a bill to create the office of the seniors' advocate, and my colleague from London-Fanshawe introduced the Time to Care Act, which mandates four hours of care per resident daily. Both of these bills are timely and contain excellent ideas for how to fix parts of the broken long-term-care system. The leader of the official opposition has also introduced our plan to overhaul the system, called Aging Ontarians Deserve the Best. It lays out a real blueprint for fixing the long-term-care system. There's no shortage of great ideas to adopt to fix our long-term-care system, but it is clear that this government isn't interested in any of that. It's disappointing, to say the least. No one has a majority on good ideas; the government should hear that.

Let's talk about schedule 2, which in this bill repeals the part of the Municipal Elections Act that deals with ranked ballot elections. With everything going on right now, why is this a government priority? Does this government realize that Ontario hit over 1,500 daily cases of COVID-19? Not even a global pandemic can stop this government's contempt for local democracy. The first thing that the government did in 2018 was to cut Toronto city council in half in the middle of an election. In Hamilton, the government said over and over that it would respect the decision of voters and city council when it came to the LRT, but then unilaterally cancelled the program. We've wasted even more time on the issue, and still no clear direction. Now we're seeing this government take away the flexibility for cities and their citizens to decide which methods they prefer.

I'm running out of time, Speaker, but as you see, this bill does nothing for the people of Ontario. The people of Hamilton Mountain are absolutely disgusted that they're seeing this before them, as is, we're hearing, the rest of Ontario. I will be proud to vote against this bill.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Further debate?

Ms. Mitzie Hunter: I want to rise today on behalf of my constituents in Scarborough–Guildwood—constituents like Mr. McVeigh, who presented at committee on behalf and in memory of his mom and his dad, who passed away from COVID-19 at Seven Oaks Long-Term Care Home.

I remember his testimony at committee because he said, “No one is listening.” He said that presenting at committee was his only opportunity to honour his parents and to be heard. He felt strongly that Bill 218 would take away the rights and the voices of families like his, who really want to hold the long-term-care homes to account for what happened during COVID-19.

I believe that this bill and the way that it’s being pushed through the Legislature, not giving more families like Mr. McVeigh’s an opportunity to be heard, even at committee—because we only had one day to hear presenters. I believe of the 58 people who signed up to present, only 15 of them were scheduled to speak. The fact that our debate time is truncated on a bill of such importance to people—like the liability. People have contacted my office speaking about the issue of meeting the test of gross negligence. I listened to the AG’s debate this afternoon, but unfortunately, I didn’t hear anything new. I didn’t hear anything that would put at ease the minds of these concerned constituents, when gross negligence is ill-defined in our legal system, when it’s going to actually make litigation even more costly and complex for these families—these families like Mr. McVeigh’s that are already grieving the loss of their loved ones to COVID-19 in long-term care.

1610

Why is that even in this bill? Why is that even part of this bill? If we wanted to limit the liability for non-profits—and the Ontario Nonprofit Network presented as well—we want these groups and the sports associations to continue operating and to be able to acquire insurance, and we understand that, but when it comes to the responsibility of government, when it comes to the responsibility of large organizations like long-term-care facilities, why are they receiving this protection for their actions under this legislation?

I want to make sure that I reiterate—after debating in second reading, after listening to presenters at committee and now coming for third reading debate—my strong opposition to this bill, Bill 218, both for the inclusion of long-term-care homes and for the possible protection of bad actors as a result of this as well as, of course, the erroneous inclusion of schedule 2.

I also listened to the Minister of Municipal Affairs as he was talking about why that was included in this bill, and I am not convinced, Madam Speaker, that there was any reason other than an overreach, once again, of Premier Ford in the affairs of local municipalities. Local municipalities deserve to have a choice. Many of them have written in to say that. Why are we rushing this legislation? Give them a choice in how they determine what they will do with their local elections.

The city of London: leading city in Canada and first ever to present a full-scale election using ranked ballots,

to great success and to great participation—70% of those who cast ballots exercised their right for local choice and to choose their options via ranked ballot. The mayor was very clear that this is going to be a costly reversal, forced upon them by the provincial government. It is going to cost their municipality hard-earned tax dollars, but more importantly it’s going to confuse their residents who have voted in favour of a new system of electing their local council and now that right has been taken away. So come the next municipal election, they’re going to have to re-educate, once again, causing confusion amongst their voters in London.

The same thing for Toronto: Toronto had voted across councils multiple times to pursue the direction of a ranked ballot. In fact, Madam Speaker, when I was first elected to this Legislature in 2013, that was my private member’s bill, to allow the city of Toronto, upon their request, upon local choice, to use a ranked ballot to conduct their local elections. I supported that. I brought it forward in this Legislature, and it eventually became a government law and was being pursued by the city as its chosen path. But, once again, Premier Ford seems to be fixated on Toronto and wanting to interfere in its local activities, as evidenced by one of his first acts, to cut Toronto council in half—that is now being pursued by the municipality at the Supreme Court of Canada. We are waiting to hear that result. But, not good enough: The Premier is still interfering in the affairs of Toronto.

Bill 218 has gone too far. It has gone too far in the area of gross negligence and potentially letting bad actors off the hook in long-term care, and it has gone too far in schedule 2, which cancels ranked ballots. By the stroke of a pen, by the vote that we are about to do, that local choice will be taken away from duly elected councils in this province that had chosen that voting system as their preferred choice.

It’s unfortunate that this government is not focused on the real priorities in this province, which are protecting residents and the people of Ontario from the pandemic—the pandemic that is multiplying. Every day, COVID-19 is increasing. I just saw a list of positivity rates, and as I said this morning in my question, there are multiple communities and neighbourhoods in this province where the positivity rate is in double digits. That should be the focus of this government: the health crisis, to save lives and to keep people safe, especially in our long-term-care facilities, where they are the most vulnerable; not meddling in local elections, not letting bad actors off for their responsibility to protect our most vulnerable seniors. So I will be voting no to Bill 218.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Further debate?

M^{me} France Gélinas: It is, I think, my duty to put a few words on the record regarding Bill 218, the Supporting Ontario’s Recovery and Municipal Elections Act. When you hear the title, Supporting Ontario’s Recovery—hey, we’re all for this. When you start to look at the bill itself, it is a shame, a disappointment. I don’t have words strong enough to tell you how bad this is.

The pandemic put a spotlight on our long-term-care homes. We all know that 3,361 Ontarians died from COVID-19. Of those, 2,141 were residents of long-term-care homes. That's two thirds of the deaths from COVID that are residents of long-term-care homes. In all, 7,685 residents—that's 10% of the residents of our long-term-care homes—have contracted COVID. The spotlight showed us how poor the care is in our long-term-care homes. This is something that anybody who follows long-term care—we all already knew this.

I was elected in 2007 on a promise of 3.5 hours of hands-on care. When Mike Harris, in 2003, took out the minimum standard of care, which was at 2.25 at the time, we knew that we needed a standard of care. We knew that we needed every one of the 626 homes to report on the standard of care because we saw it nosedive. In 2016, I introduced the Time to Care Act, and now my colleague is following through.

For families who lost loved ones; for the wife who showed us the picture, who showed me the picture of her husband who had lost 60 pounds during the confinement—he hadn't been fed; for the people who showed me the picture of their loved ones covered in bedsores because nobody had repositioned them or transferred them into a wheelchair—some of those bedsores were infected in ways that I had never seen before because they were left in their own feces in their beds for days on end.

If this is allowed to happen in Ontario—this has happened in Ontario. Read any report on long-term care, but read the one from the armed forces. They will tell you that people died of not only starvation, but dehydration. Basic care is to feed them, to give them water. This is basic care, and the long-term-care homes, basically the three large corporations that own 50% of the homes and the long-term-care beds in Ontario, failed them. This is where most of the 2,141 deaths happened.

But finally, there was a spotlight. Finally, people knew that what was going on in those homes was not okay. There was no quality care. There was no basic care. Finally, they turned to the courts. They put class action lawsuits together. Most of the families would not have thought of going through the courts because this is not what we do. They have tried to put in complaints. Well, the complaint mechanism for long-term care barely worked. The oversight didn't work at all. They had tried, but now through COVID, through the spotlight, through the army report, they finally would have their day in court. Everybody would know what was going on behind closed doors. Everybody would know that the quality of care was not there. We know how to provide quality care in Ontario. We know how to protect with infection control. We know all of this, but it wasn't done, so the families went to court.

There are a number of class action lawsuits against the big three corporate, for-profit long-term-care owners in Ontario, but all of this is for naught because the government decided to side with the corporations who did not feed the people, with the corporations who let them die of dehydration, with the corporations who let them lay in their own feces, covered in bedsores.

This is who the government is siding with, when the people of Ontario want a government to be on their side, to protect their loved ones, to bring back quality care in our long-term-care homes, like we all want. Do the right thing. Vote this bill down.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Pursuant to the order of the House dated October 28, 2020, I am now required to put the question.

Mr. Downey has moved third reading of Bill 218, An Act to enact the Supporting Ontario's Recovery Act, 2020 respecting certain proceedings relating to the coronavirus (COVID-19), to amend the Municipal Elections Act, 1996, and to revoke a regulation. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? I heard a no.

All those in favour of the motion will please say "aye."

All those opposed to the motion will please say "nay."

In my opinion, the ayes have it.

A recorded vote being required, the bells will ring for 30 minutes, during which time members may cast their votes.

Prepare the lobbies, please.

The division bells rang from 1622 to 1652.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): The vote was held on the motion for third reading of Bill 218, An Act to enact the Supporting Ontario's Recovery Act, 2020 respecting certain proceedings relating to the coronavirus (COVID-19), to amend the Municipal Elections Act, 1996 and to revoke a regulation.

The Deputy Clerk (Mr. Trevor Day): The ayes are 52; the nays are 38.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): I declare the motion carried.

Be it resolved that the bill do now pass and be entitled as in the motion.

Third reading agreed to.

MOVING ONTARIO FAMILY LAW FORWARD ACT, 2020

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

Resuming the debate adjourned on November 5, 2020, on the motion for third 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 Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Further debate? The last time the bill was debated, the member for London West had the floor.

Ms. Peggy Sattler: It is a pleasure to rise to continue the debate on Bill 207, the family law amendment act. It was about a week and a half ago, Speaker, that I last spoke to this bill, and I just wanted to remind my colleagues of where I was going with the comments that I was making.

In particular, I was focusing on what people in the violence against women sector have called the pandemic within the pandemic. That, of course, is the pandemic of intimate partner violence that we are far too familiar with in this province. That is very relevant to this bill, Speaker, because about one third of the cases that are heard in the Family Court system involve domestic violence, so it is very important to recognize the reality of gender-based violence that women in Ontario face on a daily basis.

In Ontario, a woman is killed approximately every six days by her partner or her former partner. When family violence is reported—as we know, it's a very underreported crime, but when it is reported, women are the victims in seven out of 10 cases. About one in four women will experience intimate partner violence in her lifetime. Those rates remain constant over time.

There is a profound and deeply negative impact on children when there is violence in the home, and that is whether children witness the violence or not. One of the presenters who spoke to the committee on this bill when it went for public input had a child who was killed by her abusive partner, and this is the reality that is being faced by far too many women in Ontario.

The pandemic within the pandemic means that this level of risk is just increasing. We have people who are working at home. We have intimate partners who are both working at home. They're struggling, trying to keep their kids engaged in online learning; there may be financial stresses; and the constant being around each other—there's no outlet for women who are experiencing violence to let their co-workers know, let their neighbours know, which has meant that the risk to women has increased even more.

In London, Speaker, on Friday, we recognized Wear Purple Day. That is an opportunity to recognize the violence that is experienced by women in our community and also, in this case, in November 2020, the increasing rates of violence that we are seeing in our communities. The Sexual Assault and Domestic Violence Treatment Program at St. Joseph's hospital in London reported a 35% increase in call volumes during the first wave of the pandemic when non-essential businesses were closed, but we know that those call volumes are continuing with crisis support services across the community and across the province.

In the context of that reality, it is so essential that we have a Family Court system that recognizes that people who go through this system might be experiencing violence at home and might be reluctant to disclose it. There has been a long history of our legal system penalizing women who are trying to keep their children away from an abusive partner, and when they go through the Family Court system, the judges may look unfavourably at a woman's attempts to protect her children and she may be penalized with less access to the children.

1700

In that context, this bill provides an opportunity to accompany the rather technical and minor changes, frankly, that are made in this bill, but to accompany that

with some meaningful resources and supports that are going to help women navigate the Family Court system because even the focus on mediation and alternative dispute resolution that is in this bill, that's not appropriate in cases of domestic violence, in cases of intimate partner violence. Those processes do not lend themselves to situations where there has been violence in the home.

We have to make sure that the Family Court system that is going to continue to hear cases—usually people who are self-represented, but that in the Family Court system, all of the professionals who are involved in the Family Court system, from judges and lawyers, clerks, whoever, really understands domestic violence. That is why one of the amendments that we proposed but, unfortunately, was not supported by this government, was around mandatory screening for domestic violence.

That would have been a measure that would help the legal professionals who are representing people who are going through the Family Court system identify if there has been domestic violence because that changes the way somebody might be represented in the legal process, but that amendment was not supported, unfortunately, by the majority of MPPs who sat on that committee.

Also, at the time that I made my remarks on November 5, I held out the faint hope that there might be some support in the budget that we saw on the very next day, and my hope was dashed. There was no additional support in the budget for anything to do for victims of domestic violence, for people who were trying to navigate the Family Court system in very, very challenging circumstances.

We heard over and over again from people who appeared before the committee about the need for education, about the need to assist litigants to navigate the very complex process of the Family Court system.

As many of us who've spoken to this bill have already indicated, we are going to support these relatively minor amendments that have been made, but we really look at it as a missed opportunity. There was an opportunity for Ontario to really make some meaningful changes that, most of all, would protect children, but also assist women who are going through the Family Court system and who have been experiencing violence in the home.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Questions?

M^{me} France Gélinas: It's always very interesting to listen to my colleague. The link that she made between the pandemic and violence against women during the pandemic is throughout our province. I hear it in my riding. I'm sure you have all heard it.

We have an opportunity with this bill to make things better, to change the lives of children. I would love for the member to explain to the House why it is so important to look at gender violence and what it does to the lives of children.

Ms. Peggy Sattler: This bill deals with common-law relationships that have broken down, and when children are involved. When the bill went to the committee, there were some horrifying stories shared of the kinds of abuse—invisible abuse that women may have experienced in the process of the dissolution of the relationship.

Pamela Cross, who appeared before the committee, talked about a client she represented who was involved in a mediation process, and her ex-partner used to abuse her with burnt cigarettes. Every time she spoke he would bring out his pack of cigarettes as a way of inflicting that kind of psychological and emotional control over the process.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Questions?

Mr. Rick Nicholls: In response to the amendments made at committee to the Moving Ontario Family Law Forward Act regarding family law appeal routes, the Ontario Bar Association said that they would support the removal of legal requirements for the Court of Appeal, which is the second appeal, for child protection matters. The OBA also said that they remain strongly in favour of simplifying family law appeal routes and ensuring families in Ontario are treated equally, regardless of where they reside and whether or not spouses are married.

We also received the support of the Federation of Ontario Law Associations, the Ontario Association of Children's Aid Societies, the Office of the Children's Lawyer and the Ontario Association of Child Protection Lawyers.

My question to the member is very simple: Can the member opposite advise whether they and their party agree with the OBA and will support these important reforms that help make it easier to navigate the family justice system?

Ms. Peggy Sattler: I made it clear during my presentation and I know that my colleagues who have spoken to this bill previously have all made clear that, yes, we're supporting this bill. We're supporting these relatively modest and technical changes to language that are being made.

But we also heard very strongly from organizations that are involved in family law issues that there are some huge gaps in the system that still need to be addressed. There is the gap around funding for legal aid. We saw this government make sweeping cuts to legal aid, and that has an impact on access to justice. There's a need to provide assistance to help people who will still continue to use the Family Court system to navigate the process. It is a very complex and difficult process for anyone to try to manage.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Questions?

Ms. Laura Mae Lindo: Thank you to the member for bringing up the missed opportunity around this bill, in particular around what we need to do to better support people who have experienced intimate partner violence.

Prior to being elected I oversaw the gendered violence prevention portfolio at Laurier and I know that navigating the system, when it comes to intimate partner violence, is particularly difficult. Many people relied on legal aid and additional specialty clinics that understood the nuances of somebody who was navigating domestic violence. I would love to have the member spend some time speaking about the importance of that investment and the missed opportunity that we have here when we are all in agreement that we can and should do better.

Ms. Peggy Sattler: I very much appreciate that question from my colleague because what we know from

the consultation that the government held in advance of this bill is that the government had explicitly stated that submissions were not to consider expansion of the unified Family Court system. That is a system, Speaker, where judges are trained in recognizing the signs of domestic violence and understanding the implications of the breakdown of a relationship where children are involved. It also considers both custody and access issues along with the division of property. That is a model that has proven quite effective because of that training and that understanding that has been built up by the judges who run that system.

This was, as my colleague said, a missed opportunity to look at how we expand that model further across the province.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Questions?

The member for—

Mr. Aris Babikian: Scarborough—Agincourt.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): I'll go with Scarborough—Agincourt. You weren't the one I was looking at, but Scarborough—Agincourt.

Mr. Aris Babikian: Thank you to my colleague on the opposite side for her presentation.

1710

Our government is introducing changes that will allow parents to request and receive certified copies of support payment notices online without having to go into a court. These are common-sense changes that help make our justice system work better for families. This is an important change, especially now, as we seek to limit inter-personal interactions.

Will the member support Bill 207 and give single parents the opportunity to enforce their child support orders online and avoid the need for an in-person visit?

Ms. Peggy Sattler: I can tell the member across the way that there is much more expansive reform needed to ensure enforcement of family support orders than just making those payments available online.

I, myself, in my constituency office, had a recent case where I think it took three years to track down the delinquent parent, who had moved to Alberta and was not making those support payments that he had been ordered to by the court.

So there are a lot of issues involved in making the FRO system do what it is supposed to do and ensure that the parent who has been ordered to receive the support actually gets it. This bill, yes, is one tiny step, but so much more is needed.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Question?

Mr. Ian Arthur: I want to pick up on what the member was just speaking to.

Shortly after you're elected, it does not take long to learn what the FRO is and how underfunded it is and what a backwards system it actually represents. In terms of meaningful steps forward, this legislation, as we have said, is a starting point.

Would the member please elaborate on what she would like to see in terms of a well-funded Family Responsibility Office and the potential that would have?

Ms. Peggy Sattler: As with so many initiatives that are undertaken by the government, what happens on paper is not the reality for people who are receiving the services. Unless there is robust enforcement, unless resources are allocated to operate these programs and services, they won't be able to achieve what they are supposed to achieve.

There remains the need for major reforms of the Family Responsibility Office. There remains the need for major reforms to be able to provide meaningful support for people who are going through the Family Court system and, in particular, as I said, people who have experienced intimate partner violence in the home.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): There isn't enough time for another question. Further debate?

Ms. Lindsey Park: I was just going to ask one final question, but we'll move on to my remarks, then, with the limited time.

I'm pleased to rise in the House today for third reading of the Moving Ontario Family Law Forward Act. As I've said before, this bill, along with our government's steps to invest in technology and move more services online, will make the family justice system easier for Ontario families to navigate in their time of need.

When families are going through a separation, they're often going through one of the most stressful times in their life. They're also often encountering our court system for the very first time. The court process should help couples make the best decisions for them and their children while causing minimal additional stress and emotional strain. This is ultimately the impetus behind this bill and our complementary reforms, such as expanding the dispute resolution officer program to new locations, as well as moving more court services online.

I'm very proud to stand before the House in support of this bill, having had a part in its development, as parliamentary assistant to the Attorney General.

Speaker, in July 2019, I was tasked by the Attorney General to review family and civil legislation and processes in Ontario. I know sometimes the process work in the work of improving processes can seem not the cool stuff to do. It's not billions of dollars to throw at something, but it's the hard work that's necessary to improve our system. Our aim as a government 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.

The break-up of a marriage or the break-up of a family is something no one expects when they're in love or when they decide to have children. It's rarely something people plan for, yet our society and our court system is filled with broken families who are interacting with the justice system for the first time. A frequent topic that came up in my 2019 consultations was the need to clean up the way family law appeal cases work in Ontario, the million-dollar question being, "Where does your family law case go next if you want to appeal a decision? The answer to that question is not so clear. As the Attorney General has said, even family

law lawyers are confused about this sometimes. That's why we're clarifying this with this bill.

Speaker, the Moving Ontario Family Law Forward Act aims to simplify the unnecessarily confusing process of filing family law appeals. 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. Depending which part of the province you're in, you have different options for starting court cases and different courts to start them in. Each of these three courts has a different route of appeal for their cases. 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 these individuals must feel trying to figure this process out when even lawyers find it difficult to figure out.

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're proposing clarifying amendments to the Courts of Justice Act and a few other statutes to help simplify appeal routes in family law cases. These proposed changes will help Ontarians better understand the family law appeal process. This common-sense proposal, if passed—which, by the way, has been a problem for decades—would make it easier for parents to understand where to appeal their case regardless of where their matter is heard in the province of Ontario.

Another specific change to appeal routes that I want to highlight is cases involving the Hague Convention on civil aspects of international child abduction that 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. This bill recognizes that, and our changes enable that to occur.

Canada 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 interest 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, sale or trafficking of children.

We've also introduced amendments to this bill at the committee stage to prioritize child protection cases. In the review of this bill by the Standing Committee on Justice Policy, it became clear that amendments could help clarify that child protection cases are of a special nature that is different from other family law cases. We heard that child protection cases, if appealed to the Ontario Court of Appeal, should not have to have the requirement for bringing an extra motion, which can be expensive, to get special permission or leave to appeal, in legal terms, the case.

1720

Essentially, the amendments proposed at committee have removed a step in the appeal process for child protection cases. In response to what we heard at committee, I put forward two motions at committee to make the process more simple and direct for child protection cases, which were both adopted. And now, if this bill passes, the court's permission will not be needed on the appeal of these sensitive child protection cases to the highest appellate court in our province.

This will be true no matter what court or what part of the province the case is started in. Specifically, you can see these changes, if you're curious and looking at the bill again as it has come back in its amended form, at section 1 of schedule 2 of the Moving Ontario Family Law Forward Act. It amends the Courts of Justice Act so that certain appeals under the Child, Youth and Family Services Act, 2017, to the Court of Appeal from the Divisional Court will no longer require leave of the Court of Appeal.

The motion removed child protection and adoption orders made by the Ontario Court of Justice from the list of orders that must first get leave before bringing an appeal to the Ontario Court of Appeal. This means that child protection orders made by the Ontario Court of Justice and appealed first to the Divisional Court may always be appealed a second time to the Ontario Court of Appeal without having to apply to the Court of Appeal for permission first.

We also took it a step further and removed the existing leave requirement for child protection orders made by the unified Family Court. With this change, we're able to ensure there is an equal playing field for child protection matters, regardless of which part of the province you start the case in.

The decisions made in child protection cases, we heard at committee and we all know, involve unique issues that have profound impacts on the lives of parents and children. This change recognizes the need to treat these cases differently, and is responsive to the input from justice stakeholders, including child protection lawyers, family lawyers, children's aid societies and the Office of the Children's Lawyer. It ultimately will enhance access to justice by making it easier, less expensive and faster for child protection cases to be appealed to the Ontario Court of Appeal.

The Ontario Bar Association wrote to us in the wake of these changes, saying, "The OBA remains strongly in favour of simplifying family law appeal routes, and ensuring families in Ontario are treated equally regardless of where they reside and whether or not spouses are married. The courts have recognized the inconsistency, confusion and inequality in the current appeal structure, which can make it very challenging, even for counsel, to know with certainty where appeals should be taken. This is costly and time-consuming for lawyers and our clients."

That support lines up with the support that we received from the Ontario Association of Children's Aid Societies, the Office of the Children's Lawyer, the Ontario

Association of Child Protection Lawyers, the OBA, the Federation of Ontario Law Associations and the courts. They're all supportive of these amendments we made at committee.

I think we can probably all agree in this chamber that cases involving topics of this nature should be expedited. It's not just our legislative but our moral duty to help protect the most vulnerable among us, especially children. We must do everything we can, and this will help the courts do their part.

The changes in the legislation we're debating today are also responding 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. Making these provincial changes to align family law at the provincial level with the federal Divorce Act changes was also one of the most frequently heard recommendations on my tour of the province in 2019. 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, the amendments introduced in Bill C-78 largely align with our government's vision of a faster and easier court process for families.

As part of our ongoing plan to make our government smarter and in response to the federal government's modernization of the Divorce Act, this legislation, if passed, will ensure that Ontario's 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 laws, used by the courts in the case of parenting decisions where a couple's going through a divorce, and another set of laws, used for parenting decisions where couples are not going through a divorce because perhaps they're common law or were never married.

Specifically, this alignment includes updating parenting terminology, which we've heard a lot about and I understand all members are supportive of, which is removing outdated terms like "custody" and "access" in favour of 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.

Section 24 of schedule 1 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 that, through this legislation, there will be a clear list of factors which the court must consider when considering the impacts of family violence on a child. Before, this was not clearly set out in our provincial laws and, instead, had just been established by the courts through common law over time. So I'm pleased this now is clearly going to be set out in provincial legislation if this bill passes. You'll also see in the first few pages of the bill a clear definition of what family violence is. These

changes provide checks and balances that will help protect children when difficult changes to family relationships are taking place.

The culture, too often, when someone has a family dispute is to resort to the court system to resolve it. We have therefore also taken opportunity with the bill and the federal bill that was presented to reduce the burden on the court system by encouraging the use of alternative dispute resolution processes outside the courts. Those can also include Indigenous alternative dispute resolution processes that are specifically designed for Indigenous communities.

When appropriate, it's important that our justice system finds ways to encourage earlier and alternative dispute resolution methods, like mediation, collaborative law or arbitration. Specifically, a provision's been added in this bill to encourage families to resolve their issues through out-of-court family dispute resolution processes. 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's 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 and too expensive.

I also want to mention again an important non-legislative initiative that's happening alongside these legislative changes that is responsive to what we heard in 2019 in the consultation, and that's our government's work with the Superior Court of Justice to expand the dispute resolution officer program. Through this program, people involved in family proceedings are provided with an early evaluation of their case by a neutral third party. This service works alongside other Family Court services provided by the Ministry of the Attorney General, like family mediation services and the family law information centres in the courthouses, to help resolve family cases in ways that minimize conflict, safeguard the best interests of children, protect the legal rights of all family members and resolve issues as early as possible.

Dispute resolution officers are senior family lawyers appointed to conduct family case conferences. This service often narrows the issues in dispute and facilitates a settlement or earlier resolution of a case. It's one that has received positive reviews in the parts of the province, largely, that it's in. Currently, the DRO program operates in the Superior Court of Justice and unified Family Court locations in Barrie, Brampton, Durham, Hamilton, London, Milton, Newmarket, St. Catharines and Toronto. We're now expanding that program—recently announced by the Attorney General—to court locations in Kitchener and in Welland.

1730

Other changes happening alongside this bill that are responsive to what I heard in 2019 is the rapid investment in moving more Family Court services online. Whether it's the online filing of documents or the increased use of

teleconferences and video conferences, these advancements in technology for our justice system will 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.

This is a bit anecdotal; I remember one person in Ottawa saying to me—I remember it clearly in the consultation in Ottawa—something along the lines of this: “If you can just get us online filing, you'll be my hero.” I can't take credit for that, because it's many people who have made this possible. But we certainly are light years ahead, with changes like that—to enable online filing—of where we were when I did that consultation in 2019.

We have not been resting on our laurels at the Ministry of the Attorney General; that's for sure. There is ongoing collaboration with our justice partners, and I'm looking forward to that collaboration and progress continuing.

Speaker, I've outlined a number of steps in this bill and alongside it that we're taking to make the family justice system more accessible, affordable and easier to use. The goal of the 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 court. 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 you live; 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 that you can understand and actually use, no matter where you are or what court is dealing with your matter.

I want to emphasize that this work is only the start of what needs to be done to make family law more responsive, accessible and affordable for all families. But this bill is taking necessary steps now to move family law forward. We want Ontario families to know that their government is working to make the system better and more responsive—

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Thank you. Questions?

Ms. Judith Monteith-Farrell: Thank you to the member from Durham for her presentation and for her work on this bill.

I think all of us, when we come to this job, are bombarded in our constituency offices with people who are having trouble with family law and aspects of marriage breakups and the court systems.

I was wondering if the member agrees that finances are a huge barrier to access to law. And does she feel that we need to support families with financial assistance in order for them to find justice for their children?

Ms. Lindsey Park: We have a robust legal aid system in Ontario with precisely that goal in mind.

I might add that the threshold to qualify for legal aid assistance has increased year over year in the province of Ontario under our government, with more people eligible for certificates. That work needs to continue. We recognize, during a global pandemic, that families are going through a difficult time. We need to continue to look for more ways to support them.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Questions?

Mr. Toby Barrett: The member for Durham explains how family disputes really provide some unique challenges for a justice system. I certainly hear from people who find family law frustrating. You mentioned winners and losers. In my opinion, there shouldn't be a winner, but rather a process that puts families first and, of course, puts children first.

We all know someone who has been tied up in the system. It's challenging, it's overly complex, it's outdated and it creates anxiety amongst so many people. For example, family law appeals, they're unclear, they're difficult to navigate. Can the member, perhaps through some of her work on this legislation, share some measures to address some of these concerns?

Ms. Lindsey Park: The member for Haldimand–Norfolk I think highlights one of the important issues we're trying to resolve and improve upon in this bill. That is the fact that there are three different courts that hear family law matters in the province of Ontario, and the appeal process is different for each court. That's confusing. It's confusing to lawyers, so you can only imagine how confusing it is to people who do not have a representative.

Through this bill, we worked alongside our chief justices of Ontario, who have to manage the court resources and the appeals process in the province of Ontario, to make the appeal system easier for families to navigate. In this bill, we propose to clarify where to appeal family law cases and increase consistency and fairness, regardless of where your case is heard.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Question?

Mr. Ian Arthur: Speaker, through you, my question is fairly simple: Does the member opposite feel that the cuts to legal aid that were done by this government in any way undermine the effectiveness or efficiency of this piece of legislation?

Ms. Lindsey Park: I'm proud we have a robust legal aid system in the province of Ontario. Year over year, under our government, the eligibility for legal aid has continued to increase. That threshold for vulnerable families has continued to increase, increasing eligibility for certificates for family law matters. Again, we recognize that we're going through a global pandemic and how important that coverage is.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Question?

Mr. Rick Nicholls: During consultations, stakeholders told us that the family law appeals process needs to be better balanced and promote access to justice. At committee, our government put forward two motions that would improve access to justice and clarify the appeal process even further for child protection cases only. Specifically, stakeholders asked us to rethink our appeal

route for child protection matters that stem from the Ontario Court of Justice. I understand that we took it one step further and increased access to justice for child protection proceedings that stem from the unified Family Court. Can the member from Durham please explain why these amendments were made at committee and what the stakeholders' responses were?

Ms. Lindsey Park: Our government has not stopped listening to the people of Ontario, from when these consultations on family law started in mid-2019 through to the committee stage of this bill and back to third reading.

At committee, we heard from a few stakeholders who suggested that changes to how child protection cases should be treated should be made. We took note and we addressed their concerns. In response, we did what they were asking for, which is to eliminate the leave requirement for child protection cases when they make that appeal to the Ontario Court of Appeal, no matter what court they start in. We've received support, Speaker, for these changes from the Ontario Bar Association, the Ontario Association of Children's Aid Societies, the Office of the Children's Lawyer and a number of other stakeholders. We just want to thank the members opposite and everyone who appeared before committee for their collaboration.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Question?
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Miss Monique Taylor: I just want to say how grateful I am for the written submission from the child protection lawyers because they were the ones who flagged this first, and when I asked the Attorney General about this, he kind of fluffed it off to me like, "Oh, it's the family lawyers. It isn't about the kids." Well, it's always about the kids when we're talking about child protection. So I'm glad they finally had the way to change it, because we put in the same amendment. The government put in one; they changed it. It was a good thing.

But still, the greatest problem throughout this entire bill is access to justice. We've heard from many folks right throughout the same round, the same people who talk about—who support this bill. They will still say that the measures do not go far enough. Do they not think that families need legal representation when they're being outgunned by children's aid societies?

Ms. Lindsey Park: As I said at the end of my speech for all those who cared to listen, this is not the end; this is only the beginning. You cannot change a justice system that has been created over hundreds of years overnight. You can't improve it and completely overhaul it overnight.

I'm proud—and I hope the members opposite will support tangible steps forward in the middle of a pandemic to support families. This is needed. Families are asking for it. The legal community across the province is asking for it. Now is the time to stand with families in the province of Ontario.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Question?
The member for Mississauga East–Cooksville.

Mr. Deepak Anand: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's Mississauga–Malton.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Sorry.

Mr. Deepak Anand: Thank you so much for that.

Since the outset of the pandemic, Ontario's justice system has moved decades in a matter of months. I would like to say thank you to AG Downey for your hard work. The progress made in modernizing the system has increased the accessibility and affordability of justice across the province.

Madam Speaker, we all know how tough it becomes when it comes to family legal matters. Through you, I will ask the member: Please describe how our government has made it easier, faster and more affordable to resolve these family matters.

Ms. Lindsey Park: I think the member highlights that the bill alone and the laws alone don't work if there is not a robust legal system that's supporting the implementation of them in access to justice.

Alongside this bill, we've also worked tirelessly to make justice more accessible and more modern with investments in technology that have enabled the province to provide more remote proceedings and reduce the number of courthouse visits needed by families, making the justice system safer to access during the COVID-19 outbreak and recovery period.

This is especially helpful for families who have to consider child care when making a visit to a courthouse. Some examples of changes are electronic filing for more than 400 types of civil and Family Court documents, as well as a cloud-based document sharing and storage platform for e-hearings.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): We don't really have enough time for another question.

Report continues in volume B.

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