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CONTENTS / TABLE DES MATIÈRES

Monday 22 February 2021 / Lundi 22 février 2021

PRIVATE MEMBERS' PUBLIC BUSINESS / AFFAIRES D'INTÉRÊT PUBLIC ÉMANANT DES DÉPUTÉES ET DÉPUTÉS

Road safety

Mrs. Nina Tangri.....	11375
Ms. Jennifer K. French.....	11377
Mr. Dave Smith.....	11378
Mr. Jamie West.....	11378
Mr. Randy Pettapiece.....	11379
Mr. Stephen Blais.....	11380
Ms. Goldie Ghamari.....	11380
Mrs. Nina Tangri.....	11381
Motion agreed to.....	11381

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS / DÉCLARATIONS DES DÉPUTÉES ET DÉPUTÉS

Health care

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong.....	11381
------------------------------	-------

Rural Ottawa South Support Services

Ms. Goldie Ghamari.....	11382
-------------------------	-------

Aslam Mahida Mohammad

Mr. Faisal Hassan.....	11382
------------------------	-------

Paramedic services

Mr. Mike Harris.....	11382
----------------------	-------

Tenant protection

Ms. Peggy Sattler.....	11382
------------------------	-------

Logement abordable / Affordable housing

Mme Lucille Collard.....	11383
--------------------------	-------

COVID-19 response

Mr. Daryl Kramp.....	11383
----------------------	-------

Automobile insurance

Mr. Kevin Yarde.....	11383
----------------------	-------

Marilyn Crabtree

Mr. Jim McDonell.....	11383
-----------------------	-------

Hospitality industry

Ms. Jane McKenna.....	11384
-----------------------	-------

QUESTION PERIOD / PÉRIODE DE QUESTIONS

COVID-19 response

Ms. Andrea Horwath.....	11384
Hon. Doug Ford.....	11384
Hon. Christine Elliott.....	11384

COVID-19 response

Ms. Andrea Horwath.....	11385
Hon. Doug Ford.....	11385

Long-term care

Ms. Sara Singh.....	11386
Hon. Paul Calandra.....	11386

COVID-19 response

Mr. Stan Cho.....	11386
Hon. Doug Ford.....	11387

COVID-19 immunization

Mme France Gélinas.....	11387
Hon. Christine Elliott.....	11387

Health care

Mr. Roman Baber.....	11388
Hon. Christine Elliott.....	11388

Northern economy

Mr. Norman Miller.....	11389
Mr. Dave Smith.....	11389

Small business

Ms. Catherine Fife.....	11389
Mr. Stan Cho.....	11389

Land use planning

Ms. Mitzie Hunter.....	11390
Hon. Steve Clark.....	11390

Human trafficking

Mr. Stan Cho.....	11391
Hon. Jill Dunlop.....	11391

Land use planning

Ms. Suze Morrison.....	11391
Hon. Steve Clark.....	11391

Small business

Mr. Michael Coteau.....	11392
Hon. Monte McNaughton.....	11392
Mr. Stan Cho.....	11392

Long-term care

Ms. Bhutika Karpoche.....	11393
Hon. Merrilee Fullerton.....	11393

Land use planning

Mr. Mike Schreiner.....	11393
Hon. Paul Calandra.....	11393

Employment standards

Mr. Kevin Yarde.....	11394
Hon. Monte McNaughton.....	11394

REPORTS BY COMMITTEES / RAPPORTS DE COMITÉS

Standing Committee on Public Accounts

Mme France Gélinas.....	11394
Debate adjourned.....	11395

Select Committee on Emergency Management Oversight	
Mr. Daryl Kramp.....	11395
Report presented	11395
Standing Committee on Public Accounts	
Mme France G��linas	11395
Debate adjourned	11395
Select Committee on Emergency Management Oversight	
Mr. Daryl Kramp.....	11395
Report presented	11395

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS / D  P  T DES PROJETS DE LOI

Combating Human Trafficking Act, 2021, Bill 251, Ms. Jones / Loi de 2021 sur la lutte contre la traite des personnes, projet de loi 251, Mme Jones	
First reading agreed to.....	11396
Housing is a Human Right Act, 2021, Bill 252, Mr. Hassan, Ms. Singh / Loi de 2021 sur le logement en tant que droit de la personne, projet de loi 252, M. Hassan, Mme Singh	
First reading agreed to.....	11396
Mr. Faisal Hassan.....	11396

STATEMENTS BY THE MINISTRY AND RESPONSES / D  CLARATIONS MINIST  RIELLES ET R  PONSES

Human trafficking	
Hon. Jill Dunlop.....	11396
Hon. Sylvia Jones.....	11397
Ms. Jennifer K. French.....	11398
Mme Lucille Collard.....	11399

PETITIONS / P  TITIONS

Consumer protection	
Ms. Lindsey Park	11399
Property taxation	
Mr. Daryl Kramp.....	11399
Life insurance	
Ms. Donna Skelly.....	11400
Environmental protection	
Ms. Andrea Khanjin	11400
Consumer protection	
Ms. Goldie Ghamari.....	11400
Northern Health Travel Grant	
Ms. Judith Monteith-Farrell	11400

Small business	
Mr. Jim McDonell.....	11401
Front-line workers	
Mme France G��linas	11401
Consumer protection	
Mr. Norman Miller.....	11401
Addiction services	
Mr. Jamie West	11401

OPPOSITION DAY / JOUR DE L'OPPOSITION

Long-term care	
Ms. Andrea Horwath.....	11401
Mr. John Fraser	11404
Mr. Will Bouma	11405
Ms. Sara Singh	11406
Mme Lucille Collard.....	11406
Ms. Lindsey Park	11407
Mr. Jamie West	11409
Mr. Mike Schreiner	11409
Mr. Randy Pettapiece	11410
Ms. Jennifer K. French.....	11411
Ms. Mitzie Hunter	11412
Mr. David Piccini	11412
Mr. Wayne Gates	11414
Ms. Donna Skelly.....	11415
Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong.....	11416
Mme France G��linas	11416
Mr. Faisal Hassan.....	11417
Ms. Marit Stiles.....	11417
Ms. Judith Monteith-Farrell	11417
Mrs. Jennifer (Jennie) Stevens	11417
Miss Monique Taylor	11418
Ms. Andrea Horwath.....	11418
Motion negatived	11419

ORDERS OF THE DAY / ORDRE DU JOUR

Accelerating Access to Justice Act, 2021, Bill 245, Mr. Downey / Loi de 2021 visant �� acc��l��rer l'ac��s �� la justice, projet de loi 245, M. Downey	
Hon. Doug Downey	11419
Mr. Kevin Yarde	11429
Mr. Mike Harris	11430
Mr. Wayne Gates	11430
Mr. Daryl Kramp.....	11430
Mr. Michael Mantha.....	11430
Mr. Will Bouma	11431
Mr. Gurratan Singh	11431
Second reading debate deemed adjourned	11435

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

Monday 22 February 2021

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Lundi 22 février 2021

The House met at 0900.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Good morning, everyone.

Prayers.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): I wish to acknowledge this territory as a traditional gathering place for many Indigenous peoples and nations, most recently the Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation.

This being the first sitting Monday of the month, I ask everyone to join in the singing of the Canadian national anthem, followed by the royal anthem.

Playing of the national anthem / Écoute de l'hymne national.

Playing of the royal anthem / Écoute de l'hymne royal.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' PUBLIC BUSINESS

ROAD SAFETY

Mrs. Nina Tangri: I move that, in the opinion of this House, the government of Ontario should take action to keep our roads and communities safe by increasing penalties for stunt driving and other dangerous offences under the Highway Traffic Act.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Mrs. Tangri has moved private member's notice of motion number 138. Pursuant to standing order 101, the member has 12 minutes for her presentation.

I turn to the member from Mississauga—Streetsville.

Mrs. Nina Tangri: It is my honour to rise in the Legislature for the first time in 2021 and lead off the debate of my second private member's motion of my parliamentary calendar. While responding to the health and economic impacts of COVID-19 has always been, and will continue to be, the government's top priority throughout this pandemic and recovery to come, it is very important that all aspects of legislative business continue, especially private members' business.

Before I begin, I would like to thank the government House leader for bringing forward the standing order changes in the fall that allowed us to be here this morning and consider an extra piece of private members' business each week to catch up from the impacts that COVID-19 had on our last spring session. As we all know, we normally would not be here at this time talking about PMBs.

While the pandemic has brought direct impacts to each and every one of us here in Ontario and around the world, there are other, more indirect impacts the pandemic has

had as well. One of those indirect impacts has been on our roads and highways. The people of Ontario have been doing their part throughout the pandemic by staying home and limiting their travels to essential trips only. The businesses of Ontario have adapted their practices and allowed employees to work from home, which has led to a drastic decrease in the number of people who commute to and from work.

Naturally, this has led to a marked decrease in road users and traffic volumes. Traffic is lighter, which is something I'm sure most road users appreciate, but there are people taking advantage of this change by acting irresponsibly and downright dangerously.

Last May, we were all shocked to hear of an 18-year-old charged with travelling 308 kilometres per hour on the Queen Elizabeth Way west of Toronto. As Sergeant Kerry Schmidt of the Ontario Provincial Police explained at the time, that's 191 miles an hour, or 280 feet per second. Any driver up ahead would not even be able to see this person coming up behind them. A driver could check their mirror and begin to change lanes and, without notice, this vehicle could be racing past them or into them.

0910

Words cannot begin to describe how utterly reckless, dangerous and callous this behaviour is, and members of the public agree. This particular incident has started a conversation about the dangerous behaviour people were exhibiting on the roads, but this driver isn't the only one we have seen acting this way. While not all charges are as egregious, we are seeing an extremely concerning increasing trend as bad actors have been treating empty roads and highways as their personal racetracks, driving at ludicrous speeds without care and regard for others. It was pure luck that, in this case, nobody was injured or killed, but this is not always the reality. Speeding and aggressive driving are the number one cause of driving-related fatalities. These deaths are preventable.

Last year, Peel Regional Police, responsible for my community of Mississauga, laid 827 stunt driving charges in 2020, versus 366 charges in 2019 and 375 the year before. The change between 2019 and 2020 is a 125% increase.

In Toronto, as of mid-September, 714 stunt-related driving charges were laid, up from 332 in the same period a year before—a 215% increase. In Waterloo, 285 drivers were charged with stunt driving last year, compared to 143 the year before. This is a 98% increase.

The numbers across the province paint a clear picture that this is a growing problem. As of October, high-speed collisions across the province rose by 186%, compared to

the previous year. These collisions are tragic and have real impacts on real people. Innocent people are at risk of serious injury or losing their lives as a result of this reckless, callous and irresponsible behaviour.

Enforcement is not the issue here, Speaker. Many members know I have a great deal of respect for our police and I have an especially good relationship with my local chief of police, Chief Nish Duraiappah. The increase in charges means the officers are keeping up. We're also seeing operations spanning multiple jurisdictions, targeting rallies, gatherings and other events that promote unlawful and dangerous behaviour. Project Drift, a collaboration between the OPP, York Regional Police and Peel police, is a prime example and has yielded good results.

Section 172 of the Highway Traffic Act prohibits racing and stunting. The actions that define these terms are currently outlined in regulation. A few of these, as they relate specifically to stunt driving, are brake-checking; driving without being in the driver's seat; going 50 kilometres per hour or greater over the speed limit; or travelling at or above 150 kilometres per hour, which was a section our government introduced in 2019.

The majority of charges laid are for speeds 50 kilometres and over. It is these types of actions that cause the greatest risk and devastation.

While excessive speeds we should never be travelling certainly grab our attention—160, 228, 250 or 308 kilometres per hour, for example—stunt driving is not limited to freeways or expressways. Just this month, three drivers in Oakville were charged, travelling at 129 kilometres per hour in a 60-kilometre zone. Last June, police in Burlington charged a driver with travelling 156 kilometres in a 60-kilometre zone, nearly 100 kilometres per hour over the posted limit.

In 2018, around the time I moved into my constituency office in Streetsville, a driver up the street from us on Britannia Road was caught at 142 kilometres per hour in a 50-kilometre zone, nearly three times the speed limit. And, last August, a stunt-driving charge was laid against a driver travelling 119 kilometres in a 60-kilometre zone, nearly twice the limit, also on Britannia Road. This was not the driver's first stunt-driving charge, nor was it his second; it was his third in five months.

These individuals are acting with no regard for the people and communities around them. These actions are taking place on our local streets, near homes, libraries, parks and schools. Every time the police stop a driver acting this dangerously, they are saving people's lives. And every time a driver acts this dangerously, they are putting other people's lives at risk. When collisions don't occur, it is out of sheer luck, nothing else.

There are two factors, I believe, that need to be addressed. First, the current penalties for stunt driving, at least at the roadside, are not a strong enough deterrent. The current roadside penalty for stunt driving is a seven-day licence suspension and a seven-day vehicle impoundment, which is, of course, at the owner's expense. The current roadside penalty for impaired driving is a 90-day licence suspension and a seven-day vehicle impoundment.

To be clear, driving while impaired by drugs or alcohol is absolutely unacceptable and poses a great danger to other road users and members of communities right across the province, but so is stunting and racing. There is no valid reason for anybody to be stunting, and the act of doing so, while a mistake in retrospect for most, is deliberate. We need to prevent this behaviour from happening in the first place and keep our road users safe.

While the courts should—and must—have to convict individuals before the full penalties allowed under statute, such as fines or imprisonment, can be applied, administrative or roadside penalties immediately reduce the risks these drivers pose on our highways and further deter individuals from committing the offence.

The government should consult with stakeholders and others across the province to determine what an appropriate roadside penalty, both in terms of licence suspensions and vehicle impoundments, should look like. Additionally, escalating penalties, increasing each time the offence is committed, should be taken into consideration to prevent repeat offences from occurring.

The other factor that needs to be addressed specifically relates to younger drivers. Like many other things, the habits we develop when we are young stick with us throughout the rest of our lives. We must make sure that our youth develop good driving habits that keep them safe and all road users safe. We have zero tolerance for novice drivers with a G1 or a G2 licence in our graduated licensing program or anyone 21 years of age or younger driving under the influence of drugs or alcohol, because we know the lack of driving experience poses additional risk. It is reflected in many of the reports of charges we see in the media. It is reflected in the fatalities and injuries that are a result of these preventable collisions and, coming from the insurance world, it is definitely reflected in the insurance premiums in that age group.

As the Honourable Minister and Associate Minister of Transportation stated during National Teen Driver Safety Week in October, "Road crashes are the second leading cause of death among young people in Canada. It's a tragedy when someone loses a life on our roads, and these deaths are completely avoidable."

We need to educate our young drivers and make them aware of the responsibilities they have as operators of motor vehicles. We also need to make them aware of the serious risks they pose to themselves and others when they behave irresponsibly and ensure they are aware of the penalties they face for doing so. This charge, and the reckless behaviour associated with it, is not something to be proud of; it is something you should deeply, deeply regret.

While it is true that Ontario has some of the toughest penalties in North America when it comes to street racing and stunt driving, the dangerous trend we have seen means that we have more work to do. This is not an easy issue, and the correct response and the correct policies won't be immediate. The government needs to work with stakeholders and find the right policies to implement. They are willing to offer solutions and they are willing to work with

the government to get them in place. We need to get this right.

Throughout my consultations on this motion, both in my community and with organizations and other groups, everybody agreed that this issue is of growing concern and everybody agreed that we need to take action. I hope that this motion is the start of an ongoing conversation on how we can best protect the individuals and families that use Ontario's highways. I look forward to hearing from my colleagues and the opposition members.

0920

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

Ms. Jennifer K. French: I am very pleased to be able to speak today on this motion, because certainly anything that we can do as a Legislature to make our roadways safer, the workers and families who travel on our roads safer, is something that not only we should be talking about but we should look forward to seeing government action on. Wanting our roadways to be safer is something that I think we are unified on. So I am pleased to offer my comments today and offer some additional suggestions to flesh out this motion in front of us.

The motion reads, "That ... the government of Ontario should take action to keep our roads and communities safe by increasing penalties for stunt driving and other dangerous offences under the Highway Traffic Act."

Just so that everyone is reminded, there are two pieces of legislation before this House that, at any time—if the government is serious about making changes when it comes to safety, they can pick up these two pieces of legislation. They are not insignificant in terms of their impact, but they are fairly uncomplicated. They could incorporate them into government legislation at any time—one being my own bill, Bill 122, Fairness for Road Users Act (Contraventions Causing Death or Serious Bodily Harm).

There are thousands and thousands of stakeholders, the bikers' rights organizations, folks from across the province who have requested—not just my bill. Mine is a newer version of a bill that has been tabled a few times, to give judges the opportunity to have stiffer penalties should someone be significantly harmed or killed through something that is—like an improper left turn. Right now, it's a slap on the wrist, and the families who are left struggling and suffering have no closure whatsoever.

So it is something that I'd ask the government to take a look at. I've asked the government, and they say, "Oh, we're looking forward to debate." Well, Speaker, you and I both know that there are many good ideas on this side of the House or on that side of the House that could very easily be incorporated into government legislation. That's one. Please consider that, especially as we're seeing, if you are sincerely honest—sorry, I know you're always honest; otherwise, it would be unparliamentary. But if you're sincere in wanting to make these changes, that's another one.

Additionally, Bill 62, as put forward by my colleague from University–Rosedale, to protect vulnerable road

users—we don't want people damaged, hurt, killed or endangered on the roadways.

So there are a few suggestions. I may revisit that in a moment, but I'm going to stick to this conversation because I'm very, very appreciative to have it.

This is about stunt driving—and first of all, I hate that it's called that. I take the member's point; the member from Mississauga–Streetsville said that people who are charged with stunt driving should be very regretful, that this shouldn't be a badge of honour. The term "stunt driving"—I think of Hollywood. I think that has to change. Whether we call it jerk driving or idiot driving or dangerous driving or reckless driving—I don't have an appropriate name for it, but it is purposefully getting behind the wheel to act like an idiot and to endanger people. They don't care who they are. They don't seem to care about the repercussions.

If you told someone that you were pulled over or that you were charged with drunk driving, impaired driving, drugged driving, there's quite a stigma there. I think that's because there has been so much education—not just the harm that comes with that, but also the stigma, the education campaigns. We have our work cut out for us when it comes to this type of driving, whether we call it aggressive driving or something like that—I don't know. Calling it stunt driving makes it seem kind of fun and I hate that.

Another thing I would encourage the government to stop doing or to stop course right now—this government is going ahead, pedal to the metal, full speed ahead, on their speed pilot. Right now, during a pandemic, when we see changing traffic patterns, we know that the numbers are going to be skewed. You have fewer people on the roads. So as you're doing your measures with the speed pilots, I worry about what that will yield and why. Who on earth is driving this speed pilot to increase the speed limit?

If we're going to stand in this House and talk about how speed kills, and thank our police officers who are doing their best to keep on top of this, if we're going to thank our first responders who are first on the scene with the havoc and the trauma that results from high-speed impact collisions, ask the folks at the hospitals, ask the folks in the trauma departments who know that just an incremental increase in speed yields terrible results in their space. Catastrophic injury, Speaker, is a lifelong journey, if someone survives, for the family. It destroys lives, that of the family, not to mention the health care and home care required.

So as this government, on one hand, is saying, "We want to reduce speeds; we want to target those who would be reckless on our roads," on the other hand, you've got someone in a backroom somewhere saying, "Let's increase the speeds. That seems like a good idea." Let's figure that out, because now is not the time for that, nor, would I argue, is it ever.

Speaker, if we're going to bring forward meaningful legislation—and I'm not diminishing this motion, but this is a motion. The member has talked about this, calling on the government to take action. If a government is going to bring forward legislation, I think that the at-the-roadside

repercussions, the administrative things at the roadside, a seven-day impoundment or a seven-day licence suspension—fine, whatever. Why aren't we making that longer? Let's make this a deterrent. I don't want to hear about second- and third-time offenders. Let's have that graduated penalty where it gets worse each time they do it.

My understanding is that 90% of the charges—the government can correct me if I'm wrong, but what I have understood from stakeholders is 90% of those get pled out. There's a plea bargain. Well, that doesn't happen with impaired. Why on earth does it happen with this stunt driving? Let's look at administrative penalties rather than a judicial review. It's worth a conversation.

Also, people act like idiots in parking lots too, and interestingly, the legislation only has to do with public roadways. There's an interesting conversation. Let's talk to the police about where on earth people are putting others in danger, and let's get them.

Vision Zero: Our partners at the Ontario Good Roads Association, they talk about Vision Zero. We all need that kind of strategy. In Durham, we're one of the regions that has a strategic road action safety plan specific to aggressive driving. Let's talk about having those kinds of plans across the province.

Again, I've already mentioned effective education. Let's do that. Stunt driving shouldn't be hot. It shouldn't be fun. You think of stunt driving, you think of neon. You think of—I can't even imagine how much money *The Fast and The Furious* franchise is worth. But let's make it something that is not what young people want to do.

Ontario has some of the lowest fines for speeding in Canada. Why? They should be higher. This government has the pedal to the metal to get their speed increases rammed through; however, this is the chance for us to do the right thing.

Speaker, I have not left that much time for my colleagues, so I am going to sit down, though there is lots more to say. I'm very glad that we're having this conversation. Our roadways need to be safer.

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

Mr. Dave Smith: I really appreciate that this motion has come forward, because it does provide us with an opportunity to do a lot of things, more than just change the legislation. There is an education that needs to be made on this.

I've said it a number of times in the House here: I'm 50. I grew up in a small town, Wellington, south of Belleville. About 750 people lived in the community when I lived there. I remember one street in particular, Niles Street. For those of you who don't know Prince Edward county very well, it heads out to the dump. Just as you pass the dump, there's a 90-degree left turn. As a kid, we used to go out to the dump a fair bit and ride our bikes out there, because it was a great place for us to play. You can't do that anymore. But we would build forts and so on.

What sticks out in my mind is there was a section of the road, because it was fairly long and straight, where someone had painted a drag strip. You could do the quarter mile

right there, just two minutes outside of town. What I remember most about it, very interestingly, is that—my father had talked about it a couple of times—the paint that was used was actually provided by MTO to put the drag strip on. That is what things were like 40 years ago. That was kind of the attitude.

0930

The reason I bring it up is because there has been an attitude change on a number of different things. Stunt-driving is seen as something sexy that we should do; everyone should engage in it. I recall as a kid growing up, drunk driving was considered the norm. I recall distinctly that after winning the squirt all-Ontario baseball championships at home in Wellington at about eight years old, there was a big party on the field afterwards, and so many people were drinking. The joke the next day was they had to drive home because they were too drunk to walk. That was the attitude that we had. That attitude changed. That attitude changed through legislation. That attitude changed through education. It's something we need to do right now as well.

If you go on YouTube and do a search for “stunt-driving Ontario,” you're going to find thousands of videos. It's cool for some of these idiots to pull out their cellphone and record them doing idiot stunts with a whole group of people around. In a lot of these videos, you see someone smash into the group of people, because the spectators are there.

One of the problems with smart phone technology is that we've made people really stupid by doing it, and we do stupid things. In my riding, two incidents in particular: On November 19, an 18-year-old was driving up to Peterborough to the driver test centre with his G2 to go for his G licence and got pulled over doing 155 kilometres on the 115, and then about three weeks later, another idiot with their G2 licence driving up to get their complete licence clocked at 158. They don't get it.

I do blame a lot of things on mainstream media. I'm going to hit one in particular, and that's Pepsi. A number of years ago, they put out a commercial with Jeff Gordon test-driving a Camaro and what he put that salesman through. Jeff Gordon is a race car driver—absolutely a fabulous handler behind the wheel of a car. But he made it look cool to do something like that with a Camaro. We need to change that narrative. This motion is a great step forward in changing that narrative so that we are protecting people.

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

Mr. Jamie West: I also want to thank the member from Mississauga—Streetsville for her motion on driving. Before I do that, I made a promise to a constituent in my riding, Catherine Charron. She is the great-niece of Arnold Hawkins. Arnold turned 110 years old on January 30, his past birthday. It makes him the oldest Canadian-born man in Canada. He has received over 2,000 birthday cards from people all across Canada and scrolls from all levels of government, including my office.

As I said, Catherine lives in Sudbury. She's actually a friend of my wife and I. Because of COVID-19, she

couldn't celebrate in person, so I promised her that I'd wish her great-uncle a happy birthday at Queen's Park. So on behalf of everyone at Queen's Park, happy birthday, Mr. Hawkins. I hope you had an amazing 110th birthday.

In review of the motion that, in the opinion of this House, the Government of Ontario should take action to keep our roads and communities safe by increasing penalties for stunt driving and other dangerous offences under the Highway Traffic Act, we have limited time, so I want the member to know that I think it's a good idea.

Our role, as you know, Speaker, is to find ways to improve good ideas, and we do have some suggestions on how to improve this idea. As the member from Oshawa said earlier, I think Bill 122, the Fairness for Road Users Act, would be worth debating to help improve road safety. The member from University-Rosedale's Bill 62, the Protecting Vulnerable Road Users Act, would be worth debating as well to improve road safety.

There currently are some really tough penalties for stunt driving. When you have a conversation about increasing penalties and is it going to be a stronger deterrent, the knee-jerk reaction is yes, but perhaps maybe no. It seems like, as more and more fines are coming forward, maybe they're not deterrents at all right now.

When I looked up stunt driving on Google—the member opposite talked about videos online—the first half-dozen hits on Google are law firms who defend you against charges for stunt driving. One of the quotes they had—I clicked on one randomly—said, “Over the years, our law firm has successfully defended many individuals charged with ‘stunt driving.’”

These are people who are exceeding 50 kilometres an hour, people driving with people in the trunk, people doing doughnuts, people doing wheelies on motorcycles. As the member from Oshawa said earlier, maybe the phrase “stunt driving” is the wrong term, because a stuntman is a professional and stunt driving is something that's cool. It's *The Fast and the Furious*. She suggested “jerk driving.” I agree there has to be a stigma to this. The phrase has to be re-evaluated. You weren't caught filming *The Fast and the Furious*; you were caught endangering people, endangering your passengers, endangering people on the road, people nearby. So I would recommend we change that.

I also recommend, Speaker, that it forces some automatic training. When I talk to people caught speeding, the thing they complain about the most is how long it took to get the ticket—not the cost of the ticket; how long they were stuck on the side of the road, because they were speeding and it ate up the time they made up while speeding. The mandatory training would be a way not only to educate them on why it's dangerous and on the outcomes, but also to act as a penalty.

I think as well about being impaired: If you're caught impaired and you have children in the car, it's an automatic licence suspension, automatic child endangerment. It should be similar for stunt driving.

I have many notes, Speaker, but I've simply run out of time, so thank you to the member opposite and good luck on the motion.

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

Mr. Randy Pettapiece: It's a pleasure to speak today in favour of this motion put forward by my colleague from Mississauga–Streetsville. This motion deserves unanimous support. Stunt driving is incredibly dangerous. It's not only an issue on 400-series highways and in urban areas. In my riding of Perth–Wellington in rural Ontario, excessive speeding is a persistent problem.

Here are a couple of examples from last November: A 24-year-old was pulled over going 133 kilometres per hour in an 80-kilometre zone, a 55-year-old was clocked going 147 kilometres per hour in an 80-kilometre zone and a 19-year-old was pulled over for driving 169 kilometres in an 80-kilometre zone. The police investigation later revealed the driver had consumed alcohol and was driving with a novice licence.

No one should be okay with this, not when our friends, families, colleagues and neighbours use these roads every day. I commend the member from Mississauga–Streetsville for raising this serious matter in public and in this House.

Like many of us, I have family members and friends who are first responders. Like most MPPs, I have met with law enforcement officials, health care workers, doctors, paramedics and firefighters throughout my time in elected office. First responders too often witness the worst-case scenarios that result from stunt driving and excessive speeding. They tell me they are sick of the carnage.

Last year, the Ontario Provincial Police raised the alarm over excessive speeding. With fewer drivers on the road due to COVID-19, some feel it is okay to stunt-drive or speed. I know that the government is aware of this issue, and it is encouraging to know that the Ministry of Transportation is working on legislation to address it.

In an article marking National Teen Driver Safety Week last year, the Minister of Transportation and Associate Minister of Transportation highlighted this matter. The title, “Keep Our Young Drivers and Roads Safe from Aggressive Driving,” speaks for itself. I would like to quote from this article: “Making bad decisions behind the wheel can have devastating consequences, not just for you, but for other drivers and passengers sharing the road with you.”

I want to thank the Minister of Transportation and Associate Minister of Transportation for their ongoing commitment to fighting excessive speeding and stunt driving. By supporting this motion, each of us takes a step closer towards protecting drivers, families and everyone else using Ontario roads.

Speaker, when I come in on Sunday nights is when I see, most of the time, stunt driving. The roads are quiet. In fact, last night was the perfect example of two people racing on the 401. It happened just before the split in the 401, out by the airport. I am accustomed now to staying in one lane, usually one lane from the outside. I just stay there. I set my cruise control and watched the performance. These two people were doing excessive speeds and doing this weaving in and out of traffic. I guess they felt good because they were missing everybody. It happens

usually on a Sunday night when I come to this Legislature because the roads are quiet and they feel they have the room to do this.

0940

We need to control this. We need to get a handle on this. It is not fun seeing an accident where people are hurt or killed. I've seen some of these. I know that all of us in the House are tired of this aggressive driving. It needs to stop.

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

Mr. Stephen Blais: I'd like to thank the member from Mississauga–Streetsville for bringing the motion today. Going back to my time as a school trustee and through a decade on Ottawa city council and now here at the Legislature, road safety, in particular safety near where our children are walking to school and playing in parks in our neighbourhoods, has been a top priority of mine. In fact, just before getting elected to the Legislature, I had the privilege of launching the updated road safety action plan for the city of Ottawa.

I have no problem supporting this motion today. Higher fines can certainly act as a deterrent. But we have very high fines already for a number of serious traffic violations, and people continue to break the law. As an example, fines for distracted driving range from up to \$3,000 and six demerit points, and yet we continue to see people using their cellphones, people Zooming into meetings from their cars during the pandemic. Those high fines and a risk of demerit points are not having the effect we would like on that particular type of behaviour.

All that is to say that fines alone will not, I think, achieve the result that the honourable member is looking for. What we need is a modern road safety plan for 21st-century Ontario. Ontario needs a road safety action plan that is data-driven, has measurable outcomes and encompasses the principles of a systems approach that prioritizes human life and health, a plan that understands that safety is a shared responsibility between road providers, road regulators and, of course, road users.

Ontario needs a goal of reducing unnecessary traffic fatalities to zero. When I was elected last year, Madam Speaker, I was shocked that Ontario still does not have such a plan. The province can play a leadership role in developing a Vision Zero plan and requiring municipalities across the province to bring this systems approach to road design right across Ontario.

Human life and health are the number one priority, and so when we design and build roads, we must ensure that small human errors that we all do all the time don't result in death. Road traffic systems should be designed so that human error on the roadways cannot lead to death or serious injury. Ontario can lead the way, ensuring that municipalities have the tools needed to design, build and modify infrastructure to meet this objective.

We must continue to supplement police enforcement efforts with automated tools—and yes, in some cases, coupled with higher fines. But we also need to change the habits of high-risk users to make our roads safer.

I was proud to help lead the way with automated enforcement in Ottawa, Madam Speaker, with the introduction of the I Stop, You Stop campaign, which placed enforcement cameras on Ottawa school buses to stop, catch and fine those who choose to pass stopped school buses in our neighbourhoods, every morning unfortunately.

Road safety requires a change in the culture to achieve the long-term vision and goals of reducing fatalities to zero. Everyone shares responsibility for safety on our roads. The province or city as the roadway provider, the police who enforce the rules of the road and the road users all have a role to play in that.

I encourage the government to bring forward a road safety action plan that recognizes this systems approach to reduce fatalities to zero. We will always support measures to make our roads safer and help change road culture, that lead to a reduction in dangerous behaviours. We encourage the government to show some ambition and bring forward a Vision Zero plan for Ontario.

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

Ms. Goldie Ghamari: It's an honour to rise today for the first time in 2021 to speak to this matter. I wanted to thank the member for Mississauga–Streetsville for bringing forward this important motion. When she asked me to speak to it today, I was proud to do so, because stunt driving is not just a big issue in the member's riding; it's a huge issue in Carleton. In fact, in rural areas, Madam Speaker, it is one of the top concerns that I get from constituents.

I just wanted to share a few recent news articles about stunt driving in Ottawa. This is from February 9, and this is a reminder from Ottawa's police traffic section that they're rolling out on rural roads: "Assignments for" street "enforcement include Osgoode Main Street, Snake Island Road, Manotick Station Road and River Road—'among others.'" These roads are all in my riding of Carleton, Madam Speaker.

One new driver was nabbed for speeding on Highway 416 because they "didn't get the memo." This G1 driver "netted a stunt driver charge after being stopped—unaccompanied on a 400-series highway—going 154 kilometres per hour in afternoon traffic."

Not only that, Madam Speaker, just on December 31, two G2 drivers were "stopped for racing on Limebank Road 60 kilometres per hour over the speed limit." Limebank Road is known as "Limebank raceway" in my area because it is notorious for speed driving and stunt driving.

Another news article, Madam Speaker, reads: "Motorist Clocked at 121 Km/h on Hunt Club Road in Ottawa's South End."

Another article: "Teenage Driver Caught Going 213 Km/h on Woodroffe Avenue." Woodroffe Avenue has a speed limit of 60 kilometres per hour, so the fact that a teen driver is going 213 kilometres per hour on this road signifies that there is a problem.

That's why, Madam Speaker, it is so important that we come together to support this motion, because this is what

the people of Ontario are asking for. This is what the people of Carleton are asking for.

In Richmond, where my constituency office is, the main road is Perth Street. That's also notorious for speed driving and stunt driving. One of the biggest concerns I get from people in Richmond is the concern that they have with the speed driving there, because right on that road, there are also people who live there: a lot of senior citizens, people walking their dogs, families walking with their children on those sidewalks. To have cars speeding by at over 100 kilometres per hour, that's a big problem.

Oftentimes, especially in rural areas, there might not be enough police presence. But I am so proud and so thankful that, because of the good relationship I have not just with the chief of police in Ottawa, Chief Sloly, but also with the local staff sergeants at the police stations that are in my riding, I have communicated the concerns with them. I am so pleased now that, more often than not, when I am driving in rural areas in my riding, there are police cars there. They're driving around or they're stopped, monitoring traffic, and I'm so thankful, because that's how we save lives.

It's so important that everyone is responsible and that everyone drives responsibly, but sometimes you can't control what people do. I think with this motion, imposing stricter penalties will send a strong message to these people that what they're doing is not appropriate. It's unsafe. You cannot bring back a life.

Again, I am proud to support this motion and I want to thank the member for bringing it.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): We'll go back to the member for Mississauga–Streetsville for her two-minute reply.

Mrs. Nina Tangri: I really do want to thank each of the members from Peterborough–Kawartha, Perth–Wellington, Carleton, Orléans, Oshawa and Sudbury for speaking to this motion.

We heard loud and clear, talking to many, many stakeholders about the term “stunt driving,” how it is perhaps something that many strive to obtain, which doesn't serve the purpose at all. We need to make sure we find some kind of a terminology—perhaps not what we've heard today, but I'd like to work with a lot of the others to find some specific terminology that would work in being more of a deterrent.

I certainly do look forward to working with all the stakeholders, the Ministry of Transportation and the Attorney General to work with them in changing the Highway Traffic Act to make sure that penalties are increased, because a seven-day licence suspension or a seven-day vehicle impoundment is not, by any means, a deterrent at all.

Just last week, I held a safety town hall with Mississauga fire, with a staff sergeant from the Peel police, the chief of paramedics and the Peel public health chief, Dr. Loh, on safety, and stunt driving came up quite often. All agree that further action needs to be taken to deter; it's not always after the fact. We need to make people understand, especially our young drivers, that stunt driving does kill.

And, unfortunately, many of them themselves have been killed whilst stunt driving, or the spectators around them. So we really want to make strides and make more efforts.

I do want to thank everyone for speaking to this bill and for their support. I look forward to working with everyone to make sure we have a positive resolution. Thank you very much, Speaker.

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

Mrs. Tangri has moved private members' notice of motion number 138. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? That's carried.

Motion agreed to.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Orders of the day?

Ms. Andrea Khanjin: No further business.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): There being no further business, this House stands recessed until 10:15.

The House recessed from 0951 to 1015.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

HEALTH CARE

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: Earlier this month, I received an email from Maura, a constituent. She writes:

“I am a 63-year-old female, in relatively good health, living in London.

“I moved here almost two years ago, and I still have not found a doctor.

“I am writing to you as I don't know what else to do or who else to contact.

“I have registered with HealthCare Connect, and I am still waiting for a connection.

“Having a virtual doctor is okay for minor ailments, but I don't believe this is a viable option long-term, especially as I get older.

“I hear all the time about how lucky we are to have such a fabulous health care system and I get quite angry and think to myself, ‘Wow, and I can't find a doctor.’

“It leaves me very scared. I'm not looking for any special treatment, but I would just like my voice to be heard.

“I know quite a few people in my situation, so I am not alone.”

She is right: She is not alone. I have heard from many constituents facing the same struggle. According to the Ministry of Labour's own website, the total projected number of job openings for family physicians in this province for the last five years is 7,000 to 8,000.

I am imploring this government, on behalf of Maura and all my struggling constituents, to work quickly to recruit and train more doctors. We cannot wait any longer.

RURAL OTTAWA SOUTH SUPPORT SERVICES

Ms. Goldie Ghamari: Mr. Speaker, as we move into February, it is of critical importance that seniors and adults with disabilities care for their mental health. This is especially true for those who live in rural areas, such as in the riding of Carleton, which I am proud to represent here at the Legislature.

The unfortunate reality is that seniors and adults with disabilities who live in rural areas are oftentimes more isolated, more distant from services and have more difficulty getting around due to lack of proper or reliable public transportation. Thankfully, Carleton is home to a wonderful non-profit charitable organization called Rural Ottawa South Support Services, or ROSSS.

I first had the pleasure of getting introduced to ROSSS when I was seeking the nomination, and I am thankful to have kept in touch with them ever since. Even before COVID, ROSSS, a well-known household name in communities like Manotick, Metcalfe, Osgoode, Greely, Kars, North Gower, Richmond and Vernon, was providing critical services and programs to seniors in rural Ottawa. However, since COVID, ROSSS immediately took action and stepped up to the plate to support seniors and adults with disabilities in rural Ottawa.

In ROSSS's more recent newsletter, they continue to highlight the services and supports that are available to the residents of rural Ottawa to support their well-being while staying safe at home.

To everyone living in rural south Ottawa, I encourage you to check out ROSSS's website, rosss.ca, or to call 613-692-4697.

ASLAM MAHIDA MOHAMMAD

Mr. Faisal Hassan: I will dedicate my statement this morning to Aslam Mahida Mohammed, a young man who lost his life a short while ago. Aslam was a generous and humble soul who was an inspiration and role model to many members of his community.

Aslam involved the youth in his community, and his impact on Masjid El Noor's community programs are felt to this day. Much of his communal work involved people from various groups within society, hence demonstrating the core Canadian values of inclusion and acceptance.

At his Masjid's Janazah prayer performed after his passing, Aslam's peers claimed that he always took time out of his own schedule to help with his community's projects and that he believed that something had to be done for his community's youth.

His legacy of inclusion and activism have lived on after his passing. A GoFundMe page launched after his death has raised a remarkable \$10,000, which will be donated to build wells, alongside creating food banks and other projects decided by Aslam's family. This demonstrates the importance of activist figures in society, alongside the power a community has when they come together.

My deepest sympathy and respect goes out to Aslam's family and friends. We will not forget Aslam.

1020

PARAMEDIC SERVICES

Mr. Mike Harris: On Friday, I joined the member of provincial Parliament for Kitchener South—Hespeler, Waterloo Regional Chair Karen Redman and the region's chief of paramedics services, Stephen Van Valkenburg, over Zoom to announce an expansion to our community paramedic program.

Back in the fall, our Minister of Long-Term Care implemented a 100% provincially funded, long-term-care-focused community paramedicine program. Alongside my regional colleagues, I was pleased to share that we're expanding this program in Waterloo region. This means that seniors waiting for long-term-care beds will be able to get the care they need from the comfort of their own home from specially trained paramedics.

It is no secret that after 15 years of neglect under the previous government, Ontario's long-term-care wait-lists have ballooned. The reality is that 38,000 people waited while they only built 611 new beds.

Our plan to modernize long-term care is well under way. In Waterloo region alone, we are already announcing close to 600 new and upgraded beds. And it's through programs like this one that we'll ensure those who are waiting will be well taken care of in their own homes.

So again, thank you to the Minister of Long-Term Care, the Minister of Health and, of course, our Premier for their commitment to ensuring our government provides seniors with the high-quality care they deserve. I look forward to seeing the expansion of community paramedicine in my riding getting off the ground and hearing about the benefits it brings to seniors and their loved ones.

TENANT PROTECTION

Ms. Peggy Sattler: London was dealing with a housing crisis long before COVID-19, but last week, we learned how much worse the pandemic has made things for London tenants. According to CMHA, in the last year, more than 8,000 London-area families fell behind on rent. London is second only to Toronto in the amount that is collectively owed in rent arrears, a whopping \$7.6 million. Many of these 8,000 families were already struggling to make ends meet before COVID turned their lives upside down. They now face the prospect of losing their homes as well.

I am grateful for the work of two local grassroots organizations, the London Tenants' Association and ACORN London, which have stepped up to support tenants in the wake of this government's drastic cuts to legal aid. This work is especially important right now, given the government's decision to allow fast-tracked COVID evictions to go ahead.

London's shortage of affordable housing and skyrocketing rents means people who are evicted struggle to find a new place to live. As Ontario faces a possible third wave, how are those 8,000 London-area families supposed to follow public health advice if they don't have a home to stay safe in?

London tenants desperately need solutions. When will this government recognize housing as a human right and start working with us to protect tenants and fix the housing crisis in London and across the province?

LOGEMENT ABORDABLE AFFORDABLE HOUSING

M^{me} Lucille Collard: En novembre dernier, j'ai lancé un groupe de travail sur le logement abordable avec mes trois collègues municipaux d'Ottawa–Vanier. Devant cette crise de logement qui affaiblit gravement notre économie et le nombre croissant de sans-abris, nous avons décidé d'unir nos efforts afin de trouver des solutions.

La pénurie de logements adéquats, sécuritaires et abordables dans la province est un problème majeur depuis plusieurs années, et la situation ne fait qu'empirer avec la pandémie.

Currently, more than 12,000 people, many families with children, are waiting for housing in Ottawa. This is a 15% increase from 2017. The lack of adequate, affordable housing in Ontario is not an issue that we can put off any longer. It is not a partisan issue; it's a matter of human rights and human dignity.

This pandemic makes us realize that we need to do better to protect and help the most vulnerable members of our communities. We have all heard and seen in the news and in our ridings the alarming increase and the terrible stories of homeless people. In a country like Canada, in a province as prosperous as Ontario, every citizen should have access to the necessary support to be able to live with dignity.

The days of the old shelter system have come and gone. It is time to invest in supportive housing, and I urge every member of this House to join efforts to ensure that all Ontarians can have a place to call home.

COVID-19 RESPONSE

Mr. Daryl Kramp: Colleagues, there's light at the end of the tunnel. I say this after having spent the last three days chatting with constituents in my riding, which is composed of two of the first five counties allowed to end the lockdown, fortunately, due to our green numbers.

We have to be clear: Nobody likes the lockdown. The government didn't do it on a whim, I can assure you. We listened to the top medical minds in this province. We acted based on science, which also included an evaluation of experiences in other jurisdictions like Australia last August—which, of course, would be their winter—and France last fall, when lockdowns stopped an upward death spiral that nothing else had slowed.

But what about that light? Well, let me tell you about a restaurant in one community in Napanee. They had never, ever offered takeout or home delivery, because they always had a very busy sit-down trade with their fantastic food. But during this last year they've stayed busy by sending their dishes into homes. They have kept their entire staff employed during all this time. Now that they

can serve sit-down meals again, they see more than the light at the end of the tunnel. Their kitchen is at capacity, and they've hired additional staff to handle the extra work. That's the Ontario spirit, Mr. Speaker.

AUTOMOBILE INSURANCE

Mr. Kevin Yarde: While our province has been in one of the longest lockdowns, there have been less drivers on the road and far fewer accidents. Despite this, billion-dollar auto insurance companies have been allowed to price-gouge in Brampton and the Peel region, charging some of the highest rates in the country. This is discrimination based on their postal codes, and the government must take action. The Ontario NDP caucus has repeatedly tried to end this auto insurance discrimination; however, this government has not been on the people's side.

On February 17, Brampton city council unanimously voted to take a stand and officially advocate to reduce our auto insurance rates. I support their motion. This was a step in the right direction. We need this government to mandate lower car insurance rates. They cannot ignore Brampton and many more cities in this province while Ontarians struggle with the economic impact of the pandemic. This government has the power to mandate lower auto insurance rates and make the lives of Bramptonians and others across the province more affordable. Yet, time and time again, they refuse to do so.

As the new critic for auto insurance, Mr. Speaker, I ask this government to listen to Ontarians when they say they are being price-gouged by Ontario's auto insurance companies. We, the official opposition, have asked this government to implement a 50% decrease on auto insurance payments during this pandemic and allow payment deferrals for those who have lost their jobs in these times of economic uncertainty.

I will continue fighting, Mr. Speaker, for my constituents and all Ontarians until they receive more affordable auto insurance. The only question is, will this government do the same?

MARILYN CRABTREE

Mr. Jim McDonell: I rise today to give thanks to a recently retired family physician who served the public and cared for her patients for over 30 years in Dundas county.

Dr. Marilyn Crabtree is a great example of the devotion we sometimes take for granted in our health care and medical professionals. She has had a long association with the Winchester District Memorial Hospital, where, by her own account, she delivered more than 1,000 babies. She has administered full life-cycle care, with a special emphasis on palliative care. At the same time, she has cared for countless other patients at the St. Lawrence Medical Clinic, where she has held leadership roles.

Dr. Crabtree told a local paper that she was "very privileged to have been part of so many people's lives." I can say, on behalf of the constituents of Stormont–

Dundas–South Glengarry, that we have been very privileged to have her amongst our many caring health care practitioners, who provide high-quality care for us, especially during these challenging times.

Dr. Crabtree, I wish you well during your retirement and hope to see you fulfill your stated desire of returning to the medical field in a local leadership role. Thank you, and I want to wish you many happy years in retirement.

HOSPITALITY INDUSTRY

Ms. Jane McKenna: COVID-19 has devastated our hospitality industry. Across Canada, these businesses were first to close and nearly last to reopen. During these difficult times, our hospitality sector has received significant support from the Ontario public service, especially those who oversee the Ontario building code within municipal affairs and housing.

I want to thank my colleague the member from Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry and the ministry’s director of building, Mansoor Mahmood, for their tireless efforts.

1030

Thanks to Toronto’s chief building official, William Johnston, and deputy chief Kamal Gogna for issuing patio tent permits in as little as three days. Thanks, Tim Murawsky, chief building official in the Blue Mountains, for supporting the hospitality sector by accepting alternative solutions. Thanks, Frank Bidin, Ottawa’s chief building official, who, even outside of COVID-19, is always solution-driven.

Thanks, Darren Sanger-Smith, Michelle McCulloch and Dave Hine for all you’re doing to support restaurants across the GTHA. And to our restaurants and hospitality operators, thank you for keeping us safe, whether we dine in or take out.

I also want to recognize Burlington operators Barry Glazier and Mike Coles for your strong leadership and patience.

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

I’ve been advised that the member for Brampton Centre has a point of order.

Ms. Sara Singh: Speaker, I seek unanimous consent to immediately pass private member’s motion 139, calling on the Ford government to address inadequate pay for PSWs and other health care sector workers.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The member for Brampton Centre is seeking the unanimous consent of the House to immediately pass private member’s motion 139, calling on the government to address inadequate pay for PSWs and other health sector workers. Agreed? I heard a no.

QUESTION PERIOD

COVID-19 RESPONSE

Ms. Andrea Horwath: People around the province are very, very concerned that this government is literally

marching us into a third wave of COVID-19. You just have to listen to what the experts are saying to get a sense of how worried they are. In fact, as our Premier decides to loosen restrictions, the advice that everybody is giving is quite the opposite. It’s to strengthen the restrictions. We all heard the chief medical officer, federally, Theresa Tam, say this last week: “Current public health measures will not be sufficient to control rapid growth and a resurgence is forecast.” This is exactly the same advice that Dr. Brown gave the Premier about a week and a half ago.

My question is, why is this Premier prepared to move ahead, risking lives, risking another lockdown and ignoring all of the advice of the experts?

Hon. Doug Ford: Through you, Mr. Speaker, we always follow the advice of the chief medical officer, Dr. Williams, and we’ll continue to do it. But I find it pretty rich, the flip-flops from the leader of the NDP, and the Liberals. The NDP and the Liberal members criticized the inclusion of Ottawa as part of the Christmas lockdown. They were criticizing us for locking Ottawa down, saying they shouldn’t be locked down. So it’s the flip-flop scenario here. It’s okay for Ottawa—and meanwhile, it was proved wrong; we should have kept them locked down, and thank God for Dr. Etches.

You can’t have it both ways. It’s very simple.

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

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Unfortunately, it’s not just Dr. Tam who is warning this Premier to stop the reopening of Ontario. The association of public health agencies, also last week, got on board and said that the Premier has underestimated the “imminent and considerable threat” of another wave and “public health measures need to be intensified”—not loosened. Likewise, the Ontario Medical Association, the doctors of Ontario, also warned the government that pandemic restrictions need to continue, to avoid a third wave of COVID-19.

Ontario’s doctors, the chief medical officer federally and public health units are all saying the same thing. The Premier’s own experts at the science table are urging this government to back away. Why does the Premier continue to march this province into a third wave and ignore all of the advice and information that experts are providing?

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

Hon. Christine Elliott: It’s really important to note—and I hope all Ontarians are listening to this—that we are not reopening the province. We are transitioning back into the COVID framework. We’re doing this in a very careful and cautious way, based on the medical information we’ve received from Dr. Williams and the public health measures table.

It’s also important to note that several of the members of the public health table are also the public health unit region officers, so they are reporting from across the province on their particular state of being. We are very well aware of the variants of concern that are operating in some parts of the province, which is why the emergency brake can be put by the medical officer of health on any

particular region, which is why Peel, Toronto and North Bay are still in the stay-at-home-order area and are not moving into the framework as yet.

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

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Well, Speaker, the government's own head of the science table said about this reopening, "I'd really like for him to be right"—referencing the Premier—"but all the data points in the exact opposite direction." The same thing was said by Dr. Brown about a week and a half ago. In fact, I think people's jaws dropped when they saw the modelling that Dr. Brown brought to the table. In fact, folks might remember that a particular reporter from TVO, John Michael McGrath, asked, "Is this presentation actually predicting a disaster?" And Dr. Brown, in response, said, "I don't think you're missing anything"; in other words, yes, it's quite possible that we're heading into a train wreck.

So what exactly does the Premier have in terms of information that he's relying on that says it's actually safe, when everybody else—the chief medical officer of health for Canada, our own science table experts and heads, the OMA, the association of public health agencies, our hospitals are all saying the same thing. Why is the Premier ignoring them?

Hon. Christine Elliott: We have been very clear with the people of Ontario every step along the way, with respect to this pandemic, about what's going on, where we are with things. Dr. Brown appeared with his modelling. It's very important for the people of Ontario to know what's happening across the province.

We do have the variants of concern. That is why, for example, the emergency brake was placed on North Bay, which would have been a green area except that a number of the variants—the South African variant has been detected in an apartment building and has been spreading. That is why the emergency brake exists, and that's why it's being used in North Bay and Peel and Toronto. Other parts of Ontario are able to move back into the framework.

We are watching this very carefully, and we are dealing every step of the way based on the medical advice given to us by Dr. Williams and by the rest of the public health measures table. We will continue to follow that.

COVID-19 RESPONSE

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Speaker, my next question is also for the Premier.

It's bad enough that the Premier is ignoring the advice of experts and plowing ahead with an ill-advised reopening, but at the same time he's ignoring the recommendations that these experts are making in order to keep people safe. For example: The Premier refuses to put in place paid sick days. He refuses to put in place a cap on class sizes in schools. He refuses to stop evictions from happening until the end of the pandemic. Yet these are all measures that the experts are saying the government should be putting in place.

Why is it that not only is this Premier reopening the way that he is—against advice—but he's also not undertaking the measures that are recommended to stop the spread of the variants of concern?

Hon. Doug Ford: Mr. Speaker, thanks to our Minister of Labour, myself—for advocating the federal government to change the program. We all know, since September, there's \$1.1 billion sitting there because I advocated for it. They only spent 319—now they've switched it. I want to thank the federal government for switching it.

Rather than always looking at doom and gloom, "the world is coming to an end"—we must be doing something right, because per 100,000 active cases, Ontario has the lowest outside the Maritime provinces, with 70 cases, compared to the average of 83 in Canada, 97 in Quebec, 108 in Alberta, 88 in BC, 142 in Saskatchewan, 86 in Manitoba and 83 in Newfoundland. There must be something going in the right direction here, thanks to the people and thanks to the chief medical officer and his team.

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The member for York Centre will come to order.

Leader of the Opposition, supplementary.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Perhaps the Premier is not aware, but 60% of Ontario workers do not have access to paid sick days. In fact, 70% of those workers are basically our essential workers. They're the lowest-income workers in our province.

Here in this chamber, every one of us can take a day off sick if we need to. We have paid sick days. We don't have to worry about missing money on our paycheque if we're taking a day off sick.

So my question to the Premier is, if it's good for everybody here, if it's okay for MPPs to take a day off sick and not have a pay deduction, why isn't it okay for our most important essential front-line workers?

1040

Hon. Doug Ford: Mr. Speaker, that's why the NDP is never going to form government, simple as that. They have two programs here: You have the federal program, and then what the leader of the NDP wants is for me to double dip into people's pockets when there's a program working—and it's working well now—and just ask them to pay more in taxes. You can't have it both ways.

Do you know something? We still have to be prudently fiscally responsible to all the taxpayers in this province, and we aren't about to duplicate it. They have a great program now. Rather than confusing people and contradicting and double-speaking, why don't you just tell people the truth? That is—

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I'm going to ask the Premier to withdraw.

Hon. Doug Ford: I'll withdraw.

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

Ms. Andrea Horwath: When there's little uptake to a program, it's because the program doesn't work, and that is the problem that we have. It's compounded by the fact that this Premier is shirking his responsibilities to provide

paid sick days to workers, particularly during a global pandemic, but it's exactly what we've seen from this government all along.

The train wreck is coming with the variants of concern, but this government is failing to listen to the advice of doctors, of public health experts, of chief medical officers at the federal level, of the public health agencies of our province. Vulnerable and essential workers deserve and need sick pay. People need supports to get through this next wave that's coming.

The question is, why is the government ignoring all of this advice, heading us into another lockdown, more sickness and more spread of COVID-19?

Hon. Doug Ford: I have no problem with the Leader of the Opposition saying it to me. I have skin on me like an alligator. It will roll right off my back. What the Leader of the Opposition is criticizing is Dr. Williams. She says, "Listen to the chief medical officer," but the same group voted against him when we wanted to renew him until we got through this pandemic. So either you're with the docs, which I am, or you're against the docs. You can't have it both ways.

When the Leader of the Opposition is criticizing any decision, what she's doing is criticizing Dr. Williams and a couple hundred other doctors, and all the public health medical officers in each region, because we don't make a decision without getting the buy-in from the medical officers of health—local ones. That's the reason Toronto is still in lockdown. That's the reason Peel is still in lockdown, because we listen to the public health units.

LONG-TERM CARE

Ms. Sara Singh: My question is for the Premier. Speaker, after months of delay and thousands of unnecessary deaths and chaos in our long-term-care homes across the province, the Premier's ministers and his top medical advisers are finally presenting to the long-term care commission. But as of today, the Premier is not. Despite multiple promises that he would be fully accountable and willing to appear, the Premier is not going to go on record before his own commission.

If the buck truly stops at the top and the Premier is willing to take responsibility for all of the decisions in long-term care, why is the Premier refusing to appear?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The government House leader to reply.

Hon. Paul Calandra: Mr. Speaker, as you can well appreciate, the Premier moved very quickly—as a matter of fact, quicker than almost any other government in the country—to start to learn some of the lessons from COVID-19 as they impacted long-term care.

We're quite proud of the work that the commission has done to this point, Mr. Speaker. As you know, the opposition, of course, was very critical of the long-term-care commission. They said it didn't have the independence that it required. It has shown just the opposite. Not only is it independent, it has received hundreds of thousands of

documents from the government in order to do its job. It has issued two interim reports.

I'm quite confident that they will continue to do good work and provide us with the recommendations that we need to not only address some of the shortcomings that we inherited, but also to make sure that in any future pandemic, we are better capable of handling the situations that arise.

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

Ms. Sara Singh: The reality is that this government has put up road blocks to their own commission at every turn. The commission still can't get access to important information and government documents, and the government has refused to offer the extension they need to finish their work. Why is the government preventing their own commission on long-term care from doing its work? It's a simple question: Why are you preventing them from doing their work?

Hon. Paul Calandra: Nothing could be further from the truth. Remember that this is an opposition, of course, that was very critical of the long-term-care commission when it was announced, Mr. Speaker. Not only did we speed up when the commission was started—it was originally supposed to start in September and we moved that up for it to start in July—we've received two interim reports. Thousands of documents have been released to the commission. As I said, they've given us two interim reports. We've acted on those reports, Mr. Speaker. But every step of the way, it has been the opposition that has been critical of this commission.

We're very supportive of the work of the independent commission and we hope that they will continue—in fact, we know that they will continue to do good work to help us inform not only how we've—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Member for York Centre, come to order.

Hon. Paul Calandra:—this point, Mr. Speaker, but to also help us better understand how we should react in future pandemics and learn some of the lessons that we saw after a decade and a half of mismanagement by the previous Liberal government of the long-term-care system.

COVID-19 RESPONSE

Mr. Stan Cho: Speaker, through you to the Premier: Premier, as you've said from day one, nothing is more important than the health and safety of the people we serve here in Ontario. That's why our government has been unwavering when it comes to supporting our local health officials.

These new variants of concern remain a serious risk to community transmission and our health care system capacity, especially in Peel and Toronto. For the transmission period from February 8 to 17, 2021, Toronto has seen a case rate of 67.9 cases per 100,000, above the provincial average.

Speaker, can the Premier please share with the Legislature about the current stay-at-home orders for the regions of North Bay-Parry Sound, Peel and Toronto?

Hon. Doug Ford: I want to thank the member from Willowdale for the great question. The member is 100% correct: Nothing is more important than keeping our loved ones safe. That's why I've been unwavering when it comes to supporting our local health officials and municipal partners. It was unwavering when Dr. de Villa came out and said they wanted to stay in lockdown. It was unwavering when Dr. Loh came out from Peel and said he wanted to stay in lockdown. It was unwavering when the mayor, Mayor Tory, came out and said he wanted to stay in lockdown. And it was unwavering when North Bay had a breakout of COVID.

We'll never waver from the advice of the chief medical officer and the public medical officers. It's as simple as that, Mr. Speaker. We will always listen to them, as I have from day one.

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

Mr. Stan Cho: Back to the Premier: The vaccine is the light at the end of the tunnel, and as we've all seen, it's a very long tunnel. Canada has faced some challenges in getting these vaccines, Speaker, and we should be proud of the leadership of our health and long-term-care ministers and General Hillier. Despite the delays in vaccine shipments to date, over 560,000 doses have been administered here in Ontario. We've administered more vaccines than any other province in Canada, many of them to the most vulnerable, who have now received protection from this terrible virus.

The number of long-term-care homes in outbreak, the number of active cases among residents and staff—they're all falling. Speaker, can the Premier please share with the Legislature what's next as part of the vaccination rollout for regions across Ontario?

Hon. Doug Ford: I thank the member from Willowdale again. I want to echo my thanks and the praise to General Hillier and to the health and long-term-care ministers, both of them.

Ontario is truly a leader, Mr. Speaker. As our member just mentioned, we're leading the country in vaccinations. We're leading the country in second doses of vaccinations. We're leading the country in rapid tests. We're leading the country in PCR tests. We're leading the country per capita in every single category, because the great people of Ontario are following the protocols from the chief medical officer and their local medical officer. That's how we're going to get through this. Not the naysayers, not "The world is coming to an end"—we're going to get through it because Ontario is tough. We'll make it through there and we'll come out thriving on the other end.

COVID-19 IMMUNIZATION

M^{me} France Gélinas: Ma question est pour le premier ministre. Il est about his pattern of making announcements with absolutely no details. Family doctors do not know

what role they will play to help Ontarians with the vaccine rollout, but the Premier announced that they would be involved, which was complete news to them.

Once again, important health care partners—we're talking about Ontario's doctors here—are scrambling to figure out what is going on. The medical association said on the weekend that they are aware of concerns. They have yet to meet with the Premier's point person, General Hillier, to figure out what role Ontario's doctors will play in the vaccine rollout.

1050

Why is the Premier putting the cart before the horse? Why is he announcing the plan for vaccines will involve family physicians without consulting with any of them first?

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

Hon. Christine Elliott: I thank the member very much for the question. In fact, the vaccine rollout team, headed by General Hillier, has been in frequent communication with all 34 of the local medical officers of health, who are providing their own plans with respect to the provision of vaccines for people within their area. The plans vary, as you can imagine, because the rollout in Toronto will be very different from the rollout in North Bay, Thunder Bay and so on. It's up to the local medical officers of health to fashion a plan, whether it's going to be mass vaccination clinics, whether it's going to be through pharmacies or whether it's going to be through physicians' offices.

Physicians are going to be important. Primary care is going to be an important partner, whether it's primary care practitioners providing vaccines in mass vaccination clinics or in their offices, but they are going to be contacted by the local medical officers of health—in fact, many already have—and they're going to be an important part of providing the vaccine, as with pharmacists, nurses and other people. It's up to the local medical officers of health to make those relationships work.

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

M^{me} France Gélinas: Speaker, family physicians are essential members of our front-line health care. Discussions with physicians should have happened before the Premier made the announcement, saying that they will be doing this, that or the other thing. The Premier may not believe in consultation, but this is what our province needs. This is how we make sure that everyone in Ontario is vaccinated fairly and equitably.

It is not acceptable that, as one physician puts it, "None of the family physicians in Ontario were told about this before it was announced." Others believe they are stretched too thin. They feel blindsided by the Premier's statements.

Why does the Premier not value the input of our front-line health care workers like our family physicians into how best to inform Ontarians about the vaccine rollout?

Hon. Christine Elliott: Of course, we greatly value the work that's being done by family physicians and other front-line primary care providers. They are an important

part of the vaccine rollout and there has been extensive consultation by their local medical officers of health as to the role that they will play in the area within those public health units. They may be doing the vaccinations within their office, as I indicated earlier. They may be doing them at mass vaccination clinics, but they're going to be particularly helpful when we roll out the vaccines to people over 80 years of age.

Although people can rely on booking an appointment through the online portal or calling into the vaccination help desk, the reality is that many front-line physicians will be calling their own patients who are over 80 and making arrangements for them to either come in or attend a vaccination clinic. They have a very important role to play, and they're going to be called into service very quickly by their local medical officers of health.

HEALTH CARE

Mr. Roman Baber: My question is to the Minister of Health. In a report dated April 28, 2020, the Financial Accountability Officer revealed that in the first six weeks of COVID response, our province cancelled more than 50,000 surgeries and treatments, despite empty hospital beds. On the same day, April 28, University Health Network released a study using historical data to estimate the impact of COVID-19 planning measures on cardiac procedures.

In response, the Minister of Health said that “a report had been released today—by UHN with respect to cardiac deaths and it has been estimated that 35 people may have passed away because their surgeries were not performed.” Speaker, almost a year later, with hospital rationing measures still in place, it's time for the minister to provide Ontarians with an update.

My question to the Minister of Health: How many elective procedures, be it surgeries or treatments, were cancelled by the province of Ontario since the start of the pandemic? What would be the updated estimate of patients passing away because their surgeries and treatments were not performed? And if the minister does not have such numbers, will she undertake to ask ministry staff to perform such analysis and report back the updated numbers to the House next week?

Hon. Christine Elliott: We certainly recognize that many surgical procedures and other tests had to be postponed during wave 1 in order to make sure that we had the adequate hospital capacity to care for the COVID patients who were coming in.

Since then, when the numbers abated during the summer last year in 2020, we activated those surgeries and those procedures and put hundreds of millions of dollars into dealing with that, recognizing that as sad as it is to lose a family member to COVID, it's equally as sad to lose someone due to cancer or cardiac procedures that weren't able to be performed.

We did invest up to \$283 million to support additional priority surgeries, including cancer, cardiac, cataract and orthopaedic procedures. We also extended diagnostic

imaging hours at health care facilities for MRIs, CT scans and other diagnostic procedures. Finally, we've invested more than \$351 million for more than 2,250 new beds at 57 hospitals in order to create the space for people suffering from COVID, but also being in hospital for non-COVID-related surgeries.

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

Mr. Roman Baber: The minister should be open with Ontarians about the full effect of cancelling hundreds of thousands of elective surgeries and procedures on human lives in Ontario. The minister has more than 500 advisers on the COVID command table; many of them are from UHN. As we approach the one-year anniversary of these hospital measures, I will be following up on my question next week.

Speaker, in my open letter of January 15 to the Premier, I cited the director of Princess Margaret cancer hospital, Dr. Keith Stewart, who said, “What we're worried about, of course, is that there may be a tsunami of cancer out there that's going to suddenly show up.” Cancer specialists are worried about the significant drop in the number of cancer screenings, referrals and diagnoses since last March.

My question to the Minister of Health: How many cancer surgeries, procedures and screenings were cancelled by the province of Ontario since last March? What would be the corresponding estimate of patients passing away because their cancer surgeries, procedures and screenings were cancelled? And if the minister does not have such numbers, will she undertake to ask ministry staff to perform such an analysis and report to the House sometime next week?

Hon. Christine Elliott: I think it's very important to note that while we had to delay some of the procedures for cancer and cardiac during wave 1—and, of course, now, because hospital capacity is being strained. There are some additional surgeries that are having to be postponed now.

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Order.

Hon. Christine Elliott: But in a situation where someone's life was at stake, where it was an immediate, urgent priority, people did receive those surgeries, notwithstanding COVID patients. They did receive those cardiac surgeries; they did receive those cancer surgeries.

There are some others that we're still trying to make sure we can deal with in a timely manner, which is why we have invested hundreds of millions of dollars in extending capacity so that these procedures and surgeries can be done on the weekends and during the evenings. We have also created new beds. We recently opened a new hospital, the Cortellucci Vaughan Hospital, that is operating as a catch-all for all Ontario hospitals, to make sure that they can continue to perform those surgeries.

This is something that is a priority for the Ministry of Health as much as COVID is. We know that we need to continue with those procedures and surgeries—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The member for York Centre had an opportunity to place two questions,

and then he continued to interject, interrupting the minister who he wanted a response from. He must come to order.

The next question.

NORTHERN ECONOMY

Mr. Norman Miller: Mr. Speaker, COVID-19 has placed an incredible burden on businesses across Ontario's north in all sectors.

Operating a business in the north presents a unique set of challenges, with huge distances to market that just don't exist for businesses in major urban centres. Business owners deal with barriers such as higher shipping costs, which have only been made worse by the rising federal carbon tax.

Back in September, Christy Cafovski, executive director of the Parry Sound chamber of commerce, noted that businesses have been greatly affected by the pandemic. My question: Can the Minister of Energy, Northern Development and Mines explain exactly what supports are available specifically for northerners during these challenging economic times?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The member for Peterborough-Kawartha and parliamentary assistant.

Mr. Dave Smith: Thank you to the member for Parry Sound-Muskoka. He's been a fierce advocate for Ontario's north.

Our government is supporting business owners, entrepreneurs and workers. COVID-19 has fundamentally changed our day-to-day life and how we do business, and that's why we've taken swift action to deliver the Northern Ontario Recovery Program. To date, the Northern Ontario Heritage Fund Corp. has approved NORP funding for over 1,300 businesses across the north, and this number will continue to rise.

These funds are used to help businesses make upgrades and adjustments to serve the community safely, businesses like Wright Physiotherapy in Fort Frances. Owner Jeff Wright had this to say: "Funding allowed us to renovate two of our treatment rooms to soundproof these rooms, helping ensure confidentiality during virtual visits. Virtual physiotherapy allows us to provide services to anyone with an Internet connection throughout the Rainy River district."

1100

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

Mr. Norman Miller: It's great to hear that money is flowing to so many businesses across northern Ontario. David MacLachlan, executive director of Destination Northern Ontario, noted, "The recovery for northern Ontario's \$1.6-billion tourism industry depends on the sector's successful adoption of new operating protocols to keep visitors, employees and destinations safe."

Could the parliamentary assistant please tell us what type of businesses are eligible to receive assistance from the Northern Ontario Recovery Program?

Mr. Dave Smith: NORP grants have been delivered to businesses across a variety of sectors, including tourism,

food service and retail—businesses like Crawford's Camp in Sioux Narrows, owned by Matt Rydberg. Matt had this to say: "The Northern Ontario Recovery Program has allowed us the ability and opportunity to safely expand our marina and rental location docks to properly social distance our clients and allow us to safely operate during these trying times."

Whether business owners chose to use the funds for PPE for their employees or to install Plexiglas dividers in their restaurants to ensure a safe experience for patrons, NORP funds will be put to good use. Mr. Speaker, we know that business owners across the north are resilient and they will get through these tough times. The NORP will continue to help businesses adapt to the new normal as more projects are approved and money gets into the hands of those hard-working small business entrepreneurs.

SMALL BUSINESS

Ms. Catherine Fife: My question is to the Premier. Last week, the Premier sent out a fundraising email, bragging about his government's so-called support for small businesses, but the Canadian Federation of Independent Business was quick to reply, saying the lack of support for businesses is "unconscionable" and that Conservatives have renewed their "reputation as the least small business-friendly government in the country."

Here is the government's record: Big box stores have received preferential treatment, to date. Information about opening and closing has frequently been unclear and inconsistent. Many of Ontario's small businesses feel like they've been forgotten by this government. They, and we, all deserve so much better.

Speaker, does the Premier regret not acting sooner by voting against our plan to support small businesses and give main streets the hope and the help they need to get through this next wave?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The parliamentary assistant, the member for Willowdale.

Mr. Stan Cho: Thank you for bringing up that very important question. It is a fact that small businesses have been struggling during this pandemic. That's why this government has been in step with our other partners at different levels of government, providing that blanketed level of support to those who need it most.

Most recently, our government announced \$1.4 billion for a small business support grant program. I'm glad to announce that just in Waterloo alone, \$6 million has reached the hands of small businesses who need that support. That's a grant, Speaker, not a loan, so they don't have to pay that back, and they can use that for PPE, improving safety for their patrons.

If they want to go online and see a complete list of those supports that we've provided from the beginning in one window, they can go to ontario.ca/covidsupport and see the long list of supports that are available to them. Those supports are going to continue for those small businesses in Waterloo and around the province until COVID-19 is but a distant memory.

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

Ms. Catherine Fife: Last week, the Premier begged 7-Eleven executives to come to Ontario and set up stores on every corner. Lucky for 7-Eleven, the Premier's failure to stop businesses from being evicted means that there are, unfortunately, too many storefronts for rent. But unlucky for the rest of us, the Premier's plan might be the final nail in the coffin for small businesses across the province. In fact, Ontario's Big City Mayors are opposing 7-Eleven's applications to sell booze in-store and consume it in the store, saying it would expose already hard-hit restaurants and bars to further competition. You are making it harder for businesses in the province of Ontario.

Speaker, no matter what Conservative insiders and lobbyists are telling the Premier, main streets across the province won't survive if Walmarts and 7-Elevens keep receiving preferential treatment. When is the Premier going to stop fighting for what's best for big corporations and those special interests, and start fighting for what matters to small businesses in this province?

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Members take their seats. I will remind members to make their comments through the Chair, not directly across the floor.

The response, the member for Willowdale.

Mr. Stan Cho: I'm going to remind the members opposite that they have voted against every measure this government has introduced from the beginning of this pandemic to support these very small businesses that the member now claims she supports. Whether it was the Digital Main Street program, the PPE grant, the support grants for small businesses, the commercial rent relief program where we were a 40% equity partner, that member and that party have rejected every single support we have laid out for small businesses. When are they going to actually put their actions where their words are and support the hard-working small businesses throughout this province?

LAND USE PLANNING

Ms. Mitzie Hunter: My question is to the Premier. The government says that it will only use ministerial zoning orders to expedite essential projects for the greater good. However, we now learn that does not include Ontario's irreplaceable heritage sites, like the Dominion Foundry, or invaluable wetlands, like Pickering's and Duffins Creek's. Perhaps the record number of MZOs this government has doled out has less to do with heritage sites or the environment, and more to do with circumventing and obfuscating planning processes on pet projects of the Premier's friends—

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I'm going to ask the member to withdraw the unparliamentary remark.

Ms. Mitzie Hunter: I withdraw, Speaker.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Place your question.

Ms. Mitzie Hunter: Speaker, through you to the Premier: It's obvious that your government used the MZOs to

push this through under a veil of secrecy, hoping that everyone is too preoccupied by the pandemic to notice. Why did the government make a secret deal to sell—

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

Mr. Michael Coteau: You're handing out MZOs like business cards.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Order. The member for Don Valley East will come to order.

The Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing.

Hon. Steve Clark: We're leveraging vacant, provincially owned property to build affordable housing and community space. I want to speak specifically—the member opposite bounced all around, but I'm going to address the Dominion Foundry specifically. A heritage impact assessment that was conducted on the abandoned site found that it required demolition so that it could undergo full environmental remediation.

Again, Speaker, I want to be clear: Our government approved a negotiating mandate that would help facilitate the future sale of the site, but, let me be clear, the site has not been sold to anyone.

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

Ms. Mitzie Hunter: Then I believe that this minister will have no problem making all transactions public today.

Speaker, at the end of last year's sitting, the government snuck in an eleventh-hour amendment to the budget bill, in schedule 6, to gut local conservation authorities and expand ministerial authority on zoning and other sensitive environmental areas. This abuse of power led to the resignation of Ontario's Greenbelt Council chair, David Crombie, and six other members of the council.

Again, this government seems to be trying to hide their agenda, which amounts to environmental destruction, under the cover of COVID-19. Will the minister commit today to not pave over 400 acres of the greenbelt and the Duffins Creek wetlands with the proposed Highway 413 project? And again, will the minister make all documents pertaining to the Dominion Foundry public today?

Mr. Michael Coteau: We need transparency in this House.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Order.

The Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing.

Hon. Steve Clark: I find it passing strange that the member opposite's party, when it was in power, carved up the greenbelt 17 times—17 times, Speaker. Seventeen times they carved it up.

I'm also surprised, Speaker, that this member doesn't support the use of MZOs for things like hospital expansion at Sunnybrook hospital, for affordable housing, for creating long-term-care beds. There are a number of MZOs that have resulted in outcomes that I'm surprised that this member opposite would not support.

I want to remind her and I want to remind members of this House that all MZOs that were done on non-provincial land all came at the request of the local council. So again, the member opposite can make lots of accusations. The facts are the facts, Speaker.

1110

HUMAN TRAFFICKING

Mr. Stan Cho: Every year on February 22, Ontario acknowledges Human Trafficking Awareness Day. It's unfortunate that we even need to have a day to speak of this, because it shouldn't be happening at all, Speaker. But I am proud to stand in this House today, and every day, to raise my voice for those who have been affected by this crime. Whether it's victims and survivors, their family members, their friends or other loved ones, trafficking robs these individuals of their safety, health and peace of mind.

Speaker, we've heard all throughout this House that Ontario is a hot spot for human trafficking in Canada, and we're also well aware that most victims, sadly, are children and youth. It can take away their dreams and shatter their lives. But in conversations I've had with my constituents in Willowdale, many seem surprised to learn that human trafficking happens in Ontario and in our riding. I often hear, "Well, it doesn't happen in our community," but, sadly, we know that's not true.

Speaker, can the Associate Minister of Children and Women's Issues shed more light on the human trafficking issue in Ontario and why it's so important to raise awareness for this issue?

Hon. Jill Dunlop: Thank you to the member from Willowdale for that question.

Speaker, let me be very clear: Human trafficking is a devastating crime. It's happening right here in Ontario, in our cities, in our communities and in our backyards. I have similar stories as the member about constituents of mine who did not know trafficking was happening in our communities, which is why raising awareness is so incredibly important. I've said it in this House before, but it's worth repeating: Raising awareness is the first line of defence against human trafficking. Everyone has a role to play in learning about this crime, understanding the signs and knowing where to go for help.

Speaker, the member is also correct: Children and youth are the most targeted. That's why we need to start having conversations with our kids early, like what our Minister of Education did with the health and physical education curriculum. It is why we need to work with the trucking industry and have signs at ONroutes like the Minister of Transportation is doing. We need to raise awareness everywhere so that we can stop trafficking from occurring in our communities.

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

Mr. Stan Cho: Last March, our government unveiled its five-year, \$307-million anti-human trafficking strategy. I think that all members will agree that fighting against such horrific crimes is something that we can all applaud. Our government is fighting trafficking in Ontario, and that means raising awareness, as the minister said. While lots of great ideas have been shared and a lot of hope exists that change is going to happen, COVID-19 has changed our world, Speaker.

One thing it didn't change and one thing it didn't stop was crime. In fact, trafficking still occurred, right here in our province. That meant we couldn't stop our fight. We couldn't slow down or pause our efforts in any way.

Speaker, back to the minister: Can you please tell this House and my constituents what our government has done over the past year throughout this pandemic about the appalling crime of human trafficking?

Hon. Jill Dunlop: Thank you again to the member for that question. Speaker, as the member said, this crime did not take any breaks during COVID, and neither did we. Despite our work having to take a different shape than we expected, we were still able to:

- give over \$7 million to the Attorney General for specific services to support victims and survivors;

- reinvest \$6 million into front-line community safety initiatives to help communities as well as victims and survivors heal;

- create new education tools, including an Indigenous-specific tool to help children and youth understand this crime; and

- invest an additional \$46 million in community-based, trauma-informed supports for victims and survivors.

Speaker, these are just some of the many things we were able to accomplish. But we all know that more needs to be done, which is why we are just getting started. In order for us to truly fight this crime, we need to all work together. That means across governments, across sectors and across the aisle.

I encourage all members and their constituents to go to the website Ontario.ca/humantrafficking to learn about the signs and learn where they can go for help.

LAND USE PLANNING

Ms. Suze Morrison: My question is for the Premier. Earlier this morning, we learned the Premier made a secret backroom deal with a developer in September to sell off the historic and heritage-protected foundry site in my riding of Toronto Centre. This confirms what we've known for months. But this government is still refusing to disclose the identity of the prospective buyer, their plans for the site or the sweetheart price that they're going to pay for it. This deal stinks. It's time for the government to come clean. Our communities deserve answers.

Speaker, which one of the Premier's developer buddies is lined up to get this sweetheart deal?

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

Hon. Steve Clark: To reiterate—I want to be clear—the site has not been sold to anyone. There is a negotiating mandate that the city has to facilitate the future sale of the site.

I want to remind the member opposite that we've been very clear as a government that we wanted to leverage vacant provincially owned property to build new affordable housing and community space in her riding.

I want to again reiterate that the heritage impact assessment that was conducted on this abandoned site found

that it required demolition so that it could undergo full environmental remediation. It's a shame that she's against such remediation. It's regrettable that she's against our desire to build affordable housing in the city of Toronto. But I want to make it very clear that there is no sale on this property.

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

Ms. Suze Morrison: Back to the Premier: In order to cover up this deal, this government—

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I would ask the member to withdraw.

Ms. Suze Morrison: I withdraw.

This government skipped a transparent and competitive bidding process, they passed an MZO on the foundry site in October to accelerate their secret plan, and they took a wrecking ball to my community, to heritage-protected buildings, under the cover of a pandemic in direct contravention of the Heritage Act.

Speaker, when my community took the minister to court earlier this month, the justice that issued the injunction halting demolition agreed that this government had broken the law by skipping those steps. Now we know that this was all done as a favour to someone in Ford's inner circle. Premier, who got the deal? It's time to come clean.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I'm going to ask the member to withdraw.

Ms. Suze Morrison: I withdraw.

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

Hon. Steve Clark: As I've said, the site, which has been abandoned for the most part for 40 years, requires demolition to allow for significant environmental remediation.

The member notes Justice Corbett. Obviously, I respect the decision. We've launched consultations. We're seeking input from stakeholders, residents' groups and the public on how—that some of the elements of the existing structure could help inform us for development. We'll be conducting those consultations this week. We look forward to people participating in this process.

SMALL BUSINESS

Mr. Michael Coteau: My question is to the Minister of Economic Development, Job Creation and Trade.

Small businesses across the province have been struggling to survive throughout this pandemic. Unfortunately, the government's lack of action continues to worsen the problem. Most recently, many small businesses and organizations, like the Ontario Chamber of Commerce, have come out in support of paid sick days. It helps keep businesses open; it keeps their employees and their customers safe. Despite that, the Premier and the Minister of Labour continue to deny this simple yet effective solution.

Through you, Mr. Speaker: Will the minister make this investment and support businesses to keep our economy growing and employees safe?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Minister of Labour, Training and Skills Development.

Hon. Monte McNaughton: I want to remind the member opposite that the very first measure that this government took when COVID-19 hit the province of Ontario was legislation that was supported by all members of this House to ensure that we have job-protected leave in this province. If any worker is in self-isolation, in quarantine, if you're a mom or a dad that has to stay home and look after a son or a daughter because of the disruption in the school system, you can't be fired for that. Furthermore, we also eliminated the need for sick notes during COVID-19.

I am extremely proud of the relationship that the Premier has with the Prime Minister and all provincial and territorial leaders, to deliver \$1.1 billion worth of now four weeks of paid sick days for every worker in Ontario.

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

Mr. Michael Coteau: With all due respect, Minister, that's not the word on the street. You shouldn't be proud of what organizations like the Canadian Federation of Independent Business are saying. They say that the response is "the worst in Canada" for businesses during the pandemic. Speaker, how can this government, which speaks so highly of its business credentials, have failed small businesses so terribly?

1120

In fact, a recent report of federal and provincial spending shows that of all the COVID business relief funding, barely 5% came from this provincial government. The Premier talks a good game, but when it comes to actual numbers, the government's support for businesses has been seriously lacking.

Speaker, through you to the minister: Will he try to actually listen to what small businesses are saying here in Ontario, so Ontario's economic pandemic response doesn't continue to lag behind the rest of the country?

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

Mr. Stan Cho: I'm glad the member from Don Valley East mentions how important it is to consult with the people of Ontario, because that's exactly what this government has been doing: 522 consultations in the Standing Committee on Economic Affairs last year alone, not including the thousands of small businesses that we've been consulting with leading up to this budget, coming up on or before March 31.

The reality is that these supports have continued throughout the pandemic. Most recently, \$770 million has reached the hands of small businesses in the form of a grant program. That is money directly into the small businesses of Don Valley East to give them relief during this very difficult time. Those supports are going to continue until this pandemic is behind us. I encourage the members opposite to join us, to work with us, to see what else businesses need in terms of support, instead of playing politics with this very important issue.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Once again, I'm going to remind members: If you ask a question to a

minister, surely you want an answer. You can't continue to interrupt the minister or the parliamentary assistant who is trying to answer your question.

LONG-TERM CARE

Ms. Bhutla Karpoche: My question is to the Premier. The staffing crisis that plagues long-term-care homes continues to put residents and workers at risk.

A PSW in my riding recently told me that the agency he works for quarantined all regular front-line staff in response to an outbreak and brought in untrained workers to fill the gaps. Residents were neglected and left in bed for hours on end without being checked on. My constituent also reports that some PSWs are having to work in multiple homes, despite the regulations against it. What is the minister doing to address this?

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

Hon. Merrilee Fullerton: Thank you to the member opposite for the question. Once again, I'm going to reiterate the importance of our commitment to long-term care, to the safety and well-being of residents and staff in long-term care. We have a program of inspections during COVID. We're making sure that we're understanding what's happening in these homes, and this is part of the solution.

As we go forward, understanding the role of inspections, the training programs and making sure that we're doing that now in terms of PSWs—our government has put out hundreds of millions of dollars and over a billion dollars, \$1.38 billion, to address the issues related to COVID in long-term care since the beginning of this pandemic, just for COVID. We will continue to take every measure possible and look forward to working with our sector to repair, advance and redevelop. We know the importance of long-term care to Ontarians.

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

Ms. Bhutla Karpoche: Speaker, my constituent also reports that he doesn't receive the full amount of his pandemic pay increase. He was told that it only applies to time spent directly assisting residents. PSWs often skip breaks because of understaffing, but when they so much as stop for lunch, they are nickel-and-dimed.

They have worked at the front lines of this pandemic for the last year. When will this government give PSWs what they deserve and address the staffing crisis by permanently raising their wages?

Hon. Merrilee Fullerton: Again, thank you for raising the important issue of the PSWs, the crisis that was preceding COVID. We've been working diligently, since the beginning of our ministry in the summer of 2019, not only to address over a decade of neglect of this sector, both in capacity and in the staffing crisis—we've been working with our partner ministries, the Ministry of Labour, Training and Skills Development and the Ministry of Health, to address the shortcomings for PSWs, not only in long-term

care but other sectors as well. This needs to be a coordinated effort, and not only have we addressed the pandemic pay, but also a temporary wage increase following that.

As we redevelop long-term care, our four hours of direct care, on average, per resident per day will be leading in Canada. We have all our commitments to that and the dollars behind that. We have a plan to repair and rebuild long-term care, which the previous government never cared about and did not invest in.

LAND USE PLANNING

Mr. Mike Schreiner: My question is for the Premier. The food and farming sector contributes \$50 billion to Ontario's economy. It employs close to 875,000 people. Fifty-two per cent of agri-food jobs are in the GTHA. In York region alone, the agri-food sector generates 57,000 permanent jobs and \$2.7 billion in revenue. We need to do everything we can to protect these jobs and the prosperity and food security they provide, especially during a pandemic. So I don't understand why the Premier is fast-tracking a highway that will pave over 2,000 acres of farmland. That's 1,500 football fields of farmland.

Speaker, has the government conducted an economic impact study of the effects that Highway 413 and the sprawl it generates will have on the agri-food sector and our food security?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The response? The government House leader.

Hon. Paul Calandra: As you know, it was always contemplated that when the greenbelt was formed, important provincial infrastructure would be made available in those areas. Obviously, the local areas, be it Peel, York region or Halton, have all seen and are going to see a tremendous amount of growth. That's why it's so important that we have the transit and transportation routes available to those growing communities.

At the same time, the member is quite correct: The farming community is extraordinarily important to all of those areas. That's why we will be continuing to consult to ensure that whatever route is taken has the least impact. There is, of course, an environmental assessment. That is not due for some time quite yet.

We will continue to work closely with our partners and with the agricultural sector to make sure that not only can the needs of all of these areas be met and we have an important transportation corridor, but also that our agriculture community remains vibrant.

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

Mr. Mike Schreiner: With all due respect, Highway 413 will save commuters 30 seconds—30 seconds.

The Premier was right when he said we need to be more self-sufficient—that's one of the lessons of this pandemic—whether it's procuring PPE or growing local food. But the bottom line is, we need farmland to grow local food. This is especially important in the province of Ontario, where only 5% of our land is suitable for growing food. Some 42% of the best farmland in this province is in the

GTHA, yet we're losing over 60,000 acres of farmland in this province every year. Once it's gone, it's gone forever.

We simply cannot afford to keep paving over our farmland without threatening our economy and our food security, and damaging our food and farming sector. I'm asking the Premier: Will he protect farmland and cancel Highway 413 today?

Hon. Paul Calandra: I wonder how many thousands of acres of farmland were removed from production when windmills were forced on people in the province of Ontario, windmills that they didn't want and that the people of the province of Ontario didn't need. I'll certainly take no lessons from the members opposite when it comes to preserving and protecting farmland.

As a federal member of Parliament, I worked very hard to ensure that farming continued across the Rouge National Urban Park. This was when members of the Green Party were fighting just the opposite. Not only did they want to reforest class 1 farmland across the Oak Ridges moraine—we said no and we preserved that farmland. It was a Conservative government that brought in the Oak Ridges moraine and that protected hundreds of thousands of acres of class 1 farmland.

This government will do all that it can and ensure that we continue to have a vibrant and sustainable agricultural community, because it's important in communities like mine, where it is the number one business activity. We will make sure that it thrives for a long time to come.

EMPLOYMENT STANDARDS

Mr. Kevin Yarde: Public health experts such as Dr. Loh have been clear: Paid sick days won't just save lives, they will help save small businesses and jobs in our community as well. But despite these calls, not just from Dr. Loh but from all over the province, last week the Premier went on a morning radio show and told Ontarians that he thought investing in their health and safety was a "waste" of taxpayer money.

Investing in Brampton families isn't a waste. When will this government stop wasting time and finally ensure that people have access to paid sick days that they need so they can stay home if they're sick?

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

Hon. Monte McNaughton: Our government has been working every single day to protect the health and safety of every worker in this province. That's why the very first initiative our government took action on was job-protected leave to ensure that every worker can't be fired in the province because of COVID-19. If you're in self-isolation or quarantine, if you're a mom or a dad who has to stay home and look after a son or daughter because of the schools being closed, you can't be fired. You're no longer required to present a doctor's note.

But furthermore, the Premier took charge. He negotiated \$1.1 billion worth of paid sick days for workers here in the province and right across the country. There's still \$800 million left in that bank account. Over 110,000 workers have either started receiving benefits or have applied for benefits through the federal program. And

thanks to our advocacy on behalf of workers in this province, on Friday, Minister Qualtrough, the federal minister responsible for this program, doubled the amount of sick days to four weeks. We thank them and congratulate them.

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

Mr. Kevin Yarde: Once again, this question is to the Premier. The Premier didn't just say that investing in Brampton families was a waste; he said it was "irresponsible." What's irresponsible is this government opening up the province, all while these new variants and COVID cases are surging, without giving people the supports they need to stay safe.

The Canada Recovery Sickness Benefit is not a replacement for paid sick days. It is not seamless or accessible, nor is it permanent. We need real paid sick days to protect workers.

Will the government finally do the right thing and give people back the paid sick days they took away from them before the pandemic?

Hon. Monte McNaughton: We continue to advocate on behalf of workers to the federal government, to work in partnership with the federal government. Mr. Speaker, that's why I'm proud to say that because of our advocacy, 80% of paid sick days are now directly deposited into Ontario workers' bank accounts within three days. Workers in Ontario can now apply more than once, and because of our efforts to improve the program, which your federal NDP leader supports, we've been able to double the amount of sick days to one month now.

We're going to continue to do the opposite of what the provincial NDP are calling for. We're going to actually work with our federal partners, not to duplicate government programs but actually work on behalf of the working people of this province to improve their lives so all of us can get through COVID-19 together.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): That concludes question period for this morning.

There being no further business this morning, this House stands in recess until 1 p.m.

The House recessed from 1133 to 1300.

REPORTS BY COMMITTEES

STANDING COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC ACCOUNTS

M^{me} France Gélinas: I beg leave to present a report on Special Audit of the Tarion Warranty Corporation, 2019 special report of the Office of the Auditor General of Ontario, from the Standing Committee on Public Accounts and move the adoption of its recommendations.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Madame Gélinas has presented the committee's report and moves the adoption of its recommendations. Does the member wish to make a brief statement?

M^{me} France Gélinas: As Vice-Chair of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts, today I am pleased to

table the committee's report entitled Special Audit of the Taron Warranty Corporation, 2019 special report of the Office of the Auditor General of Ontario.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the permanent membership of the committee and substitute members who participated in the public hearings and the report-writing process.

The committee extends its appreciation to officials from Taron Warranty Corp. and the Ministry of Government and Consumer Services.

The committee also acknowledges the assistance provided during the hearings in report-writing deliberations by the Office of the Auditor General, the Clerk of the Committee, and legislative research.

I move adjournment of the debate.

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

Debate adjourned.

SELECT COMMITTEE ON EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT OVERSIGHT

Mr. Daryl Kramp: I beg leave to present the fifth interim report of the Select Committee on Emergency Management Oversight.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Mr. Kramp presents the committee's report. Does the member wish to make a brief statement?

Mr. Daryl Kramp: As Chair of the Select Committee on Emergency Management Oversight, I'm pleased to table the committee's fifth interim report.

At this time, I would certainly like to take this opportunity to thank the membership of the committee for their good work. They're phenomenal contributors to this Legislature: Tom Rakocevic, the Vice-Chair; Bob Bailey; Gilles Bisson; John Fraser; Christine Hogarth; Robin Martin; Sam Oosterhoff; Lindsey Park; Sara Singh; and Effie Triantafilopoulos, as well as our substitute member Lorne Coe.

The committee, of course, extends its appreciation to the Deputy Premier and the Minister of Health for appearing before the committee, as well as to Ontario's Chief Medical Officer of Health and Dr. Brown. It was a good complement at the committee, obviously, dealing with the COVID-19 report.

The committee also acknowledges the assistance provided during the hearings and the report-writing deliberations by the Clerk of the Committee and the staff in legislative research.

Report presented.

STANDING COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC ACCOUNTS

M^{me} France Gélinas: I beg leave to present a report on Food Safety Inspection Programs, section 3.06 of the 2019 Annual Report of the Office of the Auditor General of

Ontario, from the Standing Committee on Public Accounts and move the adoption of its recommendations.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Madame Gélinas has presented the committee's report and moves the adoption of its recommendations. Does the member wish to make a brief statement?

M^{me} France Gélinas: As Vice-Chair of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts, I am pleased to table the committee's report today entitled Food Safety Inspection Programs, section 3.06 of the 2019 Annual Report of the Office of the Auditor General of Ontario.

I want to take this opportunity to thank the permanent membership of the committee and substitute members who participated in the public hearings and the report-writing process.

The committee extends its appreciation to officials from the Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs, the Ministry of Health, the Chief Medical Officer of Health, Toronto Public Health and Peel Public Health.

The committee also acknowledges the assistance provided during the hearing and report-writing deliberations by the Office of the Auditor General, the Clerk of the Committee, and legislative research.

I move adjournment of the debate.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Madame Gélinas has moved adjournment of the debate. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

Debate adjourned.

SELECT COMMITTEE ON EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT OVERSIGHT

Mr. Daryl Kramp: I am pleased to rise again to present the sixth interim report of the Select Committee on Emergency Management Oversight.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Mr. Kramp presents the committee's report. Does the member wish to make a brief statement?

Mr. Daryl Kramp: Yes, I would, again, Mr. Speaker. As Chair of the Select Committee on Emergency Management Oversight, I am pleased to table the committee's sixth interim report.

I would like to take this opportunity, as would be expected, to thank the membership of the committee for their work: Tom Rakocevic, Vice-Chair; Bob Bailey; Gilles Bisson; John Fraser; Christine Hogarth; Robin Martin; Sam Oosterhoff; Lindsey Park; Sara Singh; and Effie Triantafilopoulos; as well as substitute member Lorne Coe.

At this time, as well, I would certainly like to extend our appreciation to the Solicitor General for appearing before the committee not only this time, but every time, for an exhausting period of time.

Of course, the committee also acknowledges the assistance provided during the hearings and the report-writing deliberations by the Clerk of the Committee and the staff of legislative research.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's been a pleasure to work with them.

Report presented.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

COMBATING HUMAN TRAFFICKING ACT, 2021

LOI DE 2021 SUR LA LUTTE CONTRE LA TRAITE DES PERSONNES

Ms. Jones moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 251, An Act to enact, amend and repeal various Acts in respect of human trafficking matters / Projet de loi 251, Loi édictant, modifiant et abrogeant diverses lois en ce qui concerne les questions de traite des personnes.

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 Solicitor General like to explain her bill?

Hon. Sylvia Jones: I'll wait for the ministerial House statements, sir.

HOUSING IS A HUMAN RIGHT ACT, 2021

LOI DE 2021 SUR LE LOGEMENT EN TANT QUE DROIT DE LA PERSONNE

Mr. Hassan moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 252, An Act to recognize housing as a human right / Projet de loi 252, Loi visant à reconnaître le logement en tant que droit de la personne.

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 explain his bill?

Mr. Faisal Hassan: The bill enacts the Housing is a Human Right Act. The act provides that in interpreting all acts, regulations and policies, the government of Ontario shall be guided by the principle that housing is a human right. The act also provides that the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing shall establish a housing inequity and disparity working group.

The act also amends the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing Act by adding a new section. Section 13 establishes the office of the independent housing commissioner.

STATEMENTS BY THE MINISTRY AND RESPONSES

HUMAN TRAFFICKING

Hon. Jill Dunlop: I rise to recognize that today, February 22, is Human Trafficking Awareness Day in Ontario, and I will be sharing my time with the Solicitor General as well. A day like this gives us an opportunity to increase awareness about human trafficking; the danger that it poses to young people; the devastating impact it has

on victims, communities and families; and the actions that we are taking to combat this terrible crime that is happening right here in Ontario.

1310

Human trafficking is one of the fastest-growing crimes worldwide and, unfortunately, our province has the highest percentage of police-reported cases in Canada. To be absolutely clear, human trafficking can happen in any community and anyone can be a victim, but young women and girls are most often targeted. Nearly three quarters of victims identified by police are under age 25, and 28% of victims are children under 18.

It's a crime that also targets vulnerable populations and individuals facing barriers. This includes people who identify as 2SLGBTQ+, people with mental illness or addiction, newcomers, migrant workers, people who struggle with poverty and homelessness, racialized individuals and children and youth who have been involved in the youth justice or child welfare systems. This includes Indigenous people, particularly Indigenous women and girls, who are especially vulnerable to being targeted for sex trafficking.

That is why last year our government announced a comprehensive \$307 million, five-year strategy to combat human trafficking and child sexual exploitation. This strategy reflects the valuable input we heard from survivors of human trafficking, Indigenous communities and Indigenous-led organizations, and law enforcement and front-line service providers. It is a comprehensive action plan focused on raising awareness of the issue, protecting victims, intervening early, supporting survivors and holding offenders accountable. We have already taken significant strides in delivering on this strategy and responding to human trafficking.

In collaboration with the Minister of Education, we have updated the elementary health and physical education curriculum to include mandatory learning about online safety and consent to keep kids safe and respond to the growing threat of human trafficking. With the member from Brampton West, we released an interactive digital education tool to help children and youth learn about how traffickers lure, groom and manipulate young people into trafficking so they are equipped to recognize when it may be happening to them.

In collaboration with the Minister of Indigenous Affairs, we released an Indigenous-focused awareness campaign designed by and for Indigenous people to support Indigenous youth, communities and caregivers.

Through the work of the Minister of Transportation, we are partnering with the trucking industry and ONroutes to raise awareness on Ontario's 400-series highways. I know the minister is very passionate about this issue and has been a strong advocate for victims and survivors.

We are also investing \$96 million over the next five years in community-based services across the province to provide more supports for victims and survivors, particularly children and youth. This includes organizations like the Ontario Native Women's Association, who are providing early intervention, street-based outreach, immediate response and referrals in 10 locations across the

province, including Niagara, Ottawa, Thunder Bay and Toronto; organizations like BridgeNorth, who are providing supports from early intervention through to stabilization, transition and reintegration; and organizations like Project iRISE, who are delivering survivor-led leadership and empowerment programs, including workshops, mentorships and employment skills development. These programs do incredible work to support victims and survivors, especially our children and youth, who are often the targets of traffickers.

We have done so many things, but we still have more to do. Trafficking didn't stop or take any breaks during the pandemic, and we didn't either. We need to be constantly adding new tools and mechanisms to our toolbox, and today, we have started the work to do just that.

The Solicitor General introduced new cross-ministerial legislation to strengthen Ontario's ability to combat human trafficking. This proposed legislation, if passed, would require the province to maintain an anti-human trafficking strategy and support a sustained long-term response to combat human trafficking. It would strengthen the ability of children's aid societies and law enforcement to protect exploited children and provide law enforcement with more tools to locate victims and charge traffickers. And it would help more survivors and the people who support them in obtaining restraining orders against traffickers, with specific considerations for Indigenous survivors.

Speaker, we have the power to make permanent and positive change. We are taking action, but we cannot do it alone. We need to all work together across the aisle, across all levels of government and across the country to stop this crime. I ask my colleagues here today and all Ontarians to please join us in increasing awareness about human trafficking so more people know what it is, how it happens and where to get help. I also encourage everyone to take a moment and visit ontario.ca/humantrafficking, where they can find information about the signs that someone may be a victim of trafficking and to find services and supports available across Ontario.

Raising awareness is our first line of defence in preventing human trafficking and protecting children and youth, and it is a critical tool in helping victims and survivors find the help they need.

Thank you. I'll now pass it to the Solicitor General.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The Solicitor General.

Hon. Sylvia Jones: Speaker, I'm honoured to add my voice to this critical topic, particularly on such an important day for recognizing victims and survivors of human trafficking. Human trafficking is a vicious and violent crime that has profound and lasting impacts. I will remind members, as I always do, that the average age of those who are trafficked is only 13 years old.

The pandemic has placed an enormous strain on all of us and put our normal lives on hold, but as we know, crime is not taking a break and human traffickers are still preying on the vulnerable. According to international research, human traffickers are adjusting their methods to continue trafficking during this global pandemic.

Communications technology has rocketed to the top of the list as the traffickers' favourite recruitment tool. The enormous reach of social media means traffickers can scan for young potential victims without leaving home and, once recruited, tracking devices on mobile phones allow captors to track and monitor a victim's every move. The survivors themselves are also less able to protect themselves from the dangers of COVID-19 and are less able to seek medical help. And, of course, COVID-19 has forced governments around the world to re-organize their priorities, causing some to worry that victims of human trafficking, already difficult to identify in normal times, may fall through the cracks.

On this National Human Trafficking Awareness Day, I have a clear message to those who share such concerns: not here in Ontario—not here. We are making bold leaps to raise awareness among the public, protect victims, support survivors and hold perpetrators accountable. Through our government's anti-human trafficking strategy, we have made a historic investment of \$307 million to combat human trafficking and ensure supports for survivors are in place.

Speaker, I'm proud to serve with a government that understands the severity of the problem and is committed to ending human trafficking. When we announced our strategy last March, we committed to taking a hard look at what legislative options would be available to advance the fight against human trafficking. The proposed Combating Human Trafficking Act, 2021, which includes new legislation and amends existing legislation, does just that.

The Ministry of the Solicitor General and the Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services are two front-line ministries in the fight against human trafficking. Due to the complexity of this crime and the incredible trauma involved, it's crucial that social services and justice sectors collaborate on this issue.

I would like to take a couple of minutes to remind the House of some of the measures my ministry has taken, in co-operation with law enforcement, to target, find and stop human traffickers. We are establishing a new intelligence-led joint forces investigations team from police agencies across Ontario, including the Ontario Provincial Police, municipal police services and First Nations police services. Criminal Intelligence Service Ontario's anti-human trafficking intelligence team is supporting police services' intelligence efforts by identifying and intercepting human trafficking networks, provincially and nationally. The capacity of the OPP Child Sexual Exploitation Unit will be expanded by adding an additional 23 members, both uniform and civilian, to their current complement.

1320

As I mentioned earlier, traffickers are weaponizing social media to perform their horrible crimes, which is why the OPP's Cyber Operations Centre has enabled an anti-cyber-crime hub that will also help with the fight against human trafficking. The Cyber Operations Centre allows the OPP to host all of its cyber crime investigation and digital forensic resources under one roof. It has more

than 50 staff using advanced technologies to support criminal investigations such as human trafficking.

We are enhancing the use of major case management for missing persons and human trafficking by investing in software development to assist in meeting the needs of human trafficking investigators and analysts.

We are also putting more money from the proceeds of crime into stopping violent criminal activities, including human trafficking. Under the Proceeds of Crime Front Line Policing Grant announced in August, an additional \$6 million is being re-invested into front-line safety community initiatives, including anti-human trafficking activities. Speaker, this is just a snapshot of what the Ministry of the Solicitor General, the OPP and our policing partners are doing to prevent trafficking and bringing the traffickers to justice.

Our government's proposed legislation, introduced today, would expand the number of tools available, including lengthening the period of restraining orders where necessary, providing restraining orders and protections for support agency workers and family members of victims, and requiring platforms that host advertisements for sexual services to provide contact information for police to assist with human trafficking activities.

Speaker, I look forward to detailing the new proposals in the Combating Human Trafficking Act, 2021, in the weeks ahead. On this Human Trafficking Awareness Day, I will close by reiterating our government's pledge to never stop fighting this reprehensible crime.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Responses?

Ms. Jennifer K. French: I'm very pleased today to be able to stand on behalf of the official opposition on this National Human Trafficking Awareness Day and speak in response to the ministerial statement.

Human trafficking is a scourge across the country and across our province. It is a moving target, and all members of this House who have been paying attention know how insidious human trafficking and sexual exploitation are in their regions. It does look different everywhere, because predators are going to prey wherever and however they can.

Ontario has been identified as one of the major hubs of human trafficking in Canada. Major hubs within the province are areas like Thunder Bay, the Far North, Windsor, Ottawa and the GTA.

In terms of the northern perspective, in 2014, research from Persons Against the Crime of Trafficking in Humans found that Indigenous women and girls are most likely to be victims of trafficking because they are disproportionately affected by poverty, racism and marginalization, leaving them increasingly vulnerable, and there are strong links between sex trafficking and child welfare involvement. Indigenous youth are overrepresented in child welfare systems, increasing their vulnerability.

In the north, we see sex trafficking in a number of forms: There's a real and growing concern with sexual exploitation, for example, related to resource extraction. Remote communities near mining and exploration sites are

concerned with sexual exploitation within work camps. Speaker, it looks different everywhere you look.

In the Durham region, I've had the opportunity to work closely with the human trafficking coalition and the work that I have so personally been invested in—as I know anyone who does the work to combat human trafficking feels very passionately about. But I was glad to do so alongside the Durham Regional Police Service and the human trafficking division. The work they do there is unimaginable. To those officers who day in and day out see things, know things that I hope none of us will ever have to know, we appreciate them. And, as this government has talked about, they're working in partnership, but I do hope you will listen to all experts and make sure that the things that they ask for—and I see the Attorney General here—about that revolving door in the court system—that can't continue to happen.

Speaker, I had the opportunity to be a part of a—I'm going to say "stakeout," for lack of a better word, with the police officers. I sat at just about every hotel in the Durham region along the 401, outside, and the number of girls in those halls who were just locked there for the weekend—by the way, at these hotels, any that accept cash, Speaker; don't think it's the seedy hotels; no self-respecting man would park at a seedy hotel: Buy two nights and get the third for free. So they get dropped off, and that's what they do every, half-hour on the half-hour. They have men who—by the way, when DRPS set up a sting to catch the johns, they were the average kind of guy. The majority of the ads placed were during the work day. It was before work; it was after work; it was on the way to the gym, lunch break, or on the way home to their kids. That's who it was along the 401 corridor.

I want to talk a bit about the partners. I had the opportunity to be in a hotel room and meet an unbelievable woman who doesn't think she's worth saving, but she spoke to the police three times after we met her in that hotel room because she wanted to save the children and the girls that she knew about. She is worth saving, by the way, Speaker. We need to make sure that these women who are stolen, these girls who are taken—the only life they know is in those hotels. We need to make sure that the resources are there, that if it's a matter of the shelter system, you don't underfund it, that you put the money in; that we make sure that we work with victims services who say, "Let us be that partner, that portal." Because well-intentioned organizations are popping up all over the place. I don't begrudge them anything, but they don't necessarily know about the resources. And if a girl misses that amount of money to help her with rent, then it's gone.

So let's work in partnership. And, look, the government listens and listens and listens, and these people, these organizations have been saying things for years. So do it; invest in it. No more cutting corners. No more undermining the shelters or the women's organizations who are demanding what is needed. We can talk about the pandemic that has added an unbelievable layer of secrecy, and it's pushed it further underground. I recognize that. But even before that, we knew, and we have to do the work.

Again, I want to take this opportunity in the last few seconds to thank the people who are on the front lines: those care partners, the folks who are putting together these human trafficking coalitions, doing their darnedest to stay on top of this, and the police who are working day in and day out to save these girls, because every woman is worth saving.

M^{me} Lucille Collard: I rise today to speak to the importance of combatting human trafficking in all of its forms across Ontario. I'm very happy to see that the government is paying attention and doing something about it.

I would like to begin my remarks by offering my sincere thanks to the Ottawa area shelters and transitional housing providers who are working tirelessly to support the victims of human trafficking, including the Minwaashin Lodge, Harmony House, Interval House and A New Day Youth and Adult Services. I would also like to thank the Ottawa Coalition to End Human Trafficking and the Ottawa Police Service human trafficking unit. The Ottawa community benefits massively from the important work of all of these organizations.

Human trafficking is an insidious crime that has no place in Ontario's communities, as the minister pointed out, nor anywhere else in the world, for that matter. Its digital dimension means that it can affect anyone, and it often exploits the most vulnerable, young and marginalized among us. As a parent—a mother of three girls—and a school trustee, I was disturbed to learn that such criminal behaviour is actually present in our schools. Each of us in this House has a moral, an ethical obligation to help eradicate human trafficking from our communities and ensure that all Ontarians have access to the education, resources and public services required to stay safe and healthy in this province.

Preventing human trafficking requires a holistic approach because of the complex ways that it affects our communities. Along with effective community-level policing and a school's curriculum that is responsive to the digital dimension of trafficking, it is critical that our province is supporting a well-funded emergency and transitional housing system capable of offering a safe refuge to those victims.

Ottawa historically has struggled with maintaining adequate numbers of emergency and transitional housing, particularly for women escaping human trafficking and domestic violence. This is even more true in the context of the pandemic. When last surveyed by Statistics Canada in 2019, Ottawa only had 24 emergency shelter beds dedicated to youth, 117 dedicated to women, and had many reported instances of women escaping violence, including human trafficking, being stuck on a wait-list for months awaiting appropriate transitional housing. Nobody seeking to escape from human trafficking should ever face a year-long waiting list for a bed at a home offering the appropriate care.

1330

Effectively addressing human trafficking should never be a partisan issue. I thank the government for its attention

on this important issue and ask that we work together to ensure that no region in Ontario lacks the funding necessary to support the victims of human trafficking.

PETITIONS

CONSUMER PROTECTION

Ms. Lindsey Park: This petition is to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas since the start of the pandemic, the growth of e-commerce has exploded and online shopping has doubled in Canada;

“Whereas with the dramatic increase in doorstep deliveries, thieves have more opportunities than ever before to steal packages addressed to consumers;

“Whereas one in three online shoppers in Canada say they've had a package stolen from outside their home;

“Whereas, if passed, the Trespass to Property Amendment Act would:

“—make Ontario the first province in Canada to impose provincial fines for package piracy;

“—impose a minimum fine of \$500 for a first offence, \$1,000 for a second offence, \$2,000 for each subsequent conviction, up to a maximum of \$10,000;

“—create a deterrent for package pirates while offering more protection to consumers, retailers and couriers from this costly crime;

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

“That the Legislative Assembly of Ontario vote on and pass the Trespass to Property Amendment Act, 2020.”

I affix my name to this and will pass it to the page that's on her way to my seat.

PROPERTY TAXATION

Mr. Daryl Kramp: This petition, of course, is to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario—most interesting.

“Whereas municipal taxes are paid with income, and income indicates our ability to pay tax, property tax that is assessing our municipal tax on the current value of our property/home is a false premise as it does not indicate our ability to pay tax and results in both over- and under-taxing. It's a regressive tax that takes proportionately a larger amount from people at lower incomes, prevents older people from aging in their own home and is the legalized theft of the homeowner's self-created pension, destroys jobs and shrinks the economy;

“We, the undersigned, notably past and present members of provincial Parliament, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

“To eliminate the municipal property tax and to assess the tax on our household income.”

I affix my signature to this, Speaker.

LIFE INSURANCE

Ms. Donna Skelly: Madam Speaker, this petition is to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas at a time when many people, especially seniors, are struggling due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, more needs to be done to meet the needs of vulnerable people;

“Whereas important updates in order to modernize the Insurance Act are required;

“Whereas changes are needed to allow Ontario seniors to access the fair market value of their life insurance policies which could potentially give seniors tens of millions of dollars more than they now receive, each year;

“Whereas, if passed, Bill 219 would:

—modernize the Insurance Act to create a well-regulated secondary market in life insurance;

—provide access to an alternative financial resource and allow Ontario seniors to access the fair market value of their life insurance policies;

—ensure consumers are protected by requiring full, true and plain disclosure;

—require a 10-day cooling-off period;

—ensure the right to consult a financial or legal advisor.

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

“That the Legislative Assembly of Ontario vote on and pass the Life Settlements and Loans Act.”

I will affix my signature and give it to the appropriate page.

ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION

Ms. Andrea Khanjin: I would like to introduce the following petition: “Support the Don’t Dump, Donate Initiative.”

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas though most consumers are unaware of the high environmental cost of fast fashion, fully 85% of unwanted clothing and textiles in North America end up in landfills;

“Whereas companies who engage in fast fashion practices capitalize on low operational costs, creating dangerous working conditions with minimum pay to employees;

“Whereas fast fashion textile dyeing is the second-largest polluter of clean water globally;

“Whereas these unethical garment production practices constitute more than 24 billion pounds of waste clothing every year, rendering fashion one of the world’s worst polluters;

“We, the undersigned, support the member from Flamborough–Glanbrook’s don’t dump, donate initiative, to encourage retailers and consumers to support ethically, and to donate old textiles to charity, diverting more clothing from landfills into donation bins.

“The initiative also encourages manufacturers to have additional donate tags or stamps on clothing items and

encourages retailers to set up donation bins in their stores. These efforts along with those outlined in Ontario’s comprehensive Made-in-Ontario Environment Plan will help reduce waste and pollution, preserving the province’s beautiful and ecologically important natural environment.”

I will affix my signature and pass it to the usher.

CONSUMER PROTECTION

Ms. Goldie Ghamari: It’s an honour and a privilege to rise today on behalf of the people of Carleton to present this petition in the Legislature. The petition is entitled, “Trespass to Property Amendment Act, 2020.”

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas since the start of the pandemic, the growth of e-commerce has exploded and online shopping has doubled in Canada;

“Whereas with the dramatic increase in doorstep deliveries, thieves have more opportunities than ever to steal packages addressed to consumers;

“Whereas one in three online shoppers in Canada say they’ve had a package stolen from outside their home;

“Whereas, if passed, the Trespass to Property Amendment Act would:

—make Ontario the first province in Canada to impose provincial fines for package piracy;

—impose a minimum fine of \$500 for a first offence, \$1,000 for a second offence, \$2,000 for each subsequent conviction, up to a maximum of \$10,000;

—create a deterrent for package pirates while offering more protection to consumers, retailers and couriers from this costly crime;

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

“That the Legislative Assembly of Ontario vote on and pass the Trespass to Property Amendment Act, 2020.”

I proudly affix my signature to this petition and I will be passing it up to the table.

NORTHERN HEALTH TRAVEL GRANT

Ms. Judith Monteith-Farrell: This petition is titled, “Fix the Northern Health Travel Grant.”

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

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

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

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

1340

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

I am happy to sign the petition and send it to the Clerk.

SMALL BUSINESS

Mr. Jim McDonell: I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"Whereas small businesses required to close or significantly restrict services under the province-wide shutdown have suffered significant losses in revenue;

"Whereas small businesses need urgent relief to help navigate through the challenging period of the COVID-19 pandemic;

"Whereas, if approved, the small business support grant program would:

"—give struggling small businesses a minimum grant of \$10,000;

"—offer eligible businesses a grant up to \$20,000;

"—help businesses pay their bills and meet their financial obligations;

"—help businesses continue to employ people and support their local communities when it is safe to do so;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, support the Ontario government's initiative to help struggling small businesses through the ... small business support grant program."

I agree with this and will be passing it to the desk.

FRONT-LINE WORKERS

M^{me} France Gélinas: I would like to thank Monique Trepanier from Chelmsford in my riding for these petitions. It reads as follows:

"Make PSW a Career...."

"Whereas there has been a shortage of personal support workers (PSWs) in long-term care and home care in Ontario for many years;

"Whereas Ontario's personal support workers are overworked, underpaid and underappreciated, leading to many of them leaving the profession;

"Whereas the lack of PSWs has created a crisis in LTC, a broken home care system, and poor-quality care for LTC home residents and home care clients;"

They petition the Legislative Assembly as follows:

"Tell Premier Ford to act now to make PSW jobs a career, with full-time employment, good wages, paid sick days, benefits, a pension plan and a manageable workload in order to respect the important work of PSWs and improve patient care."

I support this petition. I will affix my name to it and send it to the table.

CONSUMER PROTECTION

Mr. Norman Miller: I have a petition regarding the Trespass to Property Amendment Act, 2020.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas since the start of the pandemic, the growth of e-commerce has exploded and online shopping has doubled in Canada;

"Whereas with the dramatic increase in doorstep deliveries, thieves have more opportunities than ever before to steal packages addressed to consumers;

"Whereas one in three online shoppers in Canada say they've had a package stolen from outside their home;

"Whereas, if passed, the Trespass to Property Amendment Act would:

"—make Ontario the first province in Canada to impose provincial fines for package piracy;

"—impose a minimum fine of \$500 for a first offence, \$1,000 for a second offence, \$2,000 for each subsequent conviction, up to a maximum of \$10,000;

"—create a deterrent for package pirates while offering more protection to consumers, retailers and couriers from this costly crime;

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

"That the Legislative Assembly of Ontario vote on and pass the Trespass to Property Amendment Act, 2020."

ADDICTION SERVICES

Mr. Jamie West: I want to thank Christina Pisanti from Sudbury for collecting these petitions on behalf of her brother Myles Keaney, who died from an opioid overdose. I want to recognize during COVID-19, with the restrictions we have, how many petitions she managed to collect.

"Prevent Overdoses in the North.

"Whereas Ontario is expecting more than 2,200 opioid-related deaths in 2020;

"Whereas opioid-related deaths are up 25% in northern Ontario compared to 2019;

"Whereas death rates in northern Ontario are almost double what they are in southern Ontario;

"Whereas northern Ontario has fewer health resources to handle the opioid crisis than southern Ontario;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly to declare the opioid crisis a public health emergency in northern Ontario and commit to funding local evidence-based initiatives such as harm reduction strategies, awareness programs, anti-stigma training, residential treatment, and overdose prevention services, including a supervised consumption site in Greater Sudbury."

I support this petition 100%, affix my signature and give it to the Clerk.

OPPOSITION DAY

LONG-TERM CARE

Ms. Andrea Horwath: The motion reads as follows:

Whereas COVID-19 has had a devastating impact in Ontario's long-term-care facilities, accounting for more

than half of all COVID-19-related deaths in the province since March 2020; and

Whereas statistics show that there have been more COVID-19 related deaths in long-term-care facilities in the second wave than in the first wave, despite the Ford government's promise of an iron ring; and

Whereas Ontario's Long-Term Care COVID-19 Commission has publicly shared significant concerns about the Ford government's slow response in providing requested documents and records and the impact these delays have had on their investigation, to the point where the commission felt it necessary to request more time to complete their study; and

Whereas the Minister of Long-Term Care has rejected the commission's request for an extension despite the delays and missing documents; and

Whereas numerous questions still remain about the effectiveness of the Ford government's response to COVID-19 in long-term care and steps taken to protect some of Ontario's most vulnerable residents;

Therefore, the Legislative Assembly calls on the Ford government to grant the request of Ontario's Long-Term Care COVID-19 Commission for an extension of their mandate to December 31, 2021 and to immediately release all government documents requested by the commission.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Ms. Horwath has moved opposition day motion number 1. Back to the leader of the official opposition.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: You know, I really wish that we didn't have to be here having this debate, on so many levels—first and foremost, the fact that long-term care has become such a horrifying place for our loved ones to spend the last years of their lives. This is something that is a result of, really, a lack of attention from a number of successive governments: the previous government as well as this government. Long-term care has really, for decades, been in decline.

Unfortunately and, in fact, tragically and unacceptably, the governments have not responded to the increasing acuity levels of the residents that live in long-term care, so when COVID hit, we ended up in just a horrifying situation, one where the government didn't even plan, initially, to deal with the tragedy that was about to unfold in long-term care. To be here at this point in time and still see homes in outbreaks and residents of long-term care still losing their lives to COVID-19 and families still grieving at the loss of their loved ones, is all that much more horrifying.

We know that 3,900—almost 4,000—residents now have lost their lives to COVID-19 in long-term care. We know that at this moment in time, there are almost 130 homes that are still in outbreak. And, of course, this is all within the context of the new variants of concern that are catching hold in our province. A province where the Premier has just begun to reopen, against the advice of pretty much every expert. Whether it be doctors in the Ontario Medical Association, whether it be hospital leadership, whether it be his own experts, whether it be Theresa Tam, the federal chief medical officer, whether it

be folks at his own science table, everybody's been saying to the Premier that now is not the time to start reopening Ontario because of these variants. But away we go, into a train wreck that this government could have had us avoid.

On top of that, as I mentioned today in question period, the government is not even bothering to put additional measures in place to help people stay safe. So things like paid sick days for workers are still not on the table, even though every expert is also telling the Premier that this is something he should be doing.

1350

We don't have reduced class sizes in classrooms across the province, even though a cap of 15 is what has been recommended on numerous occasions. This is extremely problematic, but it doesn't seem to bother the government in the least.

Of course, we also know that we don't have nearly as many PSWs as we should have. The government is apparently starting to do something about that—a drop in the ocean—in terms of an announcement they made today, but it's certainly something they should have been doing back in March of last year.

In the context of all of these realities—the final reality being that it looks like the Premier is about to make the same mistake he has already made twice in terms of how he has handled this pandemic—the bottom line is, we have a commission that is supposed to be looking into the decisions that the government has made, and yet that commission has not been given the documents that it requires to do its job. We're still in the midst of this crisis, and the commission has said it still believes it has a lot of work to do. That's because this government has really stymied the work of the commission from day one.

It's really, really troubling that the Premier went ahead with this model of an inquiry in the first place. People will know that New Democrats pushed for some time for this to be a truly independent judicial public inquiry, because that's what Ontarians deserve in the face of the horrific tragedies that we've had to deal with. But the Premier and the Ford government have no interest whatsoever in doing the right thing.

Just so folks know, we have actually made a commitment that we will put together the true, full public inquiry that people need next year when we form government, because never, ever can we be put in the same situation again. The only way that we can ensure that we're not making the same mistakes again is to have a truly independent public process to look at what went wrong and to look at what went right. Ontarians deserve that, at the very least, but they also deserve to be engaged in the process.

This is one of the things that we've seen with this government—the government has not been upfront with Ontarians on a number of levels. Yes, the commission is one of the problems. But let's face it: This government has never been freely providing information, openly providing information that the public deserves and should have. I don't know what it is that the government doesn't want people to know. It's a serious, serious problem, when

we're in the midst of a worldwide pandemic, that this government doesn't believe that being open and honest is the right thing to do.

For example, they refused to tell Ontarians what the situation was with the status of long-term-care homes overall. The government keeps a record of which homes are in precarious situations, which ones are understaffed, which ones have a lot of complaints, which ones have had various kinds of outbreaks or incident reports or complaints against them. They categorize the homes into various colour-coded levels—you're in the red zone; you're in the green zone; you're in the yellow zone. In other words, all of the long-term-care homes are categorized. But guess what? The government refused to let the people of Ontario know what category their loved one's long-term-care home was in. It's bad enough in the first place that there's no transparency in that regard, but we had a global pandemic attack our province, and still the government didn't allow people to have the information they needed to determine the risk that their loved ones were possibly facing with COVID-19 upon us. It's not only irresponsible; it's cruel not to give people the information they need to protect their loved ones, to make sure that they could make the right decisions around their loved ones' health and well-being. It's inexcusable that this kind of decision-making is what the Ford government thinks is the right thing to do—keep people in the dark, don't give them the information they need to make decisions, and then watch 4,000 people die in long-term care. The tragedy is unspeakable.

But it's not only that; this government refused to tell people who it was that was sitting on their task force in the first place in terms of their command table. The Premier claims he's got this command table, he's putting it together, and they're going to make all the decisions around COVID-19, he's going to get all kinds of advice, but then refuses to tell Ontarians exactly who is sitting at the command table.

Why is it that the Ford government doesn't trust Ontarians with information? Is it because he doesn't want to be blamed if something goes off the rails? Is it because he doesn't want people to know the connections, perhaps, that some of the folks he may have appointed have to the Premier and his government? I don't know the answer to that. None of us know the answer to that. Only the Premier knows the answer to that.

What I can tell you is that Ontarians deserve way better than that. We could actually, in our province, have transparency. We actually could have a situation where the government has done the right thing from day one and provided all of the information people needed to make decisions around their own well-being and the well-being of their loved ones. But that's not how the Premier decided to roll with his responses to this pandemic.

Not only do we not know which category the long-term-care homes are in nor would the government be upfront and open about who was at the command table providing them advice, but they also had a number of these tables—we've all heard of them: the science table, the this

table, the that table—and all of the experts that are sitting around the table were asked by the Premier to sign non-disclosure agreements—again, wanting to tamp down, wanting to put a cover over information, wanting to make sure that Ontarians didn't get the information that they need and deserve.

It's exactly the opposite of what the government should have been doing. All along, the government should have been as transparent and as open as possible, but unfortunately, I guess the Premier in his wisdom doesn't believe that people deserve to have that kind of information. I think he's wrong, because with more information, people can make better decisions and they can feel more engaged in their own commitment to the measures that need to be undertaken to prevent the spread of COVID-19. But our Premier, in his kind of paternalistic way, believed that what you don't know won't hurt you. Well, what people didn't know actually has led to a lot of death and a lot of terrible tragedies that people have had to deal with for almost a year now, Speaker. It's just unbelievably inappropriate that this government refuses to provide information for people.

Here's another example, and I want to read a little bit of a quote here. The most recent egregious example of this government and their use, or misuse, of information came just about a week and a half or so ago, when one of the government's experts sitting at one of the expert advisory tables basically said that the government's information was not accurate. In other words, the experts provided information to the government and the government, in the words of the expert, "twisted and misinterpreted" the expert advice. Why would a government twist and misinterpret expert advice? It makes no sense, Speaker. In fact, it's quite irresponsible.

The other thing, just kind of another example, I guess, is the framework that the government announced in the fall in the first place, the framework of the various coloured zones that various communities would be categorized in depending on the risk level of the spread of the virus. The government claimed that they had the sign-off of their own experts on this particular framework, and then the next day, people were stunned: The experts themselves said no, it wasn't the case, that the government didn't have the green light. In fact, these particular folks were apparently not even consulted at all on what the framework looked like or what the final framework was going to look like.

It's no wonder that people are worried about a third wave hitting Ontario. It's no wonder that people are worried about the variants of concern, because they have a government that has not been upfront with them about the decisions they make, about the information they base their decisions on. As I said earlier, we're heading into a disaster. The Premier has opened up this province too quickly, and all of the experts are saying that the likelihood is that we're heading into a train wreck. They like to use language like, "Oh, we're transitioning." We're transitioning over a cliff is what we're doing.

1400

This morning I was listening to some news, and I heard a business owner saying that, yes, her region has reopened

as of today. On the one hand she feels kind of good about the fact that she might get a chance to rebuild her business, but her very next sentence was, “If we end up in another lockdown”—this is what she said—“which everybody thinks looks like it’s coming, then it’s not only my financials around whether I can yet again try to rebuild my business.” She said just the mental stamina, the mental health, the anguish of going through that process is something she doesn’t think she can handle for a third time. But that looks like where we’re headed, Speaker.

When it comes to the framework, the Minister of Health said this: “The framework was ‘designed after full consultation and advice’ from two expert advisory groups”—the public health measures table and the modelling consensus table. But then we hear from someone from one of the tables, Dr. Shelley Deeks, who said, “That surprised me. I’m not in agreement with the indicators as they are currently written in the framework.”

“Beate Sander, the co-chair of the COVID-19 modelling consensus table, said Minister Elliott ‘misspoke’ at a ... press conference when she said members of her group had provided advice.

“‘The modelling consensus table was not consulted... The thresholds’” within that framework “‘are very, very high.’” People may remember that that forced the Premier to scramble and readjust those frameworks.

I could go on and on, Speaker. The reason I’m actually particularly talking about these pieces where the government has not provided accurate information or is refusing to listen to the experts is because these are the decisions that then impact our response to COVID-19 and how the province has done. I don’t think a single person in our province would say that the loss of 4,000 lives in long-term care is an indicator that the province did a good job in terms of the response to COVID-19. As I said, we are still seeing people lose their lives in long-term care to COVID-19 to this very day, and the province has been dealing with COVID-19 since March of last year. There’s just simply no excuse for it.

I do want to say that that is why we wanted a public inquiry. But even the commission that the Premier put together is not going to give Ontarians the answers that they deserve. We know that this government, that the Ford government has been stonewalling this commission from day one. We know that they’ve been refusing to release documents, to the point where the commission identified back in December, I think it was, that they’re not going to have time to get all of the information that they need to do a proper review of what’s been happening here in the province. And they asked the Minister of Long-Term Care for an extension beyond the original date.

What was the response? You would think if the government was interested in actually getting the information to Ontarians when it comes to the response to COVID-19 in long-term care that they would have provided the information, and when they found out that there wasn’t enough time, they would have obviously given the commission the time they needed to do the work. What is the Ford government afraid of? Why are they refusing to postpone the final

date for this commission? You would think that it would be in the interest of Ontarians to make sure that that commission got all of the information it needed and all the time they needed to process that information and present recommendations and findings to the government. Well, that’s what Ontarians deserve. That’s certainly what Ontarians deserve. But that’s not what the Premier of the province wants. You have to ask yourself, why exactly is that?

I think it’s clear: It’s because they have no interest in doing what they claimed that they were going to do. That includes the Premier claiming, in the way that he does, that “people deserve all the answers and they’re going to get the answers. I’ll go to that commission myself and I’ll testify myself,” which we all know is not happening. In fact, finally, it looks like the Minister of Health and the Minister of Long-Term Care are going to be testifying this week, but we won’t know for possibly even weeks on end what that testimony is.

Look, I could talk about this all day long, Speaker. The bottom line is that we have a real problem with a government that hides information from the public, that’s refusing to do a thorough investigation into their failures that led to 4,000 deaths in long-term care. The people of Ontario deserve better than that. We are imploring the Premier to change his opinion, to change track right now and do what he promised Ontarians that he would do, which is to give the commission everything they need to come up with a proper review of what happened and with recommendations to make sure that this never happens again.

So I leave it at that. I know my colleagues have something to say about this as well, Speaker, but at the end of the day, what we need is a Premier that does the right thing by the people of Ontario, not by his own political skin and not to prevent the truth from coming out because he doesn’t like the truth, but actually showing the people of Ontario truthfully what the failures were that led to 4,000 people dying in long-term care. Sadly, the count is still on, Speaker.

I hope everybody in this chamber realizes that we have an obligation and a responsibility to Ontarians, that this tragedy is of such a scale that I don’t think anyone should sit here and suggest that shutting down the review into long-term care is the right thing to do. I’m hoping for the support of all members of the chamber, because that is the right thing to do. The commission was never what we wanted it to be in the first place, but the way that this government has dealt with it is even worse than the commission itself not being as effective as it could have been.

On that note, Speaker, I look forward to the remainder of the debate.

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

Mr. John Fraser: I fully support the Leader of the Opposition’s motion today on the very reasonable request by the long-term-care commission for an extension, a commission that the government appointed because they

didn't want to do a public inquiry. It of course came from the Canadian military's report of the conditions inside the five long-term-care homes they were in.

Since the beginning of the pandemic, 3,800 residents have died. Those are moms, those are dads, they're grandparents, they're aunts, they're uncles, they're friends—3,800. There have been two interim reports from the commission with many recommendations, and many recommendations that have not been followed through on:

- a standard of four hours of care per day per resident;
- ensure that every home has a dedicated IPAC lead to ensure that proper protocols are being followed. Quebec has managed to do this;
- ensure a clear lead for quality of care in each home;
- reinstate the annual resident quality inspection in every home. The government, of course, only inspected 27 out of 626 homes in 2019; and
- to prioritize timely responses to non-compliant homes through increased enforcement.

Those haven't been followed through on by the government, and the Ministry of Long-Term Care has twice refused information to the long-term-care commission. They're holding it back. And now they're saying, "We're not going to give you an extension." So clearly, there's something afoot here.

The government is not really interested in what this commission—their own commission—has to report. They haven't given them all the tools they need or the time they need to take care of this, and it doesn't provide any justice for families. It does the opposite: no justice. It just frustrates families, the government's response to their own commission.

There are so many questions that need to be answered. For instance, why did it take a month to stop workers from working in more than one home, a month more than BC? How come it took a month longer to raise the wages of PSWs than in Quebec and BC? How come, when homes in Ontario were begging for a plan, the minister didn't listen, and nothing came until September? But Quebec said, "We need to hire 10,000," so they went out to do that. They only got 7,000. Today, Ontario announced that we'll have done just about 700 by the summer. That's a good question to ask.

Vaccines: How is it we said, "We've got to get to those patients, those residents in long-term care. They're our top priority, and we're ready to do that," but we finished two weeks behind every other province? We knew we had to get them there quickly. When the vaccines got here, while Quebec and BC were in long-term-care homes vaccinating residents, Ontario took a break. They took a holiday. The Ford government took a holiday from vaccinations and then didn't move them into long-term care. That's why we're two weeks behind. It caused suffering and death in long-term care. Those are questions that needed to be answered.

1410

Families are frustrated because the government won't grant an extension. They are frustrated by the government's answers when they get there. The purpose of the

commission is to take a look at long-term care and, right now especially, the government's response to COVID-19. The commission has asked for extra time. Every member of this House has families who want answers, and we should all vote to grant that extension.

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

Mr. Will Bouma: Our government has been clear since we established this commission: Ontarians have questions about the pandemic in long-term-care homes that deserve to be answered. We also know that we do not have the luxury of time; we cannot wait the average of over three years that recent commissions and inquiries have taken. Our actions reflected this. We appointed the commission quickly and gave them a timeline to report back. We expedited the commission's start date from September to July, to give them more time, because we know that we cannot wait for answers.

The Leader of the Opposition, before and during the commission's mandate, has relied on incorrect assumptions and suggestive innuendo to criticize the commissioners. She said many times in the House that the commission lacked specific powers under the Public Inquiries Act. She was wrong. In a reply letter to her, they wrote, "The commission has an array of investigative tools, including those under s. 33 of the Public Inquiries Act." In her zeal to prove a point, she cherry-picked one sentence out of a five-paragraph letter. She has portrayed the commissioners as government lackeys; they are far from it. They are eminently respected members of their fields: the law, medicine and public service.

Over the last several months, the commissioners have searched far and wide and have met with residents and their families, caregivers, staff, home operators, advocates, professional organizations, labour leadership, government officials, experts and many others, and heard what they've had to say. They have released more than 6,000 pages of transcripts from those meetings and the copies of the presentations made. They are operating on a historic scale, and we are co-operating with them to co-ordinate the historic number of documents that they have requested.

We have retained a third-party vendor to assist in producing these documents. That vendor is following an established protocol that the commission has agreed to. Requests are still coming in, and as they come in they are processed. Some of those are being turned over in 24 hours. To date, more than 60,000 unique documents have been shared with the commission.

The commission has provided two sets of interim recommendations, on October 23 and December 4, 2020. Many of the recommendations are consistent with our work to solve the systemic challenges facing the long-term-care system, and we have communicated that to the commissioners. We are making meaningful progress in the areas they cited: staffing, inspections, IPAC, visitor access, improved sector collaboration, and improved performance indicators. We have invested \$1.38 billion since the onset of the pandemic to protect residents, caregivers

and staff, and we are committed to stabilizing and modernizing the sector.

We appreciate all that the commission has done so far. I look forward to meeting with them later this week—sorry, that’s on behalf of the minister—and I look forward to seeing their final recommendations. Their contributions will supplement the work our government is doing and will help us move forward as we repair, rebuild and advance long-term care in Ontario.

I would ask the opposition, yet again, to join us in doing this productive, important work.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Further debate? The member for Brampton South.

Ms. Sara Singh: It’s Brampton Centre, but thank you, Speaker.

I’m proud to rise here today and contribute to the debate and thank the Leader of the Opposition for bringing forward this important motion.

As we’ve heard, the long-term-care commission is looking for an extension, and that is exactly what this motion seeks to do: help grant that extension so that they can carry out the work that they need to do, so they can provide the transparency and accountability that families in the province are looking for and that we can ensure that what we experienced throughout the pandemic never happens again in our long-term-care homes. But without the commission being able to do their work, we will never get those answers.

The pandemic has clearly shown us that our long-term-care system is broken here in the province of Ontario. We’ve all heard the horrors of long-term care caused by neglect from the previous Liberal government and privatization in long-term care.

But this is exactly why New Democrats asked for a public inquiry: to understand what went wrong and to ensure that it would never happen again. Instead, the government responded with a commission. This is their own commission, and yet when this commission is asking for more time to actually dig into the issues of the day and understand how to prevent them from happening again, the government is blocking them from carrying out that work. Not only do they not want to grant an extension for them to continue this work, they don’t even want to provide the documents necessary for them to understand what is going on in long-term care.

We heard from the commission why they’re requesting this extension:

“Notwithstanding the work to date, the commission continues to encounter significant delays in obtaining government information central to the commission’s investigation. Most documents responsive to the commission’s document summonses and requests remain outstanding....

“In light of the ongoing pandemic, the commission’s outstanding requests for information, and the volume of data that the commission anticipates receiving, we are writing to request an extension to the deadline for the commission’s final report to December 31, 2021.”

And that’s exactly what we’re asking. We are supporting that request so that important work can actually be carried out here in the province of Ontario, that we don’t

just rush this through, because I think, as all members on this side of the House understand, families deserve better. They deserve those answers, and this province needs to understand what happened and how this government handled its approach to long-term care. But without those documents being provided, without this extension being granted, we may not fully understand the scope of what we need to do to ensure that this doesn’t happen again.

I really question why the government would not want to grant an extension to its own commission to carry out this important work. We already understand that the commission is overwhelmed with the amount of information in the short period of time that it is being asked to carry it out. The extension isn’t so that reports wouldn’t be coming forward, as some members on the other side are insinuating; it’s so that work would continue on—so that it isn’t just a hasty inquiry into what happened; it’s actually a thoughtful process that allows us to understand what we need to do.

There are still so many questions that are remaining. Families want to understand what this government has done to help address the staffing shortage in our long-term-care homes. Families want to understand if you actually increased infection control measures, as you continue to state that you have. They want to know exactly how many homes have those IPAC recommendations put in place and how many PSWs did you actually hire. But when given the opportunity to answer those questions here in the House or through your commission, this government chooses not to provide that transparency, those reassurances and accountability to the people of this province.

We still hear that many people who are actually providing advice and insights into the handling of the pandemic are actually being sidelined, their voices are being silenced by this government. This is what the commission is starting to reveal. So why not allow more space, more time, more transparency, more accountability through the commission, as this motion seeks to achieve? Why not allow that? That’s exactly why we’re going to continue fighting, Speaker, on this side of the House, because families in this province deserve answers. Seniors in this province deserve answers. We need to fix a broken system, and the way to do that is to ensure that this commission has the tools, the resources and the time to actually carry that out.

1420

I am proud to rise here today, not only as the member in Brampton Centre but as the newly appointed critic for long-term care, home care and seniors, and support the Leader of the Opposition’s call for this commission’s deadline to be extended and for those documents to be made transparent so that the public has the information they need, and this province can actually fix our long-term-care system and make sure that people don’t continue to suffer here in the province of Ontario.

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

M^{me} Lucille Collard: I support this motion that would allow the long-term-care commission to continue its work, and here are the reasons why.

The fact that the pandemic has had a devastating impact on long-term-care patients, their families and staff isn't debatable, and it's absolutely heartbreaking. Everyone agrees that we need to do better. To do that, we need to understand fully why the current system has not worked to protect our loved ones. We need to not be afraid to uncover the truth about our failure and we especially need to understand and be provided with clear recommendations as to how to fix our long-term-care system, because the status quo is not an option. The work of the commission should do precisely that, and it has indicated clearly that it is not done and needs more time to accomplish its mandate.

We are still very much in the midst of this pandemic, and we need to continue to collect information and hear people out. We cannot afford to fail by not getting to the bottom of this. There is no room for resistance. I find it completely unacceptable that the commission had to raise concerns publicly about the government's delays in providing documents and records. The failure of the government to provide the requested information in a timely manner should not prevent the commission from doing the work it was mandated to do. Their work is tireless and crucial to the future of our long-term-care homes. Why would this government want to cut this process off before it is completed?

We need to get this right and make sure we have comprehensive and meaningful recommendations to fix the broken system and stop the flow of suffering. I agree with my colleagues and urge the government to grant the extension requested by the commission and release all requested documents.

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

Ms. Lindsey Park: I will remove my mask here and get ready for a lengthy speech. First, I want to thank you, Speaker, for the opportunity to rise to speak to this opposition day motion. We've all seen the tragic effects of COVID-19 around the world and especially in our long-term-care homes. It has been heart-wrenching to see and to hear about.

I know our Minister of Long-Term Care and her team are profoundly aware of this grave reality every single day. This is the very reason why our government established a commission to investigate COVID-19 in long-term-care homes, with a defined time frame. We knew that we did not have the luxury of time to make this a long, drawn-out process.

Ontarians have questions that deserve to be answered. We all agree on that here, and we need those questions answered in a timely way. That's why our government expedited the commission's start date from September to July. It's also why we welcomed the commission's two sets of interim recommendations, which they released in October and December of last year. The commission is doing extensive and independent work.

As part of our government's commitment to transparency about the commission's work, I want members of the public watching, and the opposition, to know that inspection reports are public, pandemic data sets are accessible

online, 6,000 pages of transcripts and presentations from everyone involved in the pandemic response are available on the commission's website if you would like to go through that at home, and updates from the health coordination table and provincial command table are also posted.

To coordinate the historic scale of documents requested by the commission, our government retained a third-party vendor to assist in the production of documents. That vendor is following an established protocol for document production. To date, as my colleague mentioned, more than 60,000 unique documents have been shared with the commission as part of this effort in transparency. As requests for documents come in, they're processed and produced.

On behalf of my constituents in Durham, I would like to thank the commissioners for their work to date, and I look forward to seeing their final recommendations in late April so we can act on them. This debate gives the opportunity to look at the work the commissioners have done thus far and to share with this House and with Ontarians how our government has already acted on the recommendations we have received. This discussion today allows our government to provide an update on our long-term-care system in Ontario and to highlight how we're working to build a stronger and safer system.

The commissioners' interim recommendations were broad-based and covered a number of aspects of long-term care, but in the time we have today I would like to focus on two areas highlighted by the commissioners: staffing and visitor policy.

Overall, we see the commissioners' recommendations are largely aligned with our government's aggressive modernization agenda for a long-term-care system that has suffered from decades of neglect. While the challenges that have been built up over those decades of neglect will not disappear overnight, even so we need to relentlessly take steps forward to move the sector ahead until we see it dramatically improved. This is the priority of our Minister of Long-Term Care and of our entire government. We are committed to this.

Before I get into staffing and visitor policies, I do want to quickly highlight some of the movement on getting new beds built in Durham region, the area I represent. I want to thank our Minister of Long-Term Care, who has pushed forward a number of long-term-care projects in Durham region. The Ministry of Long-Term Care is helping fund a new, modern, 224-bed home in Bowmanville that will replace Glen Hill Strathaven. I want to add that the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing broke down silos, working across government to support this project by reducing red tape and using a minister's zoning order to rezone the land donated for this build. Some estimates say this likely will shave a year off the timelines for this project.

In addition to that acceleration, on July 28, 2020, our government announced a collaborative partnership with Lakeridge Health and Infrastructure Ontario to build a new, modern, long-term-care home on the site of the Ajax

Pickering Hospital, using an accelerated build process. This new home will have up to 320 new beds, using an innovative design-build process.

Just those two projects alone add up to about 540 new beds that will actually get built in Durham region. This will be a huge step forward, considering that the previous government, supported by the NDP, only actually built 611 new beds across the whole province between 2011 and 2018, leaving the Central East LHIN, including Durham region, with the longest wait-times in the province. I must say, I was really entertained by the independent Liberal member attempting to give us lessons on how to more quickly improve long-term care while saying we should also delay the recommendations from the commission.

Many of those long-term-care beds in Durham region that were left neglected were constructed before 1970 and are in dire need of renovation. Many are known as class C beds, which means they were built to old, outdated building standards. These are the homes we often hear about that see four people in one room. We need to transition away from this arrangement, and those are the steps we're taking in Durham region. Our community is eagerly looking forward to these projects being completed. I speak to seniors on the phone every day who are looking forward to that.

A key element of this government's aggressive modernization agenda is the ongoing work to ensure that proper staffing is in place to improve resident quality of care and quality of life. Even before the interim recommendations had been released, all of us in the House had heard from our constituents, especially long-term-care residents and their families, that we needed more staff and that better working conditions were needed to ensure residents receive the high-quality care they deserve.

1430

Over the past year and a half, our government has taken major steps forward to address these urgent staff shortages. During the pandemic, these steps have included investing more than half a billion dollars to prevent and contain COVID-19, and to recruit, educate and retain more health care workers in long-term care.

But there also needs to be a fundamental shift to address the long-standing staffing issues that existed before the pandemic and would continue after the pandemic without further action. That's why, in December, our government launched A Better Place to Live, A Better Place to Work: Ontario's Long-Term Care Staffing Plan. At the centre of this plan is our commitment to increase the hours of direct care for residents to an average of four hours per day over four years. And let me emphasize, this is unprecedented—a first in our country.

But how do we get there? This will be a big undertaking, and delivering on this commitment will require the education and training of new health care professionals to fill the more than what's estimated to be 27,000 full-time positions which will need to be filled to achieve this standard. This plan sets out actions to hire more staff and improve the working conditions for existing staff so we can retain them. The plan I'm referencing focuses on six key areas of action delivered over four years.

(1) Investing up to \$1.9 billion annually by 2024-25 to create those more than 27,000 new positions for personal support workers, registered nurses and registered practical nurses in long-term care to meet the direct care commitment. But that also includes providing a 20% increase in direct care time administered by other health care professionals, such as physiotherapists and social workers.

(2) The plan accelerates and expands education and training pathways and programs to train the thousands of new staff we will need.

(3) The plan supports continued professional development and growth of long-term-care staff to improve retention.

(4) It improves working conditions for staff by coordinating with long-term-care employers to increase full-time employment opportunities and promote innovative approaches to work and technology. I think we've all heard about examples of our own constituents who have to work in a number of different homes because they don't have a full-time position. We need to improve that across the province.

(5) We need to drive effective and accountable leadership in homes across the province to improve oversight, guidance and medical outcomes in long-term-care homes.

(6) We're measuring progress against major performance indicators. If you can't measure something, it's very difficult to manage it.

The objectives set out in this staffing plan, if achieved, will go a long way to making long-term care a better place for residents to live and a better place for staff to work. As the plan continues to roll out, the minister and our government are taking steady, significant steps to provide the resources needed to fund both the immediate needs of the sector as well as the long-term staffing plan.

Importantly, we also understand that traditional educational pathways at current enrolment levels will not be enough to build the team of qualified health care professionals we desperately need, so our government is working collaboratively with sector partners to implement innovative approaches to develop that required pipeline.

Take, for example, the Willis College personal support worker program that was recently launched. This scholarship program follows a new delivery model. It will not only offer students a strong knowledge base, but actually put them on the job, get some on-the-job experience well before their clinical placement, thereby making candidates better equipped and more quickly equipped for their roles. This program will train up to 300 personal support workers to work in long-term-care homes in the Ottawa area.

Just this morning, our Minister of Long-Term Care, always working to improve, announced \$4.1 million in funding to eight projects across our province that will train 373 new PSWs, and she made that announcement with our Minister of Labour, Training and Skills Development. This funding will also be used to develop educational resources to minimize PSWs' exposure to infection. Some projects have already begun, while others will start later in the spring and run for several weeks or months. Our government will continue to significantly invest in our

long-term-care staff, so that they can continue to provide the best possible care to those in our long-term-care homes, both now and into the future.

I mentioned working with long-term-care employers to increase full-time employment. This is an example where collaboration will be needed to meet the objectives laid out in our staffing plan. This work will be led by the associations representing long-term-care home operators of all types, and they will consider potential barriers to full-time work, such as scheduling challenges in a 24/7 environment. The minister is also continuing to work with employers, associations and unions to address other working conditions, as well.

On the topic of visitor policies, which I know many members in this place are interested in: I think we all know that loved ones play an irreplaceable role in the lives of seniors and long-term-care residents. They bring care, comfort and joy, and they're often a lifeline for residents. Understanding this, our government moved cautiously to balance these important visits with the need to safeguard the health of residents and staff and the need to mitigate any risks related to COVID-19.

As the COVID-19 pandemic has evolved in Ontario, the direction on visits at long-term-care homes has been continually updated and adjusted, keeping that necessary balance between the safety and emotional well-being of both residents and staff at the forefront.

After announcing the gradual resumption of visits to long-term-care homes in June, our government updated the visitor policy to ensure operators implemented consistent visiting practices across the province. The updated visitor policy released in September 2020 helped clarify that essential caregivers are allowed to visit homes and provide essential care, including during an outbreak, subject to direction from the local public health unit. We know that caregivers are essential visitors and important partners who provide direct care to residents, which is also why our government has prioritized providing the vaccine to those very essential caregivers.

As I conclude, I'd like to say that when COVID-19 came upon us over a year ago, we could not have predicted the impact it would have on our entire province. We've all had to respond and we were challenged to respond with both wisdom and courage.

Speaker, when you move quickly responding to an unprecedented crisis, government is not going to be perfect. We have had to be agile, to continue to improve and adjust and learn from our partners and from each other in this place. I marvel at the dedication and courage of those who work every day to make our long-term-care homes in our ridings a better place. As the MPP for Durham I will continue to advocate for improved conditions for those in long-term care in my riding. Our seniors are depending on us as their elected leaders.

Our parents, our grandparents and their friends are the ones who built our great nation that in so many ways is the envy of the world. Now it is our time to build for them, to build the care system that meets their needs as they age. We look forward to receiving the commission's final

recommendations. I know our Minister of Long-Term Care and her team plan to not stop or slow down as they work with stakeholders across the health care sector to build a long-term-care system that rises to meet the needs of the 21st century.

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

Mr. Jamie West: I want to bring a couple of Sudbury voices to this and talk about a PSW who works in long-term care and a husband who lost his wife while she was in long-term care.

I'm going to call the PSW Danielle, because she's worried about using her real name. She's a PSW who works in one of the Extencicare locations in Sudbury, with more than a decade of experience, and she has never, ever seen long-term care this bad. She talks about always running short: not enough time to get residents ready, not enough time to bathe them and not enough time to feed them; about constantly missing their breaks, always having to work late unpaid, having to come in on their days off to get swabbed—and that, too, is unpaid. PSWs on her shift work four on, one off, four on, two off. So on that one day off, they're forced to come back to the workplace to get a swab for a COVID-19 test, unpaid. On the two days off every two weeks, they're forced to come back to get a COVID-19 swab, unpaid. Danielle sees the same problems for her co-workers—she talked about RPNs who are working short, and they're burning out as well.

1440

I mentioned that Danielle is a pseudonym. She is a PSW. She's a constituent from Sudbury. She said, "You can only share my story if you don't use my name, because Extencicare will make my life a living hell. I've seen it before, and I won't go through it."

I want to talk about Tom Andruschuk. His wife was abused in long-term care. Once it happened right in front of his eyes. He was outraged, just like any spouse would be. He followed all the right steps. He spoke to those who were in charge of the facility. He filed a complaint with the Ministry of Long-Term Care. They did an investigation, but it went nowhere. The ministry denied that the events had taken place, even though he saw them with his own eyes, even though he documented them. Nothing was done. The final report showed no non-compliance. Tom has been trying to get justice ever since, but he has hit roadblock after roadblock with this government. He refuses to give up because he doesn't want this to happen to other people in long-term care.

These two people, Tom and Danielle, are only two of thousands of people—thousands and thousands directly impacted by long-term care, and thousands more across Sudbury, thousands more across the province who want long-term care to finally be fixed and who deserve to have the long-term-care commission have all the resources and time they need to make those recommendations so we finally fix this.

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

Mr. Mike Schreiner: It's an honour to rise today to speak to the opposition day motion to extend the Long-

Term Care COVID-19 Commission mandate to December 31, 2021.

Madam Speaker, we owe it to the people who have lost their lives and the people who have lost loved ones to give the commission time to do its work thoroughly.

As of this morning, there were 14,935 COVID-19 cases in long-term care and, sadly and tragically, 3,734 deaths; and there have been 6,580 LTC staff cases and 11 deaths. It's hard for all of us to think about, because those are real people—grandparents, husbands, wives, aunts, uncles, parents.

The government seems to want us to have to make a choice: Are we going to do this quickly so we can get some recommendations out right away, or are we going to take the time to be comprehensive in our approach? I would say that we don't have to make that choice. We can do both.

The commission has already brought forward two interim reports, on October 23 and December 4, and they've pointed out so much of what many of us knew: that we need a minimum standard of care of at least four hours a day; we need more staff; we need to pay those staff a living wage; we need to guarantee them full-time work; we need safer buildings; we need better infection control protocols; we need essential visitor protocols.

We also need to know that, despite what's out there, not everyone in long-term care has been vaccinated as of today. I have at least one of my constituents reaching out to me and saying that her father, who lives in a long-term-care home, hasn't been vaccinated.

So, yes, there are some immediate issues we need to address, but we know there are systemic changes that need to take place in the way we care for elders in long-term-care homes and in our communities and in their homes. That is why I think many of us wanted to see a public inquiry that was completely independent, so we could have that independent, transparent process. But if the government wants to go with the commission, at least allow the commission to do its job.

I want to quote from the commission's December 9 letter, where they said that it's hard to be comprehensive when "The commission continues to encounter significant delays in obtaining government information central to the commission's investigation. Most documents responsive to the commission's document summonses and requests remain outstanding."

Speaker, we owe it to everyone in long-term care and their loved ones to do this right and to give the commission the time to get the documents they need and do the work they need. That's the least we can do, and I encourage everyone in this House to support this motion.

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

Mr. Randy Pettapiece: Speaker, I'm sure you know the challenges facing long-term-care homes are real. They're serious and they're long-standing, going back many years. There are problems and they must be fixed.

Today's opposition motion is correct in this respect: The impact of COVID-19 has been devastating. As a province and as a government, we grieve with those families who have lost loved ones in long-term care.

Ever since I was first elected, I have advocated for long-term-care homes in my riding. I have advocated for the staff, families and residents that I represent. I have advocated for homes in all sectors: for-profit, not-for-profit and municipal homes. In Perth–Wellington, we have dedicated staff and administration in homes of all types, working hard for the residents in their care. I have advocated for more beds and more resources, and I have advocated for beds in rural and small-town Ontario, in particular.

In 2017, when the former government was considering a proposal to transfer up to 50 of our beds out of Perth county, we stopped it in its tracks. And do you know what we found? People care about long-term care. They understand its value—so much that they are willing to mobilize, to write letters, to sign petitions, to speak up for their families and communities. When there are challenges in long-term care, people take notice, and that's what we're seeing here again today.

Yet for all the challenges we are seeing, it would be simplistic and incorrect to say that it's all bad news. In June, I spoke in the Legislature about homes in Perth–Wellington and how they responded to the COVID-19 crisis. I said in part, "People who worked long hours away from their families, people who pushed themselves working way beyond their job description, people who accepted the risk, not knowing how much PPE was left or whether they might come down with COVID, people who kept coming back to work day after day: I want to thank them at every home in Perth–Wellington. The rest of us will never know fully their contributions. I also want to thank the people and businesses who donated PPE, food or finances.

"But there's more that we can do to help. For many families unable to visit loved ones, it has been a long, tough road. We want to visit them; they want to see us too."

In September, I again raised the long-term care in this Legislature. I spoke about the challenges ahead of us. I said many more of us will need long-term care. We will need more staff, PSWs, nurses, administrators, activity coordinators, volunteers and many others. We'll need modern and accessible buildings because these buildings are the residents' homes. We'll need them in the cities, in small towns and in the country. And all of them will need to be prepared for future pandemics.

Our government has heard this message and it is responding to this need. I would like to name just one example. In November, we announced that direct care provided to each long-term-care resident will increase to an average of four hours per day. That will mean educating and recruiting tens of thousands of new personal support workers, registered practical nurses and registered nurses we need.

Of course, in the wake of the tragedy that met so many long-term-care homes during COVID-19, the government established the independent commission. Its goal was to provide a timely, transparent and non-partisan investigation and to deliver advice on better protecting long-term-care homes, residents and staff. The commissioners continued to do that, and they are doing good work. From the

beginning, the commission was asked to provide its final report by April 30. That is because the situation was urgent, and it's still urgent. Even as the commission is still completing its work, our government is not waiting to act.

1450

I want to talk about three key areas of the commission's interim recommendations: infection prevention and control; leadership and accountability in our homes; and inspection.

Improving infection prevention and control has been a major priority of this government. The commission already made some recommendations on this, and we are acting on them. They recommended that every long-term-care home have a dedicated and accountable infection prevention and control lead. They recommended that all staff have basic training and access to the local infection prevention and control centre of expertise.

Today, I'm told we have infection prevention and control hubs and outbreak management teams in place to support homes. We are also funding dedicated personnel for training and education and much more. I am pleased to see that the ministry is collaborating as outbreaks occur, hiring more inspectors and evaluating resource needs.

Another recommendation was to increase testing for residents and staff. As of last week, I'm told that Ontario Health has shipped more than 1.25 million rapid test kits to 521 long-term-care homes.

Another thing from the commission's recommendations is leadership and accountability. The interim recommendation was to require a lead for quality of care in long-term-care homes and to fund it properly, and the ministry is responding.

The commission has made two recommendations around performance indicators and accountability. The first recommendation is that we include performance metrics such as resident and family satisfaction, staff engagement, staffing levels and supply of PPE in long-term-care home performance reports. The government is developing a quality framework for this purpose.

I've always believed that residents and families need to be involved and need to be heard. I'm so very pleased the government is listening to their views on quality of care and quality of life.

The second interim recommendation is that we publicly post performance reports so that the people can see for themselves how their local homes are working. The ministry is working on this to support informed decision-making by and for long-term-care residents.

Finally, the ministry is working to do the inspections necessary to keep homes safe. During the pandemic, ministry inspectors have continued to look for risks of potential harm to residents. They are also responding to concerns from residents and families. Where there are critical issues, we're making sure that homes have what they need to fix them.

The ministry has also heard concerns from the public and the commissioners about the frequency of inspections. That's why the ministry is looking at proactive inspections. This will complement inspections responding to complaints or critical incidents.

The final recommendation calls for better collaboration and information-sharing between ministries. Long-term-care homes are inspected by the Ministry of Long-Term Care, Public Health Ontario and the Ministry of Labour, Training and Skills Development. Homes are inspected and inspected again.

I have often said there are so many good homes and so many dedicated staff members who work there. They are working hard, to say the least, but we need more of them. Our government is on track to build 30,000 new long-term-care spaces over 10 years. We need these beds, and we're getting ready to build them, even during a pandemic. The modernized funding model will help. For homes in Perth-Wellington, it will mean about \$991,000 for homes in every part of the riding.

We're also going to make sure that every new home is built to modern standards. They will consider infection prevention and control and containment, and they will replace ward rooms with single- and double-occupancy rooms.

In November, the government announced 29 new development projects across the province. These will create almost 2,000 new spaces and over 1,000 upgraded spaces. Today, we have over 22,000 safe, modern spaces in the pipeline. We need to keep going and we need to keep working.

Finally, Speaker, I would like to tell you about an incident in Perth-Wellington which just makes me so proud of how people can work together. We had a couple of outbreaks in some long-term-care homes. Our public health team and our family health teams jumped in and mitigated the outbreaks in a very short manner of time. That meant that patients who had to go to hospitals were located in the hospitals; that meant patients who could stay in their homes stayed in their homes. Workers who had COVID-19 were isolated, and these outbreaks were contained and they were over in a short period of time.

I want to give a shout-out to all the health care workers, especially those involved in outbreaks, that mitigated the circumstances and made sure that not one of our homes is in outbreak right now. I want to say thank you to all those people in my riding of Perth-Wellington.

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

Ms. Jennifer K. French: I'm very glad to be able to add a few comments on today's opposition motion about long-term care. All of us recognize that it has been a very traumatizing journey, with nearly 4,000 deaths in long-term care during this pandemic. It has been my privilege and, I would say, a life-changing opportunity to work with the families of Orchard Villa and other families who have come to and through my office advocating for their loved ones, desperate to keep them safe and protected and trying to seek answers from this government and from the homes themselves.

Speaker, what we have seen is no accountability. There has been no independent or judicial review. The commission that we're talking about today was not that. It is a creature of the province. It is what we have, and that's why

today we are asking that it be granted what it is asking for to do the work that it says it needs to be able to do.

The government has made it easier for private, corporate, for-profit homes to avoid being sued. Families do not have the accountability that they deserve. I have a quote here from Melissa Miller, who is a partner with Howie, Sacks and Henry. She's representing families of Orchard Villa. She says, "I support this motion! ... I think it is important to remember that the families wanted a complete public inquiry and" the Premier "rejected the idea in favour of the commission. The family and the public deserve the most fulsome report by the commission, so" the Premier "should not take any further shortcuts in that regard."

Hear, hear, Mr. Speaker.

My colleagues and I have been calling for a full and accountable inquiry into long-term-care homes—first Orchard Villa, but we see the need across communities. I have written a letter—weird that I haven't gotten a response from this Premier—dated February 9, calling for a public inquiry, alongside municipalities and the region in my area, with a focus on Sunnycrest and ThorntonView.

This government has answers that it needs to provide to families. Today is an opportunity for them to do that.

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

Ms. Mitzie Hunter: It is my honour to rise on behalf of the people of Scarborough. I am fully in support of the opposition day motion today to extend the commission's inquiry into what happened in long-term care until December 31, 2021.

I really would have hoped that the government would be listening and would have taken this debate even more seriously. I would have hoped that the minister herself would have been here or any member, frankly, from cabinet—

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Stop the clock, please. I'm just going to remind members that we don't reference who is or is not in attendance in the chamber.

Ms. Mitzie Hunter: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

It was March 11, 2020, when I asked this House to close the doors in long-term care on the virus. The government dragged its feet. It didn't move as quickly as it could have to protect residents in long-term care.

When we look at what happened over the summer, when the virus was abating slightly, Quebec took steps, hired orderlies, trained them and paid them while they were being trained. Now they are managing and coping, and we are still here in Ontario with the ravages of this virus in our long-term-care system.

When I look at the effects on Scarborough and the devastating impact—I have friends who have lost parents, who have lost partners. There is so much mourning in my community as a result of the effects of COVID-19.

1500

Since March, we have lost 3,745 residents of long-term care and 11 staff members. The first PSW to lose her life during this virus was in Scarborough. When it comes to

doing all that we can, how will we know that, if we cut off the commission's work, if we delay requests for documents—simple transparency—if we don't want to hear the hard news?

What are we going to say to the 81 residents of Tendercare Living, whose loved ones are in mourning right now; or the 43 residents of the Midland Gardens Care Community; or Kennedy Lodge, that lost 41 of their residents; Extendicare Guildwood, 48; Seven Oaks, in my community, 41 residents? What are we going to say to Greg McVeigh? Nine days apart, he lost both parents in long-term care.

This government didn't even have the decency to allow proper submissions at the committee level—

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

Mr. David Piccini: It's an honour to rise to speak to this important issue and the systemic issue that I've heard all members of this place speak to, the systemic failures of governments of all stripes over the past number of years that have led to the position and the situation we find ourselves in in long-term care.

What I haven't heard from anyone is the ability and the imperative, lest members here—like the member from Durham, who mentioned it and spoke very eloquently—on the need to act now, to get these recommendations now and act to improve the situation. I heard the member speak to systemic changes, systemic changes that are needed in the long-term-care system, so I'd like to speak to some of those systemic changes that we have witnessed in Northumberland-Peterborough South and that were so desperately needed.

The \$1.9 billion invested in staffing: What does that mean? That means training 27,000 workers to work in long-term care. That's a commitment that this minister made. This is from a staffing strategy that this minister launched long before COVID. This is a commitment this government made, recognizing the failures of previous governments.

Today's announcement to train PSWs that my colleague from Durham mentioned is yet another step in the right direction for bringing more PSWs online. You will never hear members opposite talk about the impact that this is having on youth at Mohawk, about the impact that this is having on youth at Loyalist and other colleges, both public and private career colleges that are training the workforce of tomorrow, to get them involved to work in the long-term-care homes.

When COVID-19 hit, the government moved swiftly. We implemented regular surveillance testing, universal masking, pandemic pay, PPE. Again, we could have sat back, and we've seen some of the challenges on not moving quickly to build up domestic supply with our vaccine rollout. But this Premier, under a scope that he had direct control over, with PPE, moved quickly and launched the Ontario Together portal.

We saw manufacturers pivoting across Ontario to respond to the need. What does that mean? That means that that PPE is now being utilized by our heroes on the

front line to protect the residents in long-term care. This Premier moved quickly. You'll never hear that from the members opposite.

Madam Speaker, we've heard a lot about systemic changes, and they'll continue to heckle because they don't want to hear the actual measures. You'll never hear the tangible recommendations. I've never heard comments on the micro-credentialing strategy. It's partly because we're the first government—first government in North America, I believe; certainly first government in Canada—to be implementing a comprehensive micro-credentialing strategy. What does that mean? That means education pathways. That means laddering so that PSWs, so that health care professionals can see a future in their career. Learning is no longer a thing of a defined, finite amount of years following graduation from high school. Lifelong learning must occur for us to be responsive to the needs in long-term care. That's something this Premier recognizes. That's something this government is swiftly moving on.

I'll cite another example: stand-alone nursing. This one hits close to home for residents of Northumberland–Peterborough South. Loyalist College, for example, who had to partner with universities—this was under archaic policies of the previous government—now can offer stand-alone degree-granting. That means that our nurses can stay in rural Ontario. My colleague the member from Perth–Wellington spoke about the importance of maintaining and keeping that human resource capacity in rural Ontario. That's what this government is doing.

Finally, the four hours of direct care: I would like to thank the member opposite, I believe from London–Fanshawe, who has been an important advocate. That's what happens when you don't foment fear, when you don't mislead Ontarians, but you work collaboratively.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): I'm going to ask the member to withdraw his unparliamentary comment.

Mr. David Piccini: Withdraw.

That's what happens when you work collaboratively, when you bring forward good ideas. That member has spoken eloquently. I've heard her a number of times talking about four hours of direct care, and that's what this government has acted upon. We've launched a \$1.9-billion investment to help train the human resource capacity to deliver. As much as we all would like to admit—we can't click our fingers together and have the human resource capacity to deliver this tomorrow, but we can make tangible investments and move quickly to do this, and that's exactly what this government is doing.

I've spoken a bit about staffing. I'd like to shift to structural changes. The structures that were allowed to dilapidate under the previous government, supported and enabled at every step of the way by the members opposite, Madam Speaker—we've made a record investment, \$1.75 billion, to accelerate the builds. What does that mean? I know people look at home and often wonder, \$1.75 billion—that means a golden plow.

We now have shovels in the ground. That means that skilled trade workers, contractors in Northumberland–

Peterborough South, are working today to build the homes of tomorrow in Northumberland–Peterborough South right now. That means Pleasant Meadow Manor in Norwood has broken ground as well.

What does this mean to the workers? It doesn't mean disenfranchising them, as the members opposite would do by advocating that we shut down half the capacity in long-term care. For the workers who get up every day, who have developed those bonds, those family bonds with our seniors in long-term care, who are scared—I'll reference one who spoke to me. I'm going to use a different name, too, because she fears retribution at the hands of different organizations and at the hands of activists encouraged by the members opposite for speaking out.

She said, “David, when I heard that the New Democratic Party was advocating for me to be given a pink slip, to shut down my facility, it scared me.” She went home that night scared. That's not the job of this Legislature. We know that there are problems, but I think we can work collaboratively in highlighting and working with the for-profit and not-for profit sectors. There are right questions that need to be asked about what's going on in this system, both in for-profit and in not-for profit, but we want to work collaboratively.

When this worker reached out, she was scared. This doesn't help improve our system. We need to be working collaboratively. We need to be listening to the commission. We need to be empowering them, which is exactly what this government is doing. And I'd like to speak and turn to that. I'd like to reference, exactly, a quote that the Leader of the Opposition has made here in this House. She said, “That's what's wrong with a commission”—and I quote, on May 19—“because it is going to be utilized to back up whatever the government decides they want to have public.”

And, again, on that same day, this is “a backroom kind of deal cooked up with some commissioner or some commission that will justify everything they've already said and done and will justify recommendations that they already have written.” Then, on the same day, “No one has asked for yet another Ford-government-controlled commission.”

“People deserve more than a government-controlled commission.” She has gone on record numerous times saying that.

Madam Speaker, this sort of language that's being used, the fomenting hatred that's embedded in this speech, does nothing to improve long-term care, does nothing to benefit the system at all. These commissioners are legitimate. This commission is legitimate. They're highly respected, highly experienced. And to see the pivot in discourse, now we hear from the Leader of the Opposition that we do want to listen to the commission. Well, on this side of the House, from day one we've known that, and we're working actively with those commissioners. In fact, we have turned over more than 60,000 unique documents.

So again, rather than highlighting any nuance, the Leader of the Opposition will tell Ontarians that there is nothing being provided to them when we know that's

patently false: 60,000 unique documents have been handed over to that commission. That's unprecedented. I'm not aware—granted I'm a first-time MPP elected on a wave of Ontarians that disapproved of the systemic failures of the previous government, enabled in large part by the New Democratic Party, so I'm unaware of that sort of unprecedented work that's gone on.

1510

In fact, we also heard—to add to the inflammatory language from the Leader of the Opposition—the term “cover-up” used as recently as September. This politically charged language does nothing to address the systemic failures that I think we can all agree have occurred in long-term care. Madam Speaker, how can anyone take the words of that member seriously? This is an unprecedented tragedy that has unfolded in our province's long-term-care system, strained by decades of neglect.

Madam Speaker, I'll draw you back to the work that's being done, because I will not stand and dignify some of the inflammatory language used by the Leader of the Opposition with any more of a response—

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): I'm just going to ask the member to be very careful with his language. We all have a responsibility in here to try and keep decorum in this room, and you are treading a very fine line.

Mr. David Piccini: Madam Speaker, I'm quoting the Leader of the Opposition, and I do agree that that language is very worrisome.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): If the member would like to challenge the Chair, he's welcome to do so directly. I asked you to be very careful with your language. I was not referring to anything you were quoting directly from the leader of the official opposition. I'm talking about your narrative around that. Please choose your words carefully. Let's keep decorum in this room.

Mr. David Piccini: Thank you, Madam Speaker. The words that I've quoted, I'll simply end by saying that those words have concerned me. They've concerned the residents that I represent. They've deeply concerned the workers that I represent.

I'm going to draw this back to the systemic structural changes and the staffing changes that our government has initiated, the structural changes that have meant accelerated builds: 23,000-plus beds right now in the pipeline, either being renovated or new beds coming online. What does that mean? That means that we know statistically that the spread of COVID-19 which occurred in long-term-care facilities, in large part driven by ward rooms—those are now being moved to private and semi-private rooms. Those are facts. That's a tangible recommendation that we're acting upon. That's movement that's needed to occur. In fact, those are investments that were committed to in the last election and that we started long before the COVID-19 pandemic.

Those meaningful changes mean shovels in ground, mean new facilities for our loved ones to have the dignity of aging in. And the workers that support them, who've become family members, who want to know, “What's

happening for me?”—the pandemic pay meant that some of those vital workers, that we all rightly call heroes, that meant that they've had a bump in pay. We've undertaken a staffing strategy to address compensation.

Madam Speaker, we've worked on the laddering, the micro-credentials, the stand-alone degree granting. We've come forward in this place with meaningful ideas, meaningful measures to improve the systemic failures, and at every stage, it's been voted against by the members opposite. They voted against that young PSW who wants to continue their learning and see a future with our micro-credential strategy. They voted against that. They voted against the workers who want to give more time to our loved ones, who have now become their loved ones and family. They voted against that.

Madam Speaker, I will close by saying they voted against that because this is more about politics and less about addressing the systemic change. On this side of the House, every day, we're going to work hard to address the systemic failures of the decades of neglect of previous governments.

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

Mr. Wayne Gates: I want to address that member. It's about saving lives. That's what we're talking about today.

But I want to talk really quickly about what happened with the Canadian military and what they told you guys was wrong in the first wave of COVID-19, as we had people dying. What did you do? You didn't do anything, quite frankly. And what happened? We see it right here. Right in my own riding, 365 people have lost their lives in long-term care and retirement homes. At Millennium Trail, 18 people died; Crescent Park, 14; Lundy Manor, 20; and the one that had the worst outbreak in the province, Oakwood Park Lodge, had 100% of the residents and 100% of the staff who have COVID-19 and they had to bring in Niagara Health because they didn't have staffing.

Staffing, staffing, staffing: Quebec hired 7,000; BC, 7,000. What did you guys do? You did nothing for nine, 10 months, and what was the result? The result was that people died in long-term-care facilities. In one of the facilities that I represent, a mom and dad died within 24 hours. Do you know what it's like to bury a parent? Imagine burying two in one day—that could have been preventable. That's the issue here: This could have been preventable in the second wave. We could have made sure we had proper PPE. We could have made sure that we had proper staffing. But you guys decided not to do that. You decided to allow Niagara to have COVID outbreaks, to have people in Niagara die. That's what happened.

And then the last thing I'm going to talk about—they don't give me a lot of time to talk here—vaccines in my riding: 5,000 Moderna vaccines were coming to Niagara to help save lives in Niagara, and what does this government do? They diverted them to somewhere else. And do you know what else they didn't do? They won't tell me where they went. We've been asking for months. It has been in the paper. I've talked to the Premier. I've talked to the health minister. They won't tell us where they

went. And the end result? People died in my riding. Don't tell me what you guys have been doing, please.

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

Ms. Donna Skelly: This debate has shown us the clear contrast in attitudes between the two sides of this House. The opposition, after relentless and unfounded criticism, has decided once again to try to politicize the commission's important work. On this side of the House, things are different. We were the first jurisdiction in Canada to launch an investigation into COVID-19 in long-term care. We know the importance of the commission's work and expect a timely response. That is why, this summer, the Premier expedited their start date by two months. In our current situation, with outbreaks still current and a third wave being a real threat, the need for a rapid response is underlined. The commission must move at COVID speed.

Over the last several months, the commissioners have met with residents, their families, caregivers, staff, home operators, advocates, professional organizations, labour leadership, government officials, experts and many more. Our government is grateful to the commission for their interim recommendations, and we look forward to receiving their final recommendations in late April so we can act on them.

The two sets of interim recommendations that the commission provided on October 23 and December 4, 2020, have been helpful tools for us in our continuing modernization of Ontario's long-term-care system.

Our government took action on those recommendations for the same reason we have established this commission: The long-term-care system must be modernized, and we cannot lose time to act. We acted quickly on the interim recommendations, as my colleagues the members for Durham and Perth-Wellington observed. We have taken those recommendations to heart and have bolstered IPAC, are working towards improving leadership and accountability in homes and the inspection system. Our government is hiring and onboarding more inspectors and looking at how to ensure proactive inspections complete complaint and critical incident complaints.

We are transitioning to rapid antigen testing for caregivers, staff, students, support workers and general visitors. This simplifies access for people to get into homes; 1.25 million tests have gone to homes.

We have clarified visitor restrictions to establish the category of essential visitors, who can enter homes even in outbreak.

The specialized care centre provides care for residents who need to be temporarily located.

The recommendations on staffing are important too. During the pandemic, we have invested more than half a billion dollars to prevent and contain COVID-19 and to recruit, educate and retain health care workers.

And we are taking action to address the long-standing staffing problems that have built up over decades of neglect. In December, we launched our staffing plan, A Better Place to Live, a Better Place to Work. Our plan sets out actions to hire more staff, improve working conditions

for existing staff, drive stronger leadership, and retain current staff. We committed to leading Canada and to achieving a standard of care of an average of four hours per resident per day. Our plan is ambitious, and it's achievable. It will require the educating and training of new staff to fill the more than 27,000 full-time-equivalent jobs which will be needed to reach this standard. We back up that solid plan with up to \$1.9 billion in annual funding by 2024-25, and that is on top of tens of millions of dollars in existing training and staff funding.

In short, we have taken the commission's recommendations very seriously.

Our government has co-operated fully with the commission and continues to. Besides Dr. Williams, the Minister of Long-Term Care and the Minister of Health and their deputy ministers' meetings with the commission, a large number of government officials have appeared. The list is comprehensive and exhaustive. To pick just a few: The Deputy Minister of Health; the Deputy Minister of Long-Term Care; the Ministry of Long-Term Care's assistant deputy ministers for policy and for development; the associate deputy minister for long-term-care pandemic response; the Ministry of Health's associate deputy minister for pandemic response and recovery; and many other government officials are in the over 100 meetings the commission has posted.

I'd be remiss not to acknowledge the sheer volume of work the commissioners have done so far. That list of meetings takes up eight pages. The transcripts and presentations from everyone involved in the pandemic response that they have released total over 6,000 pages. That is in keeping with our government's commitment to be transparent with Ontarians. I want members of the public and opposition to know that, in addition to those releases from the commission, inspection reports are public, pandemic data sets are accessible online and updates from the Health Coordination Table and provincial command table are also posted.

We are producing documents for the commission. The scope they are covering is rightfully quite broad. Some of these documents date to the previous government. To coordinate the historic scale of documents requested by the commission, our government retained a third-party vendor to assist in the production of those documents. That vendor is following an established protocol for document production. As requests for documents come in, they are processed and produced. To date, more than 60,000 unique documents have been shared with the commission.

We have seen the opposition's self-evident contradictory view of the commission. As my colleague pointed out, the Leader of the Opposition, in just one day in this House, said that something was "wrong with a commission," that it would be used to "back up whatever the government decides they want to have public," that it was "government-controlled," referencing a "backroom kind of deal cooked up with some commissioner or some commission"—all on the same day. On another occasion, she implied it was, to use her words, "a cover-up." Nothing could be further from the truth, and we have all seen that.

The commissioners have been transparent with Ontarians, opening channels of communication for residents, families, staff, operators and the public, releasing their transcripts in close to real time and informing Ontarians who they have met with.

As a member of a government committed to transparency, I commend the commissioners for being fully transparent—and I do not think the Leader of the Opposition can say the same.

Madam Speaker, at the heart of this matter, the issue is simple, and I'll repeat it for members of the opposition who don't seem to have heard it for almost a year: Our government is committed to modernizing long-term care. We are committed to getting Ontarians the answers they deserve. We are committed to doing it quickly. It is that simple. Before and during the pandemic, we have been building the foundations of a modernized long-term-care sector. We are going to keep doing that.

The commissioners' expertise and insight have already complemented these efforts, and I am confident that their final recommendations will help us move further towards our shared goal: a better long-term-care system that meets the needs of our society's most vulnerable members. That is what this is all about, and we simply cannot lose sight of this.

Madam Speaker, the opposition are treating this pandemic as politics as usual. It isn't.

Miss Monique Taylor: Oh, shame on you.

Ms. Donna Skelly: I will repeat that: The opposition continues to treat this pandemic as politics. The government has been moving at COVID speed; so must this commission.

We've already lost 15 years, time that we could have spent improving long-term care, a sector that was neglected by the previous government. We cannot lose more time to do this. Long-term-care residents, their families and the staff who care for them cannot be kept waiting even longer than they already have. Our government has made meaningful progress, and we need to keep that momentum going. We are all looking forward to the commission's final report and recommendations to help us continue to repair and rebuild the long-term-care system.

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

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: I'm glad that we're bringing this issue forward to discuss it. It really was clear last year, when this Conservative government resisted the NDP's calls to find and fix under a public inquiry, that they never really intended to be accountable for the part that they are playing in this pandemic and regarding the standard of care in long-term care.

The battle of COVID-19 is still not over. Not all long-term-care residents, staff and caregivers have received their full inoculations. Requested documents are still remaining outstanding from the commission. There is still investigating to be done and stakeholders to talk to. Families across this province are still dealing with the tragic consequences of COVID-19.

It's clear that this government is refusing to extend the commission because, in a few short months, it has already revealed the missteps of the government when it was handling the pandemic. At the time the commission was announced, Minister Fullerton said, "This is something that we believe as a government is a priority, it has to be, and we need to address the questions that Ontarians have." Well, Speaker, Ontarians still have many unanswered questions, so why is the commission not being allowed to run its course?

At the time, the Premier's office said, "We know the system is broken. We can't afford to wait for another inquiry to tell us what we already know." Then we have the commission's recommendations that have not been implemented. There is still no legislated minimum standard of care—that, we know. There is still no legislated caregiver access—that, we know. So fix it. We've called on these items to be addressed in the Legislature.

At this point, I don't know what's worse, Speaker: that this government refuses to acknowledge the fact that many of the 4,000 resident deaths could have been prevented, that action could have been taken earlier; or that they refuse to learn from their mistakes that could have protected our loved ones who live and work in long-term care.

So the government offers families a government commission, to be transparent, to seek answers, to fix long-term care, but what they're getting is half the work when we don't allow the commission to extend the timeline. Families and loved ones and workers in long-term care are wondering what those full answers are, and they deserve to have them. They deserve to have the inquiry, the commission, do a full scope of long-term care. We've waited far too long, and this is the opportunity that's before us.

I urge all the MPPs in this House—they need to support this motion and give the commission the extension it needs to do the work that this government tasked them with: to find those answers in long-term care that families and loved ones and workers and all of us have been waiting for for decades.

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

M^{me} France Gélinas: I, too, would encourage every member of this House to really look at what has happened in our long-term care homes. Look at what the commission is asking. They're not asking for much. They say, "We will give you interim recommendations. We will give you things to work on right now. Four hours of hands-on care: You can do this right now. Don't wait for five years. But give us time to look through all of those documents" they had requested of the government that still haven't come or are just starting to come. It is not reasonable, 24 hours before they have to give us their final report, to say, "You still have 10,000 pages that you've just delivered." Let them do their work. We all have a heart. We all care for the 78,000 frail elderly people who live in our long-term-care homes. We have a commission; they're asking for more time. My leader has put forward a motion that does just that. It's not too much to ask.

1530

If I look at the people in my own riding, Evelyn Dutrisac, Joanne MacNeil, Diane Lafreniere-Kingsley, Lison Breton: Those are all people who have reached out because they want changes in our long-term care. Nicole has reached out. She wants changes in our long-term care. It cannot continue the way it is.

All you have to do is vote in favour of this motion. Let them finish the work that they have started. Take the recommendations that they have given you and act upon it now. Bring four hours of hands-on care right now. It could make a huge difference. Make PSW jobs a career. Give them a decent pay. Give them benefits, full-time work, maybe even a pension plan and a workload that a human being can handle, and you will change the care for every single one of those residents. Do this now. How do you do this? You vote yes to this motion.

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

Mr. Faisal Hassan: It's an honour to stand and speak on behalf of the decent and hard-working people of York South–Weston. The long-term-care situation in our province is horrendous, and the pandemic only highlighted the troubling issues that exist. While we on this side of the House have long been calling for reform and improvement to the sad state of affairs in long-term care, it seems to take the military coming in during the alarming COVID cases in long-term care to point out to everyday Ontarians what it is truly like for staff and our elders in long-term care. The for-profit model of long-term care comes at a cost of short-staffed workers, performing largely a part-time, no-benefits role as they work two to three places to cobble together something approaching a full-time wage.

This government talks of our front-line health care heroes but doesn't treat them like heroes. Many are still waiting for long-time-delayed pandemic pay—wages, by the way, that they have always deserved. But when shareholders need a dividend, the money needs to come from somewhere. Wages, food quality for residents and quality of care suffers when long-term-care dollars are needed to make a profit. It is a staggering but true statistic that during COVID, for-profit long-term-care facilities suffered 78% more COVID-19 deaths than the public non-profit model of care.

The official opposition calls for a public inquiry into long-term care to have an open and transparent process to identify serious flaws that have existed in long-term care throughout the Liberal and the Conservative governments. Unfortunately, this government rejected that.

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

Ms. Marit Stiles: I'm pleased to rise on behalf of my constituents of Davenport to speak in favour of the motion that's being put forward by the leader of the official opposition to extend the long-term-care commission's deadline and to immediately release all documents requested by the commission.

Listen, this proposal doesn't come out of left field, so to speak. This has been requested by none other than the

commissioners themselves. But the government has refused their request repeatedly. They want to shut down the commission's work at a time when residents and families and front-line workers who have risked their lives are saying very clearly, "We need answers. Hear us." Those answers require that light be shone in the dark corners of this government's policy, of their response, of their failures. But instead of letting the light in, they're throwing up walls. Instead of looking to see how they can improve upon things in this pandemic, they are shutting down this commission.

What's happening in this pandemic, particularly to those who are vulnerable, those living and working in long-term care—it is a tragedy; it is a travesty. And this is what is going to be written in the history books. The government members need to ask themselves: Will this be your legacy—a legacy that, rather than protecting families and residents and workers, threw up an iron ring not around the homes but around the for-profit corporations that run those homes, around the shareholders, around the former Premiers who sit on their boards, around the wealthy donors who all profited from the weakened standards and the weakened regulations.

Madam Speaker, the way forward has to be based on truth, on full transparency and on full accountability. I ask the members opposite, please join us in supporting this motion.

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

Ms. Judith Monteith-Farrell: It's my pleasure to stand up today and ask that the members of this House support the motion to allow the extension of the long-term-care commission. Much better would have been a public inquiry—we all know this.

Why it's important is because the families in Thunder Bay–Atikokan—those who suffered and had their family dying in Roseview manor in Thunder Bay—have a question. They want to know why this was allowed. That is something that they have continually said. How could this have happened? We knew what the first wave brought. Why did they not act and secure security for their loved ones in the second wave?

I think there are lessons to be learned in this time. The lessons are not just about the levels of care, which are so important—and we have the power to get those in place immediately, but we don't; we sit back and talk about some time down the road, in five years. What we need to look at is the systems. Why wasn't infection control in place? Why wasn't proper PPE in place? Why was there no plan in place when we were in a second wave?

I encourage you to allow this commission to get those answers.

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

Mrs. Jennifer (Jennie) Stevens: This commission is about public health and justice—justice for families in St. Catharines who have lost their loved ones; justice for a constituent like mine, Nancy Carrier, whose mother was stripped of her dignity during COVID-19. Nancy's mom

did not receive a bath within her home for more than three weeks. This is inhumane.

We all have an obligation to fix long-term care. No one should be nodding their heads that expedient answers are better than good ones. This is what is at risk today, when there is talk about shutting down a commission that—in their own words, “Most documents and summonses remain outstanding.” What is at risk? Darn good answers.

I am clear-eyed to know that even after the commission makes recommendations, there is no obligation to heed them. Some recommendations from the SARS commission went unheeded.

We called nurses heroes, and then we forced them to go to the courts to fight for PPE for their for-profit workplaces—ignoring the previous recommendations on the precautionary principle.

Even worse, the most important recommendations from the SARS commission were about proactive inspections, but this government ignored that advice. We are repeating history when the government cut inspections before the pandemic. This is not clear. Just last month, we only had 11 proactive inspections during a pandemic—not enough, government. The lesson here is that 10 years from now, another government might not heed the lessons from this commission. So it is so important that we let the commission do its job now.

The solution is simple: Give the commission the time it needs to get it right and the opportunity to be thorough, to drive for justice, to pursue dignity for our seniors and our older adults in nursing homes.

The reality is that we need to fix long-term-care homes. Report after report highlights that for-profit homes have nearly 80% more deaths than their not-for-profit counterparts. This is worth an investigation. This is worth immediate changes.

We owe real answers to the families who have lost loved ones, to the nurses and the front-line workers. Most of all, we owe the community and all of Ontario exactly that—real answers.

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

Miss Monique Taylor: It’s always my pleasure to have the opportunity to stand in this House, particularly when we’re talking about long-term care.

Last spring, as you know, New Democrats called for a public inquiry into the catastrophe that we were seeing unfold in long-term care. Instead, the Premier created a watered-down version of an inquiry, and now, he’s trying to shut even that down early. The commission has asked for extra time and this government is refusing.

1540

Everyone can see that the government is trying to avoid accountability for its failure to keep seniors and other residents of long-term-care homes safe. They’re trying to avoid making any real changes to long-term care, despite the overwhelming need for higher-quality care, more staff, and the need to take profit out of long-term-care homes. New Democrats have put forward several measures to help this government along, and they refuse to listen.

In Hamilton, we’ve seen this government’s failure to ensure quality in long-term-care homes. Not one Hamilton long-term-care home has had a resident quality inspection since 2018. Several homes haven’t had inspections since 2017. This government likes to blame the previous Liberal government for their astonishing failure to inspect homes—rightfully so—but they point to these backlogged complaints as the reason for why they cancelled the quality inspections. That makes absolutely no sense. Seeing a high number of complaints should indicate that there is something wrong. It should be a cause for more quality inspections, not fewer.

In my riding of Hamilton Mountain, Grace Villa had its last quality inspection in November 2018. In 2020, the home had a massive outbreak which led to 234 infections and 44 deaths—all preventable. I wrote to the long-term-care minister to ask for provincial interventions. I was begging, quite honestly. It was clear from the workers and the families that I had been speaking with that the home was in crisis and the outbreak was completely out of control. The workers described it as a war zone, and they shared with me daily what issues were happening. They were understaffed. They had poor sanitation. People just weren’t showing up to work because they were terrified. They didn’t have proper bedding. They were cutting blankets to make cloths to give some kind of washing. People were lying in urine. People were vomiting and choking. It was an absolute, horrific mess.

I received the minister’s response to my letter the following week. She basically said to me that the situation in the home was under control. That very same day, I also received another response. It was announced that Hamilton Health Sciences was taking over the home—the same day I received the letter saying that everything was under control.

It’s unbelievable that in the middle of an outbreak, the province was unable to see the severity of this crisis. The province has lost real oversight of long-term care and has allowed private companies, which are now shielded from lawsuits—which is another shameful episode—to operate without restriction and to make profit on the backs of these same residents.

This is why we need the commission to finish its work and why we need the minister and the Premier to appear before that commission. The failure to secure long-term-care homes from COVID-19 and allowing seniors and people with disabilities to bear the brunt of this pandemic is an absolute disgrace. It is shameful that this government is silencing this commission before it can finish its work. The commission has asked for the time. The commission deserves the time, the people of Ontario deserve the time and the seniors of today, the seniors of tomorrow deserve us putting a clear effort into truly fixing long-term care.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Back to the leader of the official opposition.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Thanks, Speaker. I want to start by thanking my colleagues on the opposition side for supporting this motion. They’re doing so, I think, because they really believe that we have an obligation to provide

to the people of Ontario the information that they deserve, the solutions that they deserve and as much of an understanding as possible as to what went wrong here in Ontario that led to the death of almost 4,000 seniors.

It was bad enough watching COVID-19 tear through long-term care back in the spring and early summer of last year. But to watch as month after month went by and the government did literally nothing—nothing to prepare, nothing to change the approach to long-term care as the second wave was knocking on our door—is not only unforgettable, Speaker, it's unforgivable.

Maybe this is why the Premier doesn't want to allow the commission to have the time that it needs to complete its work: because he doesn't want to know what the answers are; he doesn't want to know where the government failed. But Ontarians deserve to know that, Speaker. They deserve to know.

I think it's really interesting to have listened to what some of the government-side members are saying. This is a government that promised an iron ring around long-term care that never showed up. This is a government that sat back on its heels while other provinces in the summertime were recruiting literally thousands upon thousands of PSWs. Today, I think the government made an announcement that they're going to perhaps have 300-odd new PSWs get trained. This is in February of 2021. It should have been done in April of 2020, and it shouldn't have been a couple of hundred PSWs. When Quebec can engage 10,000 and BC 7,000, what does Ontario do as seniors are losing their lives in long-term care? Nothing.

So here we are in the second wave, and not one of the lessons that should have been learned in the first wave was learned. This government never, ever got ahead of the COVID-19 virus, and the people that suffered the most and paid the worst price were the most vulnerable seniors in our communities. The tragedies, as I mentioned, are absolutely unspeakable. But what did the government do when the commission was established? They basically dragged their feet again. The commission literally had to beg the government to provide the documents necessary for them to complete their work. The government played a game and held onto those documents until the clock started ticking. So really, it's the government and the government members who are doing a huge disservice to the people of Ontario.

Had we preferred a full public judicial inquiry? Absolutely. It's interesting to hear the government members talk as if the commission is doing everything it should be doing and not being interfered with by the government. In fact, the government is interfering with the work of the commission. Yes, it is a government commission. In other words, if it wasn't a government commission, we wouldn't have to be here debating this motion, because the Premier would not have the ability to simply say no when it comes to showing up to testify, when it comes to the provision of documents and when it comes to the expansion of the mandate, at the very least to give them the time they need to do their work.

But do you know what? This government started off here in Ontario by cutting public health units, by cutting

the resident quality proactive inspections, by cutting the budget of long-term care. So it should be no surprise that the findings of the commission were things like we need to increase PSWs, we need to make sure that there is more investment to help with the staffing mix, we need to make sure that there are four hours of hands-on care—not in 2024 or 2025, which is what the government's plan is, but right now. They could have done it in the summer; they should have. The very least they should do is provide the answers that Ontarians deserve.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Ms. Horwath has moved opposition day number 1. 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.

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 1549 to 1619.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): A vote was held on opposition day number 1.

The Deputy Clerk (Mr. Trevor Day): The ayes are 25; the nays are 43.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Therefore, I declare the motion lost.

Motion negatived.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

ACCELERATING ACCESS TO JUSTICE ACT, 2021 LOI DE 2021 VISANT À ACCÉLÉRER L'ACCÈS À LA JUSTICE

Mr. Downey moved second reading of the following bill:

Bill 245, An Act to amend and repeal various statutes, to revoke various regulations and to enact the Ontario Land Tribunal Act, 2021 / Projet de loi 245, Loi modifiant et abrogeant diverses lois, abrogeant divers règlements et édictant la Loi de 2021 sur le Tribunal ontarien de l'aménagement du territoire.

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

Hon. Doug Downey: I'm so pleased to rise today in the House and open debate on the Accelerating Access to Justice Act, a bill that would, if passed, improve access to justice for people across Ontario, across the system, by modernizing processes and breaking down barriers in the province's courts, tribunals, estates law, family law and child protection sectors.

Before I begin discussing the bill we're introducing today, I must acknowledge and thank the stakeholders whose input provided the driving force behind so many of the proposals I'll be sharing with you. They include—and I'm going to list a few of them, although it is not all of

them—the Ontario Trial Lawyers Association, the Ontario Bar Association, the Federation of Ontario Law Associations and its many regional law associations, the Law Society of Ontario, the Ontario Crown Attorneys' Association, the Ontario Paralegal Association, the Canadian Association of Black Lawyers, AJEFO, the working group on access to justice in French, the Office of the Children's Lawyer and the Office of the Public Guardian and Trustee, along with many other legal organizations and members of the bar. They all participated in consultations throughout last year on ways we could make long overdue improvements in the area of estates law as well as promote diversity and transparency in our provincial judicial appointments process.

I would also like to thank the many partners in the justice system who are working with my ministry to respond and adapt with remarkable swiftness in order to address the challenges brought by COVID-19. In particular, I want to thank each of the chief justices and their teams, who demonstrated an unprecedented openness to solving long-standing and emerging obstacles, many of which could have seemed impossible to overcome. I'm so grateful for the wide-ranging efforts of the numerous legal practitioners and practice associations who we consulted with to respond to the needs of Ontarians dealing with estates law, family law, criminal law, commercial law and many other areas.

I would also be remiss if I didn't mention the team that put this together: Parliamentary Assistant Park, along with my team Amanda Iarusso, executive director of policy; Joseph Hillier, the chief of staff; Jesse Robichaud; Nicko Vavassis and so many more who have worked tirelessly to bring this all together. Their willingness to work quickly and closely with us facilitated advancements that will be an important legacy of our collaboration in these challenging times. I want to thank you.

And I must acknowledge the staff at the Ministry of the Attorney General all over the province and their tireless efforts to maintain the administration of justice and introduce innovative ways of driving it forward, no matter which challenges arose. Madam Speaker, it is really a very wide team effort. There are about 8,000 employees in the Ministry of the Attorney General and, I have to say, the professionalism, the drive and the collaboration to keep our system moving in a time when we were grappling with the pandemic—really, I do thank them. They've been resilient. They've been adaptable and they've worked around the clock with the utmost professionalism under the most stressful of times. So to all the employees of MAG, I thank you.

I must also acknowledge all the practising lawyers and paralegals on the front lines who have provided important feedback and recommendations to us as we work towards a system where we can move justice forward during the pandemic. I have worked in our justice system from these and other perspectives, including as a clerk and a court registrar, and I know that when positive change happens, it's truly the result of determined and collaborative efforts throughout the system.

Long-standing challenges that cause delays in the justice system have been compounded during the present pandemic, and we are determined to continue demonstrating, through groundbreaking innovation and collaboration, that justice accelerated is justice delivered.

Your collaboration continues to be invaluable, and I look forward to continuing to work together with all of our justice partners.

In response to the emergence of COVID-19, we took decisive action to maintain the administration of justice, and we achieved a number of breakthroughs to move Ontario's justice system forward by decades in a matter of months. The proposed Accelerating Access to Justice Act, 2021, builds on these actions and proposes urgent reforms to address delays for Ontarians waiting to resolve legal issues.

Whether it be in front of a judge or beyond the courtroom, COVID-19 had an unprecedented impact on the justice sector. Realizing the risks of having large numbers of people congregate in courtrooms and judicial settings, we immediately set to work to move to remote hearings and helped the courts with their suspension of in-person proceedings. It really was unprecedented, and many justice modernization projects had to be accelerated or changed in scope to meet the new needs of Ontarians. This included supporting new ways of conducting court matters, offering more remote proceedings, and providing online methods for filing and interacting with the court to reduce the number of people who must visit a courthouse in person.

To accommodate the physical distancing requirements, we quickly made an emergency order to temporarily enable virtual witnessing of wills and powers of attorney with an Ontario paralegal or a lawyer present. This allowed people to get their affairs in order without exchanging paper, while keeping a safe distance apart.

I'm going to come back to that point. It really is unprecedented, in terms of the province and the innovation—in the way that we've done it and the way that we came up with the solution.

We also rolled out a new online court case search service to open up online public access to information that you previously had to physically line up at a courthouse to see. That sounds like a simple little thing, but I'm just going to—it was actually a kiosk in the courthouse. If you were closing a corporate deal or you wanted to check to see the status of a particular matter, you had to physically go to the courthouse, you had to go to whichever floor it was on, you had to line up and then take your turn at this kiosk and do your search and see if you found anything. When the pandemic hit, you weren't going in the courthouse, so that access to information just disappeared. And it wasn't used just by people who were participants in court proceedings; it was used by reporters and others. Access to justice is such an important tenet, such an important principle, that we wanted to make sure that we were not only keeping matters moving but that we were keeping access to that justice available for the public and for third parties.

We also aggressively rolled out what's called Thomson Reuters CaseLines. It's a cutting-edge document-sharing e-hearing platform that supports remote and in-person hearings.

Those are only a few of the results of the quick action we took when COVID-19 struck.

Although we had to make rapid changes in order to keep the justice system functioning, we also saw this as an opportunity to expand access to justice beyond the system's immediate needs. Together with our many partners, we rose to the challenge to drive the most significant modernization effort the justice sector has seen in recent history. We've changed the culture of the system over the past year. We've created muscle memory about how to promptly identify barriers and collaborate around solutions that benefit all Ontarians. Ultimately, these actions facilitated the Accelerating Access to Justice Act we are proposing today and provided a foundation for changes that would accelerate access to justice and break down barriers in communities across the province.

I want to speak about some of the aspects of the proposed act itself. I'd like to talk about an area of the justice sector where it was important to make updates to ensure Ontario is best equipped to meet the challenges of today and tomorrow as demands in the justice system continue to evolve. The recovery of Ontario's communities from COVID-19 requires a strong justice system that works as well as it possibly can to help people resolve their legal matters with fewer obstacles and delays. That includes filling judicial vacancies faster to ensure the justice system is operating at its maximum capacity, its maximum responsiveness and resilience in the face of these unprecedented challenges. Simply put, Ontarians are waiting too long for their day in court, while judicial vacancies sit unfilled, and we have proposed important changes that will fill vacancies faster.

1630

Today's changes to the judicial appointments process build on proposals we made back in February 2020 and a process of engagement that began in 2019. After more than three decades, we could see it was time to take a fresh look at Ontario's gold-star system and update it to 2021 and beyond. Everything we have done to advance this part of our system has been aimed at maintaining its integrity and accelerating its important work. We have consulted with legal associations over the past year and a bit to hear and address their vital input. We have listened and strengthened and refined a proposal based on their comments.

With this feedback, we are proposing changes in the Accelerating Access to Justice Act that would expand access to justice and support Ontario's recovery by allowing a larger number of qualified judicial candidates to be appointed faster. They also follow changes to the justice of the peace appointments process that were passed as part of the COVID-19 Economic Recovery Act this past July. Changes were made to the Justices of the Peace Appointments Advisory Committee's composition to make processes more efficient and also require the

publication of diversity statistics in its annual reports for every stage of the process.

This was important to me, Mr. Speaker. It's important that we know who is applying for these positions, that we know who is getting those interviews, that we know who is getting recommended, and that we know who is getting selected. Shining a light on transparency and providing transparency is a crucial part of making our system better. As a result, we've made major strides towards making the justice of the peace appointments process more efficient and transparent.

Today, we are proposing to apply similar changes to the process for judicial appointments in the Accelerating Access to Justice Act. Currently, judges are selected through a recruitment process that can take over a year and allows judicial vacancies to multiply and stack up. Typically, as few as two names are put forward at a time for the Attorney General's consideration. If that's not enough, if another identical vacancy comes up, candidates often have to reapply to be considered for the same vacancy in the same location that they just applied for. In no uncertain terms, this process has created a delay of vacancies, and this leads to considerable obstacles and delays for people waiting for their day in court.

The vacancies can happen for any number of reasons. It could be retirements—and they're a little easier to predict—but it can be because an excellent judge was elevated to the Superior Court, or it can be because of illness, or death, unexpectedly. It's not all predictable, Mr. Speaker. It simply does not align with our commitment to advance the justice system and make its processes more transparent and easier for the public and for applicants themselves to understand, and it is an access to justice issue, because if we cannot appoint judges in a timely manner, then more cases, hearings and proceedings stall and Ontarians are without their day in court.

One change we are proposing in the Accelerating Access to Justice Act to respond to these issues is requiring the Judicial Appointments Advisory Committee to recommend candidates who were previously recommended for a similar vacancy within the previous 12 months. This way, candidates don't have to go through the same process all over again multiple times a year.

At this point, it's important for me to clarify; I want to be crystal clear: The minimum qualifications for appointments will not change; it is the process. Candidates will continue to be required to have at least 10 years' membership at the bar in one of the provinces or territories of Canada or a combined 10 years' membership at such a bar and experience exercising powers and performing duties of a judicial nature on a full-time basis.

We are proposing to increase the minimum number of candidates the committee presents to the Attorney General from two to six. This would allow a larger list of candidates to be considered for appointment, which makes for a better pool of applicants.

Another major component of today's proposed changes in the Accelerating Access to Justice Act involves creating greater transparency surrounding the diversity of the

judicial candidates that are being considered. Judiciary is the face of our justice system, and the people of Ontario depend on them to reflect and uphold some of our most cherished values. It is also crucial, Mr. Speaker, that Ontario's judges should reflect the evolving diversity of the province's communities. Others talk about it, but this government is doing it. We are proposing new requirements that would help keep us and the appointments committee accountable towards assessing a diverse pool of applicants. This would help us uphold our standard of excellence when it comes to Ontario's judges and ensure that they are more closely reflective of the communities they serve.

We would achieve this by requiring the committee to publish detailed diversity statistics in their annual reports, using information the applicants themselves would share voluntarily during the application process. We're not attracting as many diverse candidates as we could and should be. By collecting and reviewing these statistics, we'll have a chance to analyze, improve and promote diversity on Ontario's bench.

We are also implementing changes to ensure that the membership on the committee itself remains diverse. Currently, the way that it works, the Law Society of Ontario, the Ontario Bar Association and the Federation of Ontario Law Associations appoint their own representative to the committee. Under the proposed changes, the Attorney General would appoint the lawyer committee members, selecting from a list of candidates submitted by the organizations. These changes would also allow the committee to provide advice on the process so the Attorney General can further benefit from their collective and considerable expertise. The intended outcome remains the same: a modernized framework for filling judicial vacancies that would reduce delays in our justice system.

Speaker, we strongly believe the judicial appointments changes we are proposing as part of the Accelerating Access to Justice Act strike an ideal balance. They maintain the integrity of the current process for provincial judges while providing the Attorney General a larger pool of qualified candidates for appointment.

We have ensured that the legislation has requirements that would protect the process and keep it impartial. The Attorney General would still be required to recommend only the appointment of candidates who have been recommended by the non-partisan committee for the vacancy. Under current legislation, the Attorney General doesn't receive the names or identifying information of candidates who are not recommended, and this will not change.

In keeping with our commitment to accessibility, we're also making it easier for prospective candidates to apply by digitizing the application process. This will cut down on time-consuming paperwork, something that is a bonus no matter what sector one is working in. It's our hope that this would also encourage a wider pool of lawyers to consider applying.

Long term, we'll work with the Ontario Digital Service and the Public Appointments Secretariat to refine the

digital application process and possibly allow further options, such as giving the applicant the option to select the areas of law for which they'd like to be considered when a future vacancy arises.

Speaker, we've consulted with the chair of the committee, and we've talked to members of many legal organizations. They've provided their views on the appointments process and what can be done to improve it. The bottom line is this: It could stand to be much more efficient and more effective, and frankly, it has to be. It's our job to swiftly address the vacancies in Ontario's judiciary so Ontarians entering the court system can achieve quicker access to justice. We need qualified candidates to be appointed faster so that Ontarians will have their matters heard by a judge more quickly and with fewer delays. Our proposed changes in the Accelerating Access to Justice Act seek to honour this commitment.

I just want to talk for a moment about the process as it was and how it changed over the last year. There really should be no mystery as to how a judge gets appointed and the process. The process in 2018-19 was, if you wanted to be a judge and you had the minimum qualifications of 10 years at the bar or 10 years' experience as a judge and you wanted to apply, you had to fill out a form with references and background and all that stuff. You would fill out approximately 20 pages of materials, on cases that you had argued, courts that you had appeared in front of, reasons why you had aspirations to be a judge—very much like an application to a university or something of that sort. And you would think, having filled out those 20 pages, that you would submit it, but that is not what happens. You take those 20 pages and you photocopy them 14 times. And then you take those 15 applications—maybe it's 14. I can't remember anymore, because we changed the system. I'm going to say 14. You take those 20 pages, times 14, you put them in an envelope, you Purolator it by the deadline. It has to be received by the deadline of the advertisement of the judicial appointment. Then, let's say it's Toronto, where there are a lot, or Brampton, the busiest court in North America—well, in Canada, for sure. We take those and we break them all down into packages. So if they have 20 applicants, then for each of the members of the committee, they put them in piles and you get your 20 pages for each applicant. They then put that and they mail it out to the individual committee member—and they have to go through all these. So just in one year, we're talking about about half a million pieces of paper, and that's a conservative number.

1640

Then what happens to the paper? Well, then the committee member has the paper. You can't just get rid of it. They have filing cabinets in their homes full of these things, and they keep them for a period of time because sometimes they go back and re-have that conversation. It's an unbelievably archaic system.

Well, that's not the way it is anymore. We have an electronic system where they fill out the application—and we haven't changed the substance of the application in any meaningful way—and they can send it in. Get ready for

this: They can email it in. Can you imagine? Can you imagine, electronic—like, it was revolutionary that we did this—half a million pieces of paper a year.

So now it gets sorted. The system is working. The hearings are happening remotely through Zoom, and by all accounts—I don't sit in on them, as you know; it's the committee that does it, in a non-partisan, arm's-length way. But the reports back are that it's working very well. It's helping them to set up hearings, because if we were doing an application for a judgeship in, I'm going to say, Sioux Lookout, a very busy area, the individuals would traditionally fly to Toronto for the interview. Just think about all the resources just for the option to have the interview. Now they do it by Zoom. It's much faster and moves us through the system quicker. So we're trying to find ways to harness technology and make it work.

The application process we have now we think can be improved, but we didn't want to wait. We didn't want to wait to build the bureaucracy to change the process. So we've got an interim solution that seems to be working very well, and we'll continue to work with Ontario Digital Service to improve even that. So that's one very important area.

I also want to share some details about the proposal to permanently allow the virtual witnessing of wills and powers of attorney. This is an example of a sector that has been left standing still and falling behind for far too long. It's a sector where decades of disinterest and inaction have piled up and posed barriers for people, and I know this from my experience as a practising solicitor.

Our government began to take action in this sector in 2019, and the introduction of the Smarter and Stronger Justice Act was the beginning. It proposed an easier, more affordable and faster-to-manage system for estates of a modest value. As a result, on April 1 of this year, Ontario is setting the limit for a small estate at \$150,000 and removing the requirement to post a bond in most small-estate probate applications.

While that bill was moving through the legislative process, COVID-19 emerged and created unprecedented challenges across our province, throughout the legal system, but for estates law in particular. We soon began hearing that amid the uncertainty that had fallen on our communities, lawyers and witnesses were taking extraordinary measures to ensure that wills and powers of attorney continued to be processed.

I just want you to visualize for a moment what I'm about to tell you. This is in your community; this is happening all over Ontario. We heard stories of lawyers and witnesses—and I'm going to go right to basics: With a will, you need to have the individual sign and two witnesses there at the same time. This goes back hundreds of years to when somebody would be signing something on their deathbed and there would be tomfoolery afoot. The two witnesses were witnessing each other as well as the individual signing. So there are three people involved in this process to sign a will properly. We heard stories of lawyers and witnesses standing in the yards of testators, watching through windows as wills were signed, because

they had to see them signed. It's not enough for me to sign it and take it over there to somebody who didn't see me sign it and say, "Hey, that's my signature," and then have them sign it. They have to see me sign it. So we had people standing outside windows, looking through windows, to see the signature attached to the document. We even heard of lawyers and witnesses who were meeting people in driveways and parking lots, observing signatures on powers of attorney through car windows. It's just really—it got the job done, I suppose, but not everyone could accommodate that.

These were inventive solutions to a never-before-experienced situation, but they were far from ideal. Frankly, it's an awkward and inconvenient and stressful way of doing things. It's inefficient and, in 2021, it's entirely unnecessary. But estates law doesn't move fast over time. It's hundreds of years of precedent and hundreds of years of rules and had been neglected up until we tucked in and used our on-the-ground experience as practising lawyers and in talking to the bar.

I can tell you, I was driving home one day when I got a phone call from a lawyer who I'd known for a very long time—I won't say his name because I didn't ask for his permission—and he said to me, "My daughter is a practising lawyer and she's having this problem with clients. She has elderly clients. She's really torn about it. What are we going to do? Is there any way that we can come up with a way that they can get the wills and the powers of attorney done from a distance?" So I promptly phoned her and said, "What are you doing now?"

This is where some of the stories come from. We recognized that it was an important matter. People were very stressed about it, and we had to find a better way.

We didn't do the normal consultation process. We didn't mail out to see if people were willing to consult with us and engage with us. We said, "Let's have a Zoom call and invite some leading practitioners. Let's invite some academics. Let's invite people who understand the mechanics of how law happens, whether it be in Manitoulin or Sudbury or Cornwall or"—you do sometimes get uniqueness around the province. "Let's get them all together by Zoom." We did a consultation, we got to work, and we came up with a solution in about 11 days. Everybody in this House knows that creating policy in 11 days, from problem identification to solution, is pretty phenomenal, and that's exactly what we did.

We responded quickly, with an accelerated consultation with the estates bar, and we introduced the emergency order to allow virtual witnessing as a temporary measure. But it was only a first step. While common sense and effective order were in place, we continued to look at what could be improved in the sector in order to improve Ontarians' experience.

So we returned to the estates bar with some very specific questions on how we could permanently move this and other elements of the sector forward, and the response was extraordinary. Lawyer Lionel Tupman told the Law Times that the simple fact that we had started an action-focused conversation was groundbreaking:

“Estates law is one of those areas which has received less attention than other areas in law reform in the last 20 years, or so. We are excited, as the estates bar, that this government has an interest in bringing our estates and trusts legislation into the 21st century, and bringing it into line with the law which is currently in place in other provinces in Canada, as well as other Commonwealth nations.”

The types of challenges we have seen in the estates sector are exactly what I mean when I say that we are committed to breaking down barriers to justice. If passed, our proposal to make virtual witnessing permanent, as part of the Accelerating Access to Justice Act, would be breaking down a major barrier for so many people in communities across Ontario.

Speaker, we know that these proposed changes, like so many of our modernization initiatives over the past 11 months, are placing us in uncharted territory. We know that there are concerns about sharing personal information on the Web and potentially putting people at risk for fraud. We have worked hard to ensure that we can provide accessible and convenient justice services to Ontarians while still ensuring the security and integrity of their personal data.

Virtual witnessing will not be mandatory, but it’s going to be available as an option. If the banking industry can do online banking safely and securely, then the justice system can also deal with some of the business of justice online. I did some banking on my phone this morning; there’s no reason I should not be accessing justice services. It’s an initiative that we have happening throughout government, and we’re modernizing and digitizing and creating that as an option for people. In more rural areas of Ontario, it’s particularly of benefit, because you don’t necessarily have to drive an hour to the local centre where the lawyer may be to give instructions to sign a document and then drive an hour back. It can be a much shorter trip and can get the job done easier, faster and more affordably.

It’s also worth noting that we’ve worked with our partners at the Law Society of Ontario to ensure that the process is safe and secure for all parties. This includes the stipulation that at least one witness in the virtual process must be a licensee of the Law Society of Ontario.

We are also proposing additional changes to estates law in the Accelerating Access to Justice Act that would make it easier for Ontarians to make decisions about their wills, estates and other assets.

A lot of people don’t know that when you get married, your will becomes null and void. Estates lawyers have expressed concern to us on behalf of their clients that this leaves people exposed to predatory marriages. Another similar proposed change in this bill would repeal the section of the law that revokes a will upon marriage.

These changes stem from my own experience and conversations we’ve had with estates lawyers over the summer and fall of last year.

Another change to estates law that we are proposing in the Accelerating Access to Justice Act is to allow courts to validate wills by adding in validation provisions. Currently, wills that do not strictly comply with all of the

formal provisions might be found invalid, and a testator’s wishes might not be honoured. Giving the courts the power to validate a will that does not meet all the strict formal requirements would help to prevent this from happening and allow the wishes of the deceased to be honoured.

1650

Once again, I just want to take a moment to thank the members of the estates bar for their feedback during our consultations last year. Their input has been essential to informing our work with the Accelerating Access to Justice Act and our continued efforts to move justice forward beyond the province’s COVID-19 recovery.

This bill makes it clear that we aren’t going back to the old ways of doing things. I also want to make it completely clear that there is still work to be done, in this sector and many others. We are encouraged by the ongoing engagement of the sector in particular, and I’m going to read another quote that illustrates that commitment from Elaine Blades and Paul Taylor at the Society of Trust and Estate Practitioners: “The Society of Trust and Estate Practitioners looks forward to being part of the important work that will be done to educate lawyers and other professionals on the opportunities these proposed changes present along with the obligations that are inherent in them to ensure the protection of vulnerable individuals in circumstances where they cannot be met in person.”

Not all aspects of accelerating justice are digital. The government is also proposing changes that would allow the Office of the Children’s Lawyer to produce reports on specific issues to set out the views of children or to produce a report following a more comprehensive investigation. The Office of the Children’s Lawyer is an independent law office within the Ministry of the Attorney General. The office provides representation to children and youth across Ontario in court cases involving decision-making authority, parenting time, contact with children, job protection, civil litigation, estates and trusts. The office may also, at the request of the court, provide clinical reports for children involved in custody or access issues.

One of the reports prepared by the office to support family law proceedings is the voice of the child report, which ensures a child’s views and preferences are heard as part of family law proceedings. The voice of the child reports don’t contain recommendations. The important thing here is that these reports summarize the child’s stated preferences so they can be considered by the parents and the court when determining what’s in the best interest of the child. In this sense, they’re an important tool in specific types of family law matters. We are now proposing as part of the Accelerating Access to Justice Act to make it clear that these reports can be admitted as evidence in court hearings that deal with the rights of the child.

The legislation would also allow the office to produce focused reports. It should be noted that these reports are not a full assessment; they focus on narrow issues, usually defined by the court, in cases involving decision-making authority and parenting time for children in Family Court.

The reports can focus on where a child should go to school or may focus on medical decisions.

Making all of these reports admissible would give children a stronger and more prominent voice in the court process. It would be up to the judge whether to give them weight or how to use them, but it's certainly a tool that they will be able to have in front of the court to be considered.

We're also proposing another change in today's legislation that would have impactful benefits on families dealing with legal matters. We've heard from parents and guardians that the monetary threshold for guardianship applications for children's property was too low, forcing parents and guardians to take on additional legal fees for relatively small amounts of funds.

Parents and caregivers have spoken, and we've listened. We are proposing an amendment to the Children's Law Reform Act, which, together with regulatory change, would increase the monetary threshold and reduce the number of court appearances families need to make regarding guardianship of their child's property, saving families time and money.

This proposal under the Accelerating Access to Justice Act will amend this threshold so it would apply to money payable to a child under a court order or a court judgment or intestacy—without a will. If that amount is under the monetary threshold, these changes would allow a child's money to be paid directly to a parent or guardian to hold for their child. Parents would continue to have the same responsibilities and obligations for the amounts received for their children. Allowing parents to receive money owed to their children without a burdensome application would give families a quicker and more direct route to solving their affairs. These changes would align the justice system with Ontarian's expectations of how the justice system should work for them.

Now I'll move on to another proposal we've put on the table today as part of the Accelerating Access to Justice Act. We've made an important proposed amendment that would help Ontario's land tribunal processes work better and more efficiently for the people who use them.

Last July, the government created the Ontario Land Tribunals cluster to bring the five land tribunals under the leadership of a dedicated executive chair. These tribunals include the Local Planning Appeal Tribunal, known as LPAT; the Environmental Review Tribunal, ERT; the Board of Negotiation; the Conservation Review Board; and the Mining and Lands Tribunal.

These five land tribunals, although brought together last July, remain as separate entities with separate legislative mandates. The set-ups work pretty well, as well as they can with that constraint, but land disputes can be complex and some users currently need to appear before more than one, a multiple, of these boards to resolve any particular dispute. And so there is a better way, Mr. Speaker.

In order to make the process even more efficient and effective, the government is proposing to consolidate the five tribunals into a single tribunal called the Ontario Land

Tribunals. Adjudicative tribunals play a critical and important role in our justice system as they resolve many types of disputes which can significantly impact the lives of Ontarians, and Ontario's land tribunals, while operating independently of government, serve so many functions in this system.

Some, like the Environmental Review Tribunal, work to ensure that environmentally sensitive lands can remain protected. Others, like the Local Planning Appeal Tribunal, support the creation of new and affordable housing across the province. In our proposed changes to the Accelerating Access to Justice Act, we are building on previous changes that have helped to reduce delays when there is a dispute in the land use planning process.

This single tribunal would have a single intake process and case management system, which would help to reduce bureaucratic red tape and simplify Ontario's land tribunal processes. And the proposed consolidation would not reduce or eliminate hearing or appeal rights before the tribunal.

If the legislation is passed, the members of the five land tribunals, including the Environmental Review Tribunal and the Conservation Review Board, would continue as members of the new entity, the new tribunal, when the change takes effect, ensuring that tribunal expertise is maintained. Speaker, creating the new tribunal supports Ontario's commitment to build more housing options while continuing to protect our environmentally sensitive areas and key employment and agricultural lands.

To eliminate unnecessarily prolonged disputes and promote certainty, proposed changes in the Accelerating Access to Justice Act also seek to eliminate appeals from the tribunal to a minister. Such appeals are inconsistent with the objectives of a modern administrative justice system and they present numerous issues around tribunal independence and expertise, efficiency and certainty. The proposed change would not prevent parties from appealing final tribunal decisions to the court on a question of law.

Before I discuss the changes to Ontario's expropriation procedure, I want to acknowledge Marie Hubbard for her leadership as executive chair for Ontario Land Tribunals, and I am thankful for the words of support that Marie has provided thus far, stating "This game-changing reform will help make Ontario the leader in responsible growth in Canada." If this legislation is passed, I have every confidence in her ability to deliver on the promise of these changes.

Speaker, Ontario's expropriation procedure was another area we knew needed change to ensure a more fair process for hearings across the province. Currently, a non-binding inquiry hearing under the Expropriations Act may be held to determine in advance if an intended expropriation is fair, if it's sound or necessary to achieve its objectives. Very few of the hearings occur every year, and when they do, they're carried out by what are known as inquiry officers. Inquiry officers are appointed on an ad hoc basis from a roster maintained by my ministry. Under our proposed changes, these hearings would instead be carried out by independent adjudicators of the new Ontario

Land Tribunal. Compensation disputes about expropriated land would not be affected and would be determined by the tribunal separately, as required.

Elsewhere in the Accelerating Access to Justice Act, we're proposing to allow the Lieutenant Governor in Council to create an alternative to these inquiry hearings for any and all expropriations to which the act applies. If the bill is passed, regulations could then be made to establish and govern a process for owners to provide comments respecting a proposed expropriation and for the approving authority to consider those comments and make a final determination regarding expropriation. This could provide for greater efficiency, while ensuring fairness for owners and giving them a meaningful opportunity to be heard.

Mr. Speaker, the next item that I want to speak to—and there is a lot in here. I'm covering a lot of ground. There's a lot in here. We have a lot of work to do. The system has been neglected for a very long time. Now I want to briefly talk about the proposed changes to the Public Accountants Council that are being proposed as part of the Accelerating Access to Justice Act.

Professional accountants are one of four professions that the Ministry of the Attorney General oversees in Ontario. The Public Accountants Council is a regulatory agency whose primary role is to designate bodies to license public accountants in Ontario. As part of the Accelerating Access to Justice Act, we're proposing to dissolve the Public Accountants Council and transfer its functions to the Chartered Professional Accountants of Ontario. Both the council and the chartered professional accountants have been consulted on the change and agree that this is the most logical way forward.

1700

Just to give context on where this comes from: The change would ensure that Ontario's accounting standards align with the other provinces and Canadian jurisdictions and would eliminate unnecessary duplication and oversight, Mr. Speaker. One would ask: Why would they have done this in the first place? Why would you have these two different bodies? What happens when we get rid of one of them and transfer the functions over to the other? If you remember back—it doesn't feel that long ago, but it may have been—when we had CGAs, CMAs and CAs, they went through a transformation into the Chartered Professional Accountants of Ontario, the CPAs. Through that process of moving things around, it ended up with the Public Accountants Council overseeing parts of the Chartered Professional Accountants of Ontario—pure duplication. It's an unnecessary separation.

Now, is it going to save the government any money? No, we don't pay for it. The accountants pay for it. They pay for all that oversight. It doesn't make sense to be dipping our hands in their pockets when the function for education and accreditation can be happening through CPAO. Again, this is something that didn't have to happen, but it just makes sense and it's a bit of a red tape issue as well. Again, we're going to align with the Canadian jurisdictions.

The changes will not affect the public accounting standards, nor will they undermine the oversight of the profession. It aligns with the way that other professions work in the province. We don't have two lawyer bodies, one overseeing the other. We don't have two engineering bodies, one overseeing the other engineering body. It's just not necessary.

If passed, the change, along with the other 13 amendments in the Accelerating Access to Justice Act, will support the government's commitment to improve access to justice for Ontarians across the system.

As a government, we're very enthusiastic about the breadth and impact of the changes we've been able to drive in terms of expanding access to justice in French. This bill will build on that progress and make a difference for francophones across Ontario. It has been no secret that our government's commitment to expanding access to justice for Franco-Ontarians and all francophones extends to the justice sector. We continue to work with important partners across the province to support and strengthen access to justice in French. Our government is working across many ministries and sectors to improve access to services in French and better serve the 1.5 million Ontarians who speak French, including over 600,000 Franco-Ontarians who make up the Franco-Ontarian community.

The Minister of Francophone Affairs and I firmly believe that promoting and encouraging access to justice in French is key to the long-term well-being and development of the francophone community in Ontario. Indeed, access to justice is a pillar of our democracy and in order to live up to this fundamental right, our judicial institutions must be open and attentive and respond effectively to the needs of citizens.

Today, there are several differences in provincial legislation regarding access to justice in French, including the right to file documents written in French. The Accelerating Access to Justice Act proposes to address these differences and provide a better experience for the francophones who are accessing the court system. This would help increase access to justice in French by expanding and guaranteeing the ability of francophones to file documents in French at all Ontario courthouses and for all matters, including civil and family law. It would also ensure that French language rights are upheld across the province no matter where francophones are accessing the court system.

As another measure designed to strengthen access to justice, this bill also includes proposed changes to extend the right to obtain the French translation of documents filed in all courts throughout Ontario, as well as the right to receive the translation of reasons for decisions. These are proposed changes that were recommended by my advisory committee on access to justice in French, and we've engaged with AJEFO as well. I'll quote AJEFO president Marc Sauvé on the organization's support for the change:

“As a long-time advocate for changes to the Courts of Justice Act regarding bilingual proceedings, the Association of French Speaking Jurists of Ontario (AJEFO), is

thrilled to learn that the provincial government is proposing amendments to allow documents written in French to be submitted without restrictions, at any time, and across the province, rather than only in certain areas.”

The Ontario Trial Lawyers Association has also spoken in favour of these reforms. Member Éliane Lachaine said, “The Ontario Trial Lawyers Association ... welcomes the expansion of French-language services to all courthouses and for all judicial matters in Ontario. French-speaking accident victims will have greater access to justice as they are no longer required to pay for translation services.

“This is an important step for all francophones in Ontario.”

The proposed change would build on Ontario’s work to increase access to justice for francophones, which also includes an exciting new action plan in North Bay. The North Bay Action Plan to Enhance Access to Justice in French builds on the success of partnerships with the Superior and Ontario Courts of Justice in Sudbury and Ottawa, and is designed to develop new practices that can be implemented in North Bay and across the province. We are confident that these changes will help break down barriers to justice for francophones no matter where they live, anywhere in Ontario. Speaker, these access-to-justice-in-French action plans have been successful in bringing partners together to tackle long-standing barriers and issues that have delayed justice for francophones in particular.

In 2015, the Ontario government launched a pilot project in partnership with Ontario’s chief justices to provide seamless and timely access to justice in French at the Ottawa courthouse. The initiative was a collaborative project with the Superior Court of Justice and the Ontario Court of Justice. The Ottawa pilot project helped reduce potential challenges for French-speaking litigants, lawyers and others at the Ottawa courthouse. It ensured French-speaking court users were advised of their language rights at the earliest opportunity. The project also made sure that French-language services were clearly visible, readily available, easily accessible and publicized, and that the quality of services offered in French is equivalent to those offered in English. This applied to services provided by government staff, such as phone and counter service.

After the Ottawa project, an access to justice in French advisory committee was established. It’s comprised of representatives from the bench, bar, government and academia. The committee advises the government in our work and the development of strategies in relation to access to justice in French. Their advice has been fundamental to our ongoing efforts to support and connect francophone communities engaging in the justice system.

Our government heard it was time to launch a new action plan that can help solve a different set of challenges and develop new practices that can be deployed across Ontario. Through these discussions and our continued work with the courts, we went on to establish a similar action plan in Sudbury, where, as you know, Madam Speaker, there’s also a sizable francophone population. I know the Minister of Francophone Affairs and the then

Attorney General, Caroline Mulroney, was in Sudbury to announce this positive news. She met with local lawyers and members of AJEFO, and the feedback that we heard was overwhelmingly positive. It was clear that local lawyers and justice partners were prepared to work together to accomplish lasting change for francophones, not only in Sudbury but across the province. Here I must mention the support of our partners in the courts. This has been truly a collaborative effort.

We are now building upon the success of the Sudbury and Ottawa projects with a new action plan being implemented in North Bay, which is a community and region with its own unique demographics, challenges and opportunities. The problems solved in North Bay will provide an even broader array of enhancements and best practices that can be used to accelerate access to justice at courthouses across the province.

As with Sudbury and Ottawa, the newest action plan will make sure that French-language services are visible, accessible and publicized. It will ensure that francophone court users in this region are able to exercise their language rights at the earliest opportunity in their court proceedings, and it will identify challenges to access to justice in French, creating and testing new processes and initiatives to address these challenges. And today, Madam Speaker, we’re proposing to build upon this important groundwork by expanding the filing of documents in French to all Ontario courthouses. This would help ensure French language rights are upheld across all levels of court and all parts of the province.

Speaker, we have already seen how changes from the Ottawa and Sudbury pilots have had lasting effects on Franco-Ontarian access to justice in this province. In Sudbury, collaboration produced some great results. The Ministry of the Attorney General, the Ontario Court of Justice, legal aid and the children’s aid society worked together in order to launch a dedicated monthly bilingual family first court date.

There were other improvements, too. Enforcement officers in Sudbury now make the active offer of French-language services not only at the courthouse but also during their fieldwork. To assist francophones who don’t know which lawyers can represent them in court, Legal Aid Ontario has changed their lawyer list to include the language of provision of services. It’s worth repeating that most of the practices and initiatives put in place through these pilots have been made permanent, and some have been implemented province-wide. For example, French language rights information is now included in the family Mandatory Information Program, known as MIP sessions, that all family litigants must attend.

These French-language pilots are powerful examples of how systemic change can take root and start to flourish more widely over time. By continuing this work in communities across Ontario, we are laying the groundwork for a major shift in the way justice services are offered. This is an integral step forward in making our services more inclusive and accessible for everyone in the province.

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more widely over time. By continuing this work in communities across Ontario, we are laying the groundwork for a major shift in the way justice services are offered. This is an integral step forward in making our services more inclusive and accessible for everyone in the province. These improvements would help break down barriers to access to justice across our province, including in rural and northern communities. These are parts of Ontario that have been historically underserved by an outmoded justice system. The issues around access to justice, victim trauma and government expense in these areas are sobering.

1710

There is much to be done in this area, Madam Speaker, and we're just beginning our long-overdue work in making tangible and positive changes that will benefit francophones in regions across the province. Access to justice in French has been an issue of great concern to this government, and our entire government will continue to make this a priority.

In addition to our work on the Accelerating Access to Justice Act, we have also been very busy in this House. We've passed legislation in the past year that builds on ongoing efforts to propel Ontario's justice system forward decades while also supporting the province's recovery.

Much of the work in the Accelerating Access to Justice Act builds upon changes that were introduced as part of the Smarter and Stronger Justice Act, a very comprehensive bill that we introduced in December 2019 and passed in July 2020. In that bill, our government passed more than 20 sensible legislative improvements that made it easier, faster and more affordable for justice to be done. In particular, these changes provided building blocks for the Accelerating Access to Justice Act by simplifying the process to claim a small estate, as I spoke about earlier. These changes, which included setting the limit for a small estate at \$150,000, will help people receive their inheritances faster and make Ontario's probate process for smaller estates simpler and more accessible.

The Smarter and Stronger Justice Act also paved the way for people to virtually commission and notarize their important legal documents. So we were already moving in the right direction, and we continue to take legislative action to strengthen other parts of the justice system where it was needed most: namely, family law.

In November, the Legislature passed the Moving Ontario Family Law Forward Act, I have to say, with the support of the opposition. This legislation brought forward much-needed changes that will make it easier, faster and more affordable for people to resolve family law issues. My ministry explored ways to simplify family and civil court processes for all Ontarians, reducing the cost and delays associated with family law processes and supporting a faster resolution to family disputes. This included making changes to the family law appeals route process. Parliamentary Assistant Park did a lot of work, working through how that would work, coming together with Chief Justices Maisonneuve, Morawetz and Strathy. It was a puzzle that hadn't been solved for many years. She sat down with them and had a conversation on how we could

do it better, and we landed on it. That was part of that bill. It made it easier to understand the appeal routes for family law and it will help Ontarians reach their final decisions faster.

As a legislative initiative, we also expanded the family dispute resolution program to three new locations: Kitchener, Welland and Kingston. We also made much-needed updates to the family arbitration process. Specifically, we eliminated an old reporting requirement that had tasked arbitrators with submitting detailed reports on every family arbitration reward. Initially, it made some sense—they wanted some data—but then it stayed there as a bureaucratic step. I don't know if anybody even looked at them anymore. So we got rid of that.

Eliminating the unnecessary reporting not only helped to make government more efficient, but it also saved time and increased the efficiency for family arbitrators, front-line workers and, I dare say, for the people accessing it in their time of need.

These types of changes, along with a number of others in this family law bill, are building upon our ongoing commitment to modernization. It's a cornerstone of our overall commitment in the Accelerating Access to Justice Act: to continue updating outdated processes; embracing new technologies; and making it easier for all Ontarians to manage their legal affairs, especially when times are challenging and stressful.

I'm grateful for the opportunity to talk about the Accelerating Access to Justice Act and the ways it would not only support the justice system's recovery from COVID-19, but ensure our justice system is stronger, more adaptable and better than it's ever been before. Our proposed legislation would help us continue our work to modernize the justice system in Ontario by leaps and bounds. Today, I've outlined a wide array of changes that would enable us to move more justice services online and help us to extend those services to communities across Ontario.

If passed, the reforms in the Accelerating Access to Justice Act would ensure that judicial vacancies are filled faster so Ontarians can get their day in court earlier. They would help our land tribunals work as efficiently as possible to resolve land planning disputes that address the housing supply across the province while balancing the needs of environmental protection and conservation. They would ensure that people looking to resolve their estate matters can get their important documents signed and witnessed while staying safe. And these changes would help protect the best interests of children during stressful family law matters, ensuring that parents can spend less time in the courts and on unnecessary paperwork, and instead focus on making decisions to support and care for their kids.

If passed, the Accelerating Access to Justice Act would continue to build a faster integrated system that would allow Ontarians to be better informed when making some of life's most important decisions. It would be another crucial stepping stone in providing access to a system that's fast, affordable and responsive to what Ontarians

actually need, because justice accelerated is justice delivered.

I want to say, it really, as I began—I guess I want to talk a little bit about our partners in this, people who have moved off positions that they may have had pre-COVID. We have to cast back a year.

I'm going to talk about bail and remand, and talk about how somebody would come for a bail hearing. In my area, they may be in the Central East Correctional or Central North Correctional facility, and they would have to be processed out of the correctional facility and be transported to the courthouse, say, in Barrie, which was my experience. They would then have to be processed there. They would have their bail hearing. They may or may not have their affairs in order, they may or may not have their lawyer lined up, they may or may not be able to proceed, and quite frankly, they may then get turned around and sent back to Central North.

A lot of resources went into moving people around to have their matters heard—not only a lot of resources, but it caused delay. That's a challenge when we're talking about real people in real-life situations.

As soon as COVID hit, we knew that we couldn't be moving people the way that we had moved them before. We harnessed technology and we started doing bail hearings remotely, which, again, is pretty revolutionary in a province that had done it in person forever. We moved with the partnership and with the leadership of the judiciary and with others so that we now do 100% of bail hearings in custody, remotely. The benefits of that—and it's not just benefits for the system, it's for the individual. It's very traumatic for some individuals to have to leave the facility that they're in for a bail hearing. There are challenges sometimes in them not wanting to go for sometimes very simple reasons, routine reasons, and we've made it possible. We still have more challenges. Again, we've made it happen; we have a lot more work to do.

But then, under the leadership of Chief Justice Maisonneuve, we've moved to 100% bail hearings for out-of-custody remand hearings. Just think about that, again, for a moment, about people who live a distance from a courthouse, people for whom it's quite a challenge to get there and spend the day there. The ramifications for this, for the people accessing the system are significant, and it came about because of the pandemic.

I'm going to give you one little insight: It took a tremendous amount of effort to figure out the phone numbers attached to the lines running into some correctional facilities, because nobody had ever phoned in to them. There were outgoing lines only. So the amount of work it took to identify the phone line and the number that goes with it to make things electronic—it's my expectation that without the pandemic and without the urgency of all partners rowing in the same direction, it would not have been solved in a decade. We just would not have gotten there. And so, my hat's off to all the justice partners.

I didn't mention earlier on the collaboration with the Criminal Lawyers' Association. Their members, their thousands of members, came to the table in our time of

need and did things that were unprecedented to make the system work for the people who were experiencing the system. Again, they're one group who any—I could phone their president at the drop of a hat to have a conversation about, "How is it going? What do we need to do?"

1720

We don't agree on everything. I don't want to give the impression that all these associations all agree with each other. You can have a good, healthy debate, and as you can imagine—like we have good, healthy debates in here. But everybody was solution-focused, and that's the difference. People weren't positional on a principle that wasn't solution-focused. Everybody knew that we had to move the bar, that we had to do better, and we did do better, so for that I'm very grateful. Again, the lawyers in our caucus, Parliamentary Assistant Park and others, reached out to their networks to find solutions from people who are front-line. We ended up doing consultations very differently than we've done in the past. We got really practical solutions. We've now engaged with them.

I guess I take solace in this, when you go on social media—and everybody knows what a vomitorium Twitter is, but LinkedIn is a little bit more friendly—people will say, "You know, I may not love him, but I like what he's doing. I like what they're doing for the system." Because what we're doing for the system is not a partisan thing. What we're doing for the system is for all of our constituents who need to access the system. And the changes in this act, the Accelerating Access to Justice Act, don't have a partisan overlay on them. These are things that the system needed. People have come together from every background, from every experience, and they see the merit in these changes because they're just better for the people of Ontario that we all represent.

Thank you, Madam Speaker, and thank you to my colleagues in the House for listening to some of the changes. I look forward to the debate and discussion, and I ask all members of this House to support the Accelerating Access to Justice Act. Thank you. Merci. Meegwetch.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Questions?

Mr. Kevin Yarde: Thank you to my colleague across for his comments on accelerating access to justice, Bill 245. Now, the member mentioned that they put forward a number of proposals on the table. But there's one proposal that I believe is missing, sorely missing: Legal aid is the bedrock of any justice system, and for decades, access to legal aid has been a fundamental issue in Ontario. The disadvantaged, minorities all use and need legal aid.

So my question is, why does this bill not address the issue for Ontario?

Hon. Doug Downey: I agree with my colleague that legal aid is a very important part of this. You heard me talk about legal aid as it relates to French-language services; that's an important piece of the puzzle. We want to make sure that people have access to the parts that they need as we move forward. Now, legal aid doesn't cover things like estates, so I wouldn't talk about legal aid in that sense, but as we're moving forward with the system and improving the system, I can tell you I talk about legal aid pretty much

every day, some aspect of it. As we modernize the legal aid system, we're making sure the tools are in place, making sure their systems are in place, that they're renewing their relationships with the clinics to make sure that those services are in place. It's a really positive opportunity to move the system forward for everybody—services online and otherwise.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Questions?

Mr. Mike Harris: The minister touched quite a bit on filling judicial appointments during debate today. Obviously, I think that's a really important piece to this act. I was hoping he could go into a little bit more detail on what that means and the outcomes for people here in Ontario.

Hon. Doug Downey: I'll touch on the process a little bit. If a judicial appointment comes up, the Ontario Chief Justice, *Maisonneuve*, will identify a vacancy. She has responsibility for assigning judges to different locations, so she will have a good sense that we need an extra judge in Brampton as opposed to Oshawa. That's up to her; that's not up to me. She will say we have a vacancy because somebody is retiring or fell ill or got elevated to the superior court, and she writes me a letter. We perfunctorily turn the letter over to the JAAC, the independent committee, and they then start the process of a search. Their process for a search is open for a matter of months. Again, it can be Thunder Bay, it can be Toronto, it can be any jurisdiction—

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Response.

Hon. Doug Downey: Maybe I'll answer more in a subsequent question, but this will speed the whole process up. We'll get people in seats to make decisions for the people of Ontario.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Question?

Mr. Wayne Gates: Well-functioning tribunals are indispensable in ensuring access to justice. They have numerous benefits, including providing informed resolutions of highly technical problems. There is significant concern that this merging of tribunals in Bill 245 will undermine the technical expertise of these tribunals.

Could the Attorney General explain why this government is seeking to undermine the technical expertise of environmental tribunals? The NDP has been contacted by many people in the legal community who are concerned that Ontario tribunals have become more partisan and less well qualified under the Ford government. Can the Attorney General discuss why this legislation seeks to further undermine the expertise of tribunals, instead of focusing on measures to ensure that tribunals are properly staffed, non-partisan and easy to access for all Ontarians?

Hon. Doug Downey: I'm thrilled to talk about why we're harnessing the expertise and the professionalism of the tribunals and taking some appeals that would otherwise go to a minister and putting them over in the independent, professional forum, because that's the right thing to do. We want to make sure that we have independent professionals doing it. We're retaining all the members. We're transferring them over into the new entity so that we can harness their expertise. Really, it's not

efficient to have two different experts in two different hearings in two different tribunals dealing with the same matter. It might as well be one expert in one tribunal dealing with all the matters.

That's what we're doing, Madam Speaker. There's nothing untoward about it. Quite frankly, it's the way that you would build an organization if you had started from zero.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Question?

Mr. Daryl Kramp: They say justice delayed is justice denied. I know the Attorney General has had a tremendous amount of experience in his entire career and he has seen the failings of our system. I can honestly say, in all the years that I've been involved in the political scene, I don't think I've found, seen or been exposed to a piece of legislation that is so needed and is going to absolutely transform the justice system in this country.

Might I ask the Attorney General, with his experience in the field and the consultation that was necessary, where did he get his guidance from to help us to get to this bill?

Hon. Doug Downey: It's a great question, and I thank my friend for the question. Really, this came together through a whole variety of pieces—it was people giving unsolicited input, because we were listening; it was experience of a couple of decades practising law in the front lines in a small law firm in a small town; it came from experts; it came from academics, like Professor Oosterhoff. It came from so many—I'm going to say Ian Hull because he's been so much help. It came from everywhere. It was an opportunity for us to distill it down, be client-focused, be public-focused. The Ontarians who need to access it: This was built around their needs.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Question?

Mr. Michael Mantha: Speaker, I think the member from Hastings-Lennox and Addington hit the point that I wanted to make, and the question that I'm putting to the minister, that justice delayed is justice denied.

I looked at him and listened very intently to all of his presentation, especially when he got into the part on French services. I looked in the briefing, and it basically says here under schedule 11, the only things that are being changed notably are references to "père" and "mère" to "parent." I went a little bit more into the bill, looked and looked at it. I said, "There are six or eight pages here," and essentially it's the same thing happening there.

I was really excited hearing some of the words that you were saying that justice was going to be provided to the francophone community. Minister, there are individuals who are being denied their days in court because of the failure of—no judges being available, no courts in French. People are suffering extremely under hardship. Please find something better than a notable change from "père" and "mère" to "parent" to help these communities.

Hon. Doug Downey: This is a great opportunity to address exactly that. There are some vocabulary changes and some clean-up on that. But we are expanding, at the same time, the ability to file documents in French. We are providing free translation for those who want to access court orders and materials in French. So we are doing it in

companion time. Some of them are regulatory changes that will happen in conjunction with this act, and then there are some pieces specifically in the act that are dealing with the cleanup of a number of statutes.

1730

There is more going on than just what you see in the schedules. I'm happy to get you more details on exactly those.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Question?

Mr. Will Bouma: Just quickly, in the dying moments here, I wanted to ask the Attorney General—thank you, sir, for your presentation. Following up on my friend from Algoma-Manitoulin, I want to commend you for your efforts on improving the face of the justice system and ensuring that it's reflective of the diversity that we see here in Ontario. Constituents in my riding would welcome the opportunity to see a bench better reflect the diversity of our communities.

Can you please share more about how this bill would ensure that judicial appointments become more reflective of Ontario's diversity?

Hon. Doug Downey: In terms of diversity of the judiciary, this is born, again, of my own experience, where if you can't measure it, you can't address it; you can't change it. I'm not entirely sure what the challenge is. I don't know if we're not attracting the right applicants because I have no line of sight to who's applying, and I still won't have that—except for the statistics that will be collected from individuals self-disclosing. I don't know if we are encouraging people or if we're opening the door for them.

We want our bench to reflect the communities that we serve. All I can look at is the results, and I think we can do better. We have amazing judges. We have a gold-star system. But we can still do better, and starting better has to do with measuring. We have to measure who is applying, who is getting interviews, who is getting put forward for selection and who is getting selected. That will help, Madam Speaker.

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

Mr. Gurratan Singh: Before I begin, Speaker, I want to start by giving you some context and just talking about where we are at this moment in history, at this moment of time right now, in Ontario and across the world. When you talk about the powerful impact of law, you have to understand that right now, as a result of global focus, as a result of local focus, there are now so many more conversations happening about laws and their impacts. There is more attention, frankly, upon these actual halls of power.

People are paying attention because of movements across the world that have demonstrated the immense power and responsibility that these halls have. These halls have an opportunity to either create laws that are regressive, create laws that lack equity, that lack justice, or create laws that create justice. We can either make a decision to bring in different forms of legislation that will create more liberty and more freedom, or less liberty. We

can create legislation that can liberate or create legislation that can keep people within either economic or social repression or bondage or other forms of states that are not ideal for living their ideal lives.

When we talk about what the context is that we're in right now, we have to understand that within the past year, this discussion of access to justice is paramount. It's paramount and it's front of mind because of the vast majority of events that happened over the past year. We look at situations like what happened within America with the murder of George Floyd and the resulting movement across the world around systemic racism in policing, systemic racism in our justice systems and how that moment created a conversation and a movement to address these, both in America and locally. Here within Toronto, on the streets where this Legislature stands right now, we saw people march, pushing for greater access to justice.

When we talk about access to justice, this has to be paramount. People are paying more attention, and they want to see these halls of power, they want to see these Legislatures bring in actual change that will allow for greater justice, greater racial justice, greater access to resources, greater access to legal aid services, greater access to the variety of support systems people require to ensure that they have the justice they need.

I look at my riding and I think about the immense impact that law can have in mobilizing people, whether that be within Ontario, within Canada or across the world. Over the past weeks, within my riding, we've seen protests almost every single weekend, where people are protesting three laws in India that are bringing the mass privatization of farming. These folks have seen that these three laws—three laws—at a mere stroke can result in 50% of the population being negatively impacted, people having to struggle for their livelihoods, and a movement which is being described as the largest protest in human history, with 250 million people in one day coming out to protest, and the resulting global movement that has resulted where we're seeing, diasporically, people taking similar actions and similar protests locally in solidarity.

We're seeing how laws there, in India, have allowed for the repression of freedom of speech, of freedom of expression. It has actually resulted in the criminalization and the arrest of journalists and activists, people like Disha Ravi, an environmental rights activist who was imprisoned purely for tweeting—just for tweeting in support of this farmers' protest, she's been imprisoned—activists like Nodeep Kaur, who is a Dalit and workers' rights activist who has been imprisoned for standing in solidarity with these farmers' protests. This demonstrates that those folks, now, are paying more attention to not only the impact of laws globally but locally as well. They're looking at our Legislature and saying—there's just a heightened sense of awareness around these movements.

I look at the Indian Muslim community in my riding, a very dynamic and robust and amazing community, and how right now, they are really concerned about how big tech has caved in to an unjust policy which has resulted in the censorship of the Indian Muslim community, and how

this attack on freedom of religion and freedom of expression is deplorable and must be condemned. It must stop immediately. We're seeing how people are paying further and further attention to how laws and how access to justice and how these buildings, these Legislatures that we sit in, that we stand in and we speak in daily, have such a direct impact.

What we had with the bill put forward was a really great opportunity to create more justice, because the name of this bill very accurately describes a really immense need in our province right now. We need to accelerate access to justice, and we need to be bold in accelerating access to justice. But when we look at what people struggling with, there are a lot of gaps in this piece of legislation right now. There are a lot of areas in which this piece of legislation is not looking at the things that people are struggling with right now in order to alleviate or get access to the resources they need to ensure that the issues they're dealing with are properly being addressed.

When we go through the bill being put forward, we see that there are a lot of recommendations being presented. These recommendations bring forth a lot of concerns with respect to how people are actually going to be able to use it in an equitable way. We see a really big focus on digitization and we see a really big focus on moving everything towards a more digital context, which is something that a lot of lawyers have asked for and people are looking for. But what we have to look at simultaneously is how do people who don't have access to smartphones, how do people who don't have access to the Internet, how do people who don't have access to laptops—how do they participate in a legal system in which they have to connect digitally if they don't have those actual tools? If someone doesn't have a smartphone, how are they going to be expected to go on to a Zoom call about something as potentially serious as their own eviction? That's something that's lacking if we're not providing that simultaneous support to legal aid.

There were questions before about legal aid earlier. The reality is that we saw a huge cut to legal aid under the Ford government, and this cut to legal aid has had a devastating impact on providing legal aid support to those who are most vulnerable. If we're pushing forward a policy of digitization and at the same time we're cutting those support systems that would have allowed for people who don't have access to smartphones, who don't have access to laptops, who don't have access to the Internet a means to access those online forms or those online hearings, then what you're doing is actually further marginalizing that community.

It needs to be done simultaneously. You can't just put forward a legal system that is set up so that person that has all the means, all the access, all the resources can access it easily without thinking about the reverse: How do we ensure that those who have none of those available to them are still equally able to and equitably able to access that resource, that Zoom hearing, that shift to an online way of interacting with the justice system? The best way to do that would have been with properly funding our legal aid system.

1740

But we see within this bill, which is really, ironically described as the Accelerating Access to Justice Act, that it has no mention of funding for legal aid, has no mention of addressing this huge gap that they're struggling with in there, that all these legal aid clinics are facing.

When we look further and we see what the other issues or concerns are that come forward with this piece of legislation—we had this discussion with the JAAC. We know that earlier the Conservative government put forward suggestions around addressing the JAAC and how there was initially a suggestion put forward of changing the approach on how the selection of judges occur. We have to first sit back and recognize that the system we have in Ontario is considered to be one of the best systems in the world. It is considered to be the gold standard in terms of how to create a system that, to the best of its ability, has a very non-partisan approach towards the selection of judges. And if you have something that's already considered objectively to be such a good system, then when there are steps made to weaken or to change that—you know, it brings back the whole idea of "if it ain't broke, don't fix it."

If you don't have a problem with a system, if a system is already functioning very well and we are the gold standard and if there are changes to make it more similar to weaker systems, then that's a disadvantage. We're negatively impacting something that Ontario did really, really well. It also opens up to the ability to further selection that could make this process more partisan. It could make it more partisan because if there's a longer list presented to the Attorney General, the Attorney General could then choose someone who's more favourable in his mind as opposed to someone who's truer to the selection presented by the JAAC.

It comes back to this idea of "if it ain't broke, don't fix it." Our JAAC system is one of the best in the world. It's described as such. To provide a change to it that ultimately just allows for further partisan potential in the process of selecting judges, I would say that that's not a step in a more equitable or open direction. It could potentially be used in a process to make a system, that should be objective and non-partisan, more partisan and less objective.

Something that is a big part of my presentation are the changes to the tribunals. When we look at the tribunal system as a whole in Ontario, we can see that—folks first need to understand that tribunals are the primary mechanism with which people actually interact with the justice system in Ontario. More people use tribunals as a way of resolution of their issues rather than the regular court system. So tribunals are very, very important. The reason why they're important is because they are supposed to do a few things. They're supposed to be faster than courts, they're supposed to be more accessible and they're supposed to have a more specific expertise with how they deal with matters that are put before them.

They're supposed to specifically address a more niche area. That's why you have tribunals that are specific to

either labour or social assistance. You have specific issues that pertain to that matter, not something more generalist that you see in regular courts. In tribunals, you're seeing something far more specific to address that issue because of the unique issues that exist amongst that tribunal.

When we look at the changes being put forth, I would argue that they actually make the process slower, they make the process have less expertise, they make it less accessible. These are some of the potential concerns that are brought forward with the changes.

Why? One of the first things we see is that this implementation of the motion to dismiss without a hearing is really problematic. There's a lot of concern with that. Because what you're seeing, effectively, is if there is—to give you an example, a neighbour or an individual in a neighbourhood who has a problem with a development coming nearby. If they take that issue to a tribunal, then what could happen is the developer, who has far more resources, has far more access to lawyers and can hire individuals to argue on their behalf could say, "We're going to dismiss this motion," and force that individual, instead of being able to deal with the substance that's being put forward before the tribunal, to have to deal with this motion to dismiss. And you can effectively just put forth these motions to dismiss all the time, and that individual is just trying to take their issue forward before a tribunal. They may not have the means to hire a lawyer or they may be self-represented. They're then going to have to deal with this motion put before them to dismiss everything.

That could ultimately result in a few things. It's going to (a) result in the tribunals being bogged down in all these motions to dismiss, and (b) it's going to result in a further lack of access to justice. When you have a system that effectively is more favourable to those who have more resources, in the context of development or someone challenging any institution that has more access to resources, then they're going to be at a disadvantage. Those are two issues with it.

Then you also have the issue of less expertise. When you have a tribunal which is specific, that allows for a person with a specific expertise to deal with it. But when you bring forth a generalized approach, when you say, "We're going to put forward an amalgamation of all these tribunals and bring them together," then ultimately, as that continues, you could be losing successively, as people retire and leave, that expertise as it goes forward. That could result in a less specific or expert-based tribunal, which ultimately would also create a potentially slower system and a less successful system, because you have people who are not as well-versed in the issues before them.

Lastly, it's important to keep in mind that what we're seeing here is that—what's the problem we're trying to solve? That's something that I often asked myself as I was reading through this piece of legislation. If we want to fix the tribunal system, one of the most direct ways to fix it is just not to starve them. The Ford government, the Conservative government has been starving tribunals, not

hiring individuals to fill the tribunals. Since their election, they have not been providing these tribunals with the resources that they need and require. The result of that is this pattern we see from the Conservative government, where they will first starve a specific service or facility of resources, then they will bring forth a potentially undemocratic or non-equitable policy because they've created a crisis by not providing the funding to that service in the first place. There's a really easy way to address this. The easy way to address this is to simply provide these tribunals with the support and hiring that they require, because that will actually ensure that these tribunals can function effectively and properly.

There's an article that I often make reference to in the *Law Times* which talks about how the tribunal system is in crisis. It makes reference to Tribunal Watch Ontario and how the adjudicators have fallen to 87 from 160 over the past two years. That means there's almost half as few adjudicators in tribunals as there were before. That's problematic. That's a huge issue because that's going to limit people's ability to access justice and their ability to ensure they have properly functioning tribunals to deal with the matters before them.

When we look further to what are potential issues that arise within this piece of legislation, we can also see that there's potentially a very big issue with respect to the amendments respecting appeals to a minister. This is a part that's really a very important function that exists right now. If someone has an issue with a potential project or something being put forward, people right now have the ability to challenge and get the minister to respond, not because something is illegal but because it's something that could be a really bad idea. We often give the example of the Spadina expressway that was proposed and how it was being put forward and the community came together saying, "This is a really bad idea." It wasn't that what was being put forward was an illegal idea, potentially. It was just a really bad idea.

This appeal allows for that mechanism to be engaged, that if the community finds there's something being put forward that's potentially a really, really bad idea and it's something that the community doesn't like, they have a mechanism where they can say, "Listen, we want to get the minister to justify the decision." What we're seeing right now is by removing that—well, first off, by removing people's ability to access justice, that in and of itself is contrary to the name of this bill you've put forward, which is the Accelerating Access to Justice Act.

1750

When you have a piece of legislation that is literally taking away people's rights to challenge a minister, that is a huge barrier that the community no longer has, that folks no longer have. Individuals in Ontario can no longer now challenge the minister and say, "A project is coming forward. We don't like it. We have concerns about it, and we're going to ensure that the minister provides a reason for why this project was put forward or to justify its position." They no longer have that justification at their disposal.

It's also concerning because there are potential issues here with respect to the Environmental Bill of Rights. The Environmental Bill of Rights states that if you're bringing in a change that substantially impacts the environment, then it kicks in this mechanism that requires notice and consultations to be met. Now, the problem here is that the mechanism should be, I would argue, brought forward for consultations and notice if you're taking away from Ontarians one of the major recourses they have for opposing projects that potentially could have a bad impact or a negative impact on their community or upon their city.

So I would argue, and other folks have argued, that this is an exact situation where if you are going to take a fundamental right away from Ontarians where they can no longer now challenge the minister on the basis of fact that something is a bad idea, on projects that involve the environment—if you're going to take that right away from them, then, because that has a direct impact upon the environment because they can no longer advocate for projects that could have a negative impact on the environment, I would argue that this change should have resulted in or should have required consultations and notice to be met first.

That's not present right now in the piece of legislation, and that could be potentially a really problematic and really detrimental aspect to this piece of legislation. We've seen a track record of the Conservative government bringing forth legislation that is ultimately, afterwards, found to be illegal. This could be something that could put the government in that same position, where they're putting forth, once again, a piece of legislation that is not actually following the guidelines put forth in other pieces of legislation in Ontario.

Those are some of the concerns that this piece of legislation brings forth. But beyond that, I think what's really important to keep in mind is what's not in this bill. I think that's something that is really important to keep top of mind because there's a lot not in this bill. As I started off this speech saying, people right now are hungry for justice, and people right now are really thinking about how we can build a more just society. Because of the inequities that have come forth from COVID, because of the inequities that have come forth across the world, the social movements that people have seen, the fact that we saw the injustices that occurred in America with the murder of George Floyd and the resulting movement to protest systemic inequity in policing, systemic racism in policing or systemic racism in our justice system, the question is, if we contextualize this bill in the moment we're in right now, why don't we see this bill addressing those issues of systemic racism or systemic injustices in our justice system? That's something that's lacking.

When we talk about right now the fact that, across Ontario, there are thousands of individuals, thousands of people who are really concerned about farm bills in India right now that are going to bring in a mass privatization of farming, when we talk about farm bills in India right now that are going to bring in the mass privatization of farming, and people are really concerned about the ability that's

going to take away from farmers' ability to have a livelihood in India and people who are protesting in solidarity across the world—people are now paying attention to this House, this Legislative Assembly, because they see the connection. They're seeing how the impact of laws in India has resulted in a huge disenfranchisement of a huge segment of society. We're seeing journalists being imprisoned. We're seeing people like Disha Ravi, an environmental rights activist, being imprisoned. We're seeing Nodeep Kaur being imprisoned. People are now paying attention to this Legislative Assembly and saying, "How can we be more engaged in our civic duty, in our civic capacity here locally as well?"

When we look here locally at the injustices that people face, when we talk about legal aid—legal aid is something that is the foundation of any justice system. Legal aid is something that is so essential to people who are in marginalized positions as it relates to access to justice. When you cut one third of the budget to legal aid, that's going to put people in a really precarious situation. And a bill that is about accelerating access to justice, you would imagine, would have something about legal aid, and it doesn't. That's problematic. When you have a bill that does not address this issue head on, the systemic racism in justice, that's problematic.

People are at a moment right now where they want to have government to be bold, to put forth a future and a today that ensures that people of racialized or marginalized backgrounds are not fearful of engaging with their justice system. That would truly accelerate access to justice if we had those kinds of implementations put forth in this piece of legislation.

When we talk about folks who are genuinely concerned about the approach that we're taking towards policing and how we have individuals—in Brampton, we've seen, similar to situations we've seen across the world now, people like D'Andre Campbell, who was going through a mental health crisis, called for support and then was shot by police with their guns drawn in his own home, and the resulting outcry against something that is rooted in systemic racism. Then, people are going to want to see us be bold in how we approach creating access to justice and, beyond that, the slew of shootings and killings of individuals who were going through mental health crises and the fact that they needed a mental health response and not the response of the police with their guns drawn—that would be something that would result in accelerating access to justice.

When we talk about the fact that things like the SIU don't have the powers or the abilities to hold proper investigations to hold police accountable when we see these kinds of unjust shootings and killings, then that is going to result in people saying that there are systemic injustices in our justice system, which there are. They're going to want to see action on that, but we're not seeing that kind of action.

We're at a moment right now across the world where people want to see government be bold, they want to see direct action being made to address this issue of access to

justice. Access to justice is paramount, it's fundamental and it's a right. It's something that each and every human being requires.

It's one of those things, when we talk about legal aid specifically—it's this support system that you never know how important it is until someone has to interact with the legal aid system. Once they interact with the legal aid system, then they understand that economically there is a saving when you have more support up front. It's a faster system when you ensure that people are properly funded. When you talk to either defence counsel or crown counsel, they will all explain to you very clearly that when both sides are prepared, when you have a defendant who has the appropriate means at their disposal to make sure that their voice is being heard and they can be advocated for, that actually creates a more efficient and better system. Legal aid funding would allow for that.

When you have a system in which people who are at their worst and are struggling don't have the means to have their voices heard, and that can result in a variety of injustices put forward to them, that's going to result in a more cumbersome system. It's going to result in a more clogged-up system, because people are not going to be able to access the justice they require. It can open up appeals. It can open up a whole slew of things. It's one of

those things like measure twice and cut once. If you provide people the ability and support right now at the forefront and up front, if they get the support to advocate for themselves and for justice, then you will truly create a more just system.

If the Conservative government is really serious about creating further justice or access to justice, if they really want to accelerate access to justice, there are a lot of immediate steps that the government could have taken: Reverse the cuts to legal aid and properly fund legal aid. You could see a system in which you're hiring individuals to fill tribunals immediately and you're not starving the tribunal system. We could look to ensure that we are upholding and strengthening what is described as one of the strongest judicial appointment systems in the world and not provide any sort of chinks in that armour, something that is considered the gold standard—

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): I apologize for interrupting. The member will be able to finish his hour lead when this bill is called for further debate.

Second reading debate deemed adjourned.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Seeing the time on the clock, this House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 9 a.m.

The House adjourned at 1800.

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Downey, Hon. / L'hon. Doug (PC)	Barrie—Springwater—Oro-Medonte	Attorney General / Procureur général
Dunlop, Hon. / L'hon. Jill (PC)	Simcoe North / Simcoe-Nord	Associate Minister of Children and Women's Issues / Ministre associée déléguée au dossier de l'Enfance et à la Condition féminine Minister Without Portfolio / Ministre sans portefeuille
Elliott, Hon. / L'hon. Christine (PC)	Newmarket—Aurora	Deputy Premier / Vice-première ministre Minister of Health / Ministre de la Santé
Fedeli, Hon. / L'hon. Victor (PC)	Nipissing	Chair of Cabinet / Président du Conseil des ministres Minister of Economic Development, Job Creation and Trade / Ministre du Développement économique, de la Création d'emplois et du Commerce
Fee, Amy (PC)	Kitchener South—Hespeler / Kitchener-Sud—Hespeler	
Fife, Catherine (NDP)	Waterloo	

Member and Party / Député(e) et parti	Constituency / Circonscription	Other responsibilities / Autres responsabilités
Ford, Hon. / L'hon. Doug (PC)	Etobicoke North / Etobicoke-Nord	Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs / Ministre des Affaires intergouvernementales Premier / Premier ministre
Fraser, John (LIB)	Ottawa South / Ottawa-Sud	
French, Jennifer K. (NDP)	Oshawa	Third Deputy Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Troisième vice-présidente du comité plénier de l'Assemblée législative
Fullerton, Hon. / L'hon. Merrilee (PC)	Kanata—Carleton	Minister of Long-Term Care / Ministre des Soins de longue durée
Gates, Wayne (NDP)	Niagara Falls	
Gélinas, France (NDP)	Nickel Belt	
Ghamari, Goldie (PC)	Carleton	
Gill, Parm (PC)	Milton	
Glover, Chris (NDP)	Spadina—Fort York	
Gravelle, Michael (LIB)	Thunder Bay—Superior North / Thunder Bay—Supérieur-Nord	
Gretzky, Lisa (NDP)	Windsor West / Windsor-Ouest	First Deputy Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Première vice-présidente du comité plénier de l'Assemblée
Hardeman, Hon. / L'hon. Ernie (PC)	Oxford	Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs / Ministre de l'Agriculture, de l'Alimentation et des Affaires rurales
Harden, Joel (NDP)	Ottawa Centre / Ottawa-Centre	
Harris, Mike (PC)	Kitchener—Conestoga	
Hassan, Faisal (NDP)	York South—Weston / York-Sud— Weston	
Hatfield, Percy (NDP)	Windsor—Tecumseh	Second Deputy Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Deuxième vice-président du comité plénier de l'Assemblée législative
Hillier, Randy (IND)	Lanark—Frontenac—Kingston	
Hogarth, Christine (PC)	Etobicoke—Lakeshore	
Horwath, Andrea (NDP)	Hamilton Centre / Hamilton-Centre	Leader, Official Opposition / Chef de l'opposition officielle
Hunter, Mitzie (LIB)	Scarborough—Guildwood	
Jones, Hon. / L'hon. Sylvia (PC)	Dufferin—Caledon	Solicitor General / Solliciteuse générale
Kanapathi, Logan (PC)	Markham—Thornhill	
Karahalios, Belinda C. (NBP)	Cambridge	
Karpoche, Bhutla (NDP)	Parkdale—High Park	
Ke, Vincent (PC)	Don Valley North / Don Valley-Nord	
Kernaghan, Terence (NDP)	London North Centre / London- Centre-Nord	
Khanjin, Andrea (PC)	Barrie—Innisfil	Deputy Government House Leader / Leader parlementaire adjointe du gouvernement
Kramp, Daryl (PC)	Hastings—Lennox and Addington	
Kusendova, Natalia (PC)	Mississauga Centre / Mississauga- Centre	
Lecce, Hon. / L'hon. Stephen (PC)	King—Vaughan	Minister of Education / Ministre de l'Éducation
Lindo, Laura Mae (NDP)	Kitchener Centre / Kitchener-Centre	
MacLeod, Hon. / L'hon. Lisa (PC)	Nepean	Minister of Heritage, Sport, Tourism and Culture Industries / ministre des Industries du patrimoine, du sport, du tourisme et de la culture
Mamakwa, Sol (NDP)	Kiiwetinoong	
Mantha, Michael (NDP)	Algoma—Manitoulin	
Martin, Robin (PC)	Eglinton—Lawrence	
Martow, Gila (PC)	Thornhill	
McDonell, Jim (PC)	Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry	
McKenna, Jane (PC)	Burlington	
McNaughton, Hon. / L'hon. Monte (PC)	Lambton—Kent—Middlesex	Minister of Labour, Training and Skills Development / Ministre du Travail, de la Formation et du Développement des compétences
Miller, Norman (PC)	Parry Sound—Muskoka	
Miller, Paul (NDP)	Hamilton East—Stoney Creek / Hamilton-Est—Stoney Creek	
Mitas, Christina Maria (PC)	Scarborough Centre / Scarborough- Centre	
Monteith-Farrell, Judith (NDP)	Thunder Bay—Atikokan	
Morrison, Suze (NDP)	Toronto Centre / Toronto-Centre	
Mulroney, Hon. / L'hon. Caroline (PC)	York—Simcoe	Minister of Francophone Affairs / Ministre des Affaires francophones Minister of Transportation / Ministre des Transports

Member and Party / Député(e) et parti	Constituency / Circonscription	Other responsibilities / Autres responsabilités
Natyshak, Taras (NDP)	Essex	
Nicholls, Rick (PC)	Chatham-Kent—Leamington	Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Président du comité plénier de l'Assemblée Deputy Speaker / Vice-président
Oosterhoff, Sam (PC)	Niagara West / Niagara-Ouest	
Pang, Billy (PC)	Markham—Unionville	
Park, Lindsey (PC)	Durham	
Parsa, Michael (PC)	Aurora—Oak Ridges—Richmond Hill	
Pettapiece, Randy (PC)	Perth—Wellington	
Phillips, Rod (PC)	Ajax	
Piccini, David (PC)	Northumberland—Peterborough South / Northumberland—Peterborough-Sud	
Rakocevic, Tom (NDP)	Humber River—Black Creek	
Rasheed, Kaleed (PC)	Mississauga East—Cooksville / Mississauga-Est—Cooksville	
Rickford, Hon. / L'hon. Greg (PC)	Kenora—Rainy River	Minister of Energy, Northern Development and Mines / Ministre de l'Énergie, du Développement du Nord et des Mines Minister of Indigenous Affairs / Ministre des Affaires autochtones
Roberts, Jeremy (PC)	Ottawa West—Nepean / Ottawa- Ouest—Nepean	
Romano, Hon. / L'hon. Ross (PC)	Sault Ste. Marie	Minister of Colleges and Universities / Ministre des Collèges et Universités
Sabawy, Sheref (PC)	Mississauga—Erin Mills	
Sandhu, Amarjot (PC)	Brampton West / Brampton-Ouest	
Sarkaria, Hon. / L'hon. Prabmeet Singh (PC)	Brampton South / Brampton-Sud	Associate Minister of Small Business and Red Tape Reduction / Ministre associé délégué au dossier des Petites Entreprises et de la Réduction des formalités administratives Minister Without Portfolio / Ministre sans portefeuille
Sattler, Peggy (NDP)	London West / London-Ouest	Opposition House Leader / Leader parlementaire de l'opposition officielle
Schreiner, Mike (GRN)	Guelph	
Scott, Hon. / L'hon. Laurie (PC)	Haliburton—Kawartha Lakes—Brock	Minister of Infrastructure / Ministre de l'Infrastructure
Shaw, Sandy (NDP)	Hamilton West—Ancaster—Dundas / Hamilton-Ouest—Ancaster—Dundas	
Simard, Amanda (LIB)	Glengarry—Prescott—Russell	
Singh, Gurratan (NDP)	Brampton East / Brampton-Est	Deputy Opposition House Leader / Leader parlementaire adjoint de l'opposition officielle
Singh, Sara (NDP)	Brampton Centre / Brampton-Centre	Deputy Leader, Official Opposition / Chef adjointe de l'opposition officielle
Skelly, Donna (PC)	Flamborough—Glanbrook	
Smith, Dave (PC)	Peterborough—Kawartha	
Smith, Hon. / L'hon. Todd (PC)	Bay of Quinte / Baie de Quinte	Minister of Children, Community and Social Services / Ministre des Services à l'enfance et des Services sociaux et communautaires
Stevens, Jennifer (Jennie) (NDP)	St. Catharines	
Stiles, Marit (NDP)	Davenport	
Surma, Hon. / L'hon. Kinga (PC)	Etobicoke Centre / Etobicoke-Centre	Associate Minister of Transportation (GTA) / Ministre associée des Transports (RGT) Minister Without Portfolio / Ministre sans portefeuille
Tabuns, Peter (NDP)	Toronto—Danforth	
Tangri, Nina (PC)	Mississauga—Streetsville	
Taylor, Monique (NDP)	Hamilton Mountain	
Thanigasalam, Vijay (PC)	Scarborough—Rouge Park	
Thompson, Hon. / L'hon. Lisa M. (PC)	Huron—Bruce	Minister of Government and Consumer Services / Ministre des Services gouvernementaux et des Services aux consommateurs
Tibollo, Hon. / L'hon. Michael A. (PC)	Vaughan—Woodbridge	Associate Minister of Mental Health and Addictions / Ministre associé délégué au dossier de la Santé mentale et de la Lutte contre les dépendances Minister Without Portfolio / Ministre sans portefeuille
Triantafilopoulos, Effie J. (PC)	Oakville North—Burlington / Oakville-Nord—Burlington	
Vanthof, John (NDP)	Timiskaming—Cochrane	Deputy Leader, Official Opposition / Chef adjoint de l'opposition officielle
Wai, Daisy (PC)	Richmond Hill	

Member and Party / Député(e) et parti	Constituency / Circonscription	Other responsibilities / Autres responsabilités
Walker, Hon. / L'hon. Bill (PC)	Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound	Associate Minister of Energy / Ministre associé de l'Énergie Minister Without Portfolio / Ministre sans portefeuille
West, Jamie (NDP)	Sudbury	
Wilson, Jim (IND)	Simcoe—Grey	
Wynne, Kathleen O. (LIB)	Don Valley West / Don Valley-Ouest	
Yakubski, Hon. / L'hon. John (PC)	Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke	Minister of Natural Resources and Forestry / Ministre des Richesses naturelles et des Forêts
Yarde, Kevin (NDP)	Brampton North / Brampton-Nord	
Yurek, Hon. / L'hon. Jeff (PC)	Elgin—Middlesex—London	Minister of the Environment, Conservation and Parks / Ministre de l'Environnement, de la Protection de la nature et des Parcs

**STANDING AND SELECT COMMITTEES OF THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
COMITÉS PERMANENTS ET SPÉCIAUX DE L'ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE**

Standing Committee on Estimates / Comité permanent des budgets des dépenses

Chair / Président: Peter Tabuns
Teresa J. Armstrong, Toby Barrett
Lorne Coe, Rudy Cuzzetto
Randy Hillier, Jane McKenna
Judith Monteith-Farrell, Michael Parsa
Randy Pettapiece, Donna Skelly
Peter Tabuns
Committee Clerk / Greffière: Thushitha Kobikrishna

Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs / Comité permanent des finances et des affaires économiques

Chair / Président: Amarjot Sandhu
Vice-Chair / Vice-président: Jeremy Roberts
Ian Arthur, Stan Cho
Catherine Fife, Mitzie Hunter
Logan Kanapathi, Sol Mamakwa
David Piccini, Jeremy Roberts
Amarjot Sandhu, Dave Smith
Vijay Thanigasalam
Committee Clerk / Greffière: Julia Douglas

Standing Committee on General Government / Comité permanent des affaires gouvernementales

Chair / Présidente: Goldie Ghamari
Vice-Chair / Vice-président: Mike Schreiner
Jill Andrew, Robert Bailey
Guy Bourgouin, Stephen Crawford
Goldie Ghamari, Chris Glover
Mike Harris, Sheref Sabawy
Amarjot Sandhu, Mike Schreiner
Daisy Wai
Committee Clerk / Greffier: Isaiah Thorning

Standing Committee on Government Agencies / Comité permanent des organismes gouvernementaux

Chair / Président: Vacant
Aris Babikian, Gilles Bisson
Will Bouma, Lorne Coe
Wayne Gates, Robin Martin
Norman Miller, Rick Nicholls
Billy Pang, Amanda Simard
Marit Stiles
Committee Clerk / Greffier: Julia Douglas

Standing Committee on Justice Policy / Comité permanent de la justice

Chair / Président: Daryl Kramp
Vice-Chair / Vice-présidente: Lucille Collard
Will Bouma, Lucille Collard
Parm Gill, Daryl Kramp
Natalia Kusendova, Suze Morrison
Lindsey Park, Gurratan Singh
Nina Tangri, Effie J. Triantafilopoulos
Kevin Yarde
Committee Clerk / Greffière: Thushitha Kobikrishna

Standing Committee on the Legislative Assembly / Comité permanent de l'Assemblée législative

Chair / Président: Kaleed Rasheed
Vice-Chair / Vice-président: Vijay Thanigasalam
Rima Berns-McGown, Michael Coteau
Faisal Hassan, Logan Kanapathi
Michael Mantha, Jim McDonell
Christina Maria Mitas, Sam Oosterhoff
Kaleed Rasheed, Donna Skelly
Vijay Thanigasalam
Committee Clerk / Greffière: Tonia Grannum

Standing Committee on Public Accounts / Comité permanent des comptes publics

Chair / Président: Taras Natyshak
Vice-Chair / Vice-présidente: France Gélinas
Deepak Anand, Toby Barrett
Jessica Bell, Stephen Blais
Stephen Crawford, Rudy Cuzzetto
France Gélinas, Christine Hogarth
Daryl Kramp, Taras Natyshak
Michael Parsa
Committee Clerk / Greffier: Christopher Tyrell

Standing Committee on Regulations and Private Bills / Comité permanent des règlements et des projets de loi d'intérêt privé

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Logan Kanapathi, Vincent Ke
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Billy Pang, Jeremy Roberts
Dave Smith, Daisy Wai
Jamie West
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Standing Committee on Social Policy / Comité permanent de la politique sociale

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Deepak Anand, Aris Babikian
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Natalia Kusendova
Committee Clerk / Greffière: Tanzima Khan

Select Committee on Emergency Management Oversight / Comité spécial de la surveillance de la gestion des situations d'urgence

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Robert Bailey, Gilles Bisson
John Fraser, Christine Hogarth
Daryl Kramp, Robin Martin
Sam Oosterhoff, Lindsey Park
Tom Rakocevic, Sara Singh
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Committee Clerk / Greffier: Christopher Tyrell