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**Standing Committee on
Finance and Economic Affairs**

Pre-budget consultations

1st Session
42nd Parliament

Thursday 23 January 2020

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

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1^{re} session
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Jeudi 23 janvier 2020

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

STANDING COMMITTEE ON
FINANCE AND ECONOMIC AFFAIRSCOMITÉ PERMANENT DES FINANCES
ET DES AFFAIRES ÉCONOMIQUES

Thursday 23 January 2020

Jeudi 23 janvier 2020

The committee met at 0900 in Crowne Plaza Kitchener-Waterloo, Kitchener-Waterloo.

PRE-BUDGET CONSULTATIONS

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Good morning, everyone. Welcome to the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs. We are meeting today in Kitchener-Waterloo for the purpose of pre-budget consultations.

Each witness will receive up to seven minutes for his or her presentation, followed by eight minutes of questioning from the committee, divided equally amongst the recognized parties. Are there any questions before we begin?

ONTARIO GREENHOUSE VEGETABLE
GROWERS

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Seeing none, I would like to call the first witness, from Ontario Greenhouse Vegetable Growers. Please state your name for the record, and you will have seven minutes for your presentation. I'll give you a one-minute warning as well.

Mr. George Gilvesy: Good morning. My name is George Gilvesy, and I'm the chair of the Ontario Greenhouse Vegetable Growers. I have with me Dr. Justine Taylor, who is our science and government relations manager.

Thank you, Mr. Chair. Good afternoon, honourable members, and thank you for the opportunity to contribute to the standing committee's 2020 pre-budget consultations.

The Ontario Greenhouse Vegetable Growers represents approximately 200 farmers responsible for over 3,200 acres of fresh, nutritious greenhouse tomatoes, peppers and cucumbers across the province.

With farm-gate values of \$950 million in 2018, support for over 13,000 jobs, a contribution of \$1.8 billion to the economy and a consistent track record of growth, the sector is a valuable economic driver for the province. Over the past five years alone, the sector has grown by 675 acres. At over \$1 million per acre, this investment is on par with a new automobile assembly plant. The sector has a well-earned reputation for excellence and has established a significant market in the United States, with over 70% of what our members are currently producing being exported to that market.

Our sector continues to be poised for growth, and over the next five years we estimate the sector could expand by 900 acres, resulting in over \$1 billion in direct construction investment, an additional contribution of over \$520 million to the economy, and the creation of an additional 3,800 new jobs.

We'd like to thank the current government for recognizing the importance of Ontario's agricultural sector and for initiating discussions through Minister Hardeman's agricultural round table to address the growing regulatory burden we have faced. It's key that we maintain and enhance our competitiveness in the global marketplace, and we look to the Ontario government to be an ally in that effort. We truly believe that the Ontario greenhouse sector is seen as a shining example of success across North America, and is considered best in class throughout the produce world.

Trade and new markets: Ontario's greenhouse vegetable growers are committed to sector growth through strategic investment in both existing and emerging markets. With the majority of Ontario's greenhouse production going to the United States marketplace, we are pleased with the impending conclusion of the CUSMA. However, it is critical that we continue to diversify our markets to reduce reliance on the US market. Establishing a new marketplace is generally a seven- to 15-year effort, and OGVG would encourage the provincial government to take a long-term view of market development by supporting trade diversification over multiple years.

On farm boiler safety: Our sector has been working hard to address concerns raised about agricultural exemptions under the boilers and pressure vessels and operating engineers regulations, as identified by the Auditor General in 2018. During TSSA and MGCS consultations, we learned what specific concerns exist from several stakeholders' perspectives. We believe we have crafted a set of proposals to address those concerns effectively and efficiently while distributing effort between the regulators and the sector. This ensures red tape is minimized while maximizing safety outcomes.

Our sector is committed to the safe and conscientious operation of our production equipment devices, to ensure the safety of our workers, families and communities. We look forward to continuing to work with the government to establish smart regulations and sector-led policies.

Infrastructure development: Access to natural gas, electricity, water infrastructure and, increasingly, sanitary

sewers is critical to ensure greenhouse sector growth and economic development. Of specific interest to the sector is the development of sanitary sewer infrastructure in the municipality of Leamington. Access to this service will allow for the reliable disposal of excess nutrients, the development of on-farm housing to support a growing workforce, and the expansion of a varied and available housing stock, all of which support continued regional economic development.

More critically, this project will further strengthen our efforts to reduce phosphorus loading to Lake Erie, ensuring that Ontario can meet obligations under the Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement. Our sector is committed to this project and is looking to partner with multiple levels of government to invest private sector funds. We ask for your expertise in helping to develop creative funding solutions that effectively leverage private sector funds into projects with significant public benefit.

In addition, the agricultural community is working collaboratively to address phosphorus loading and broader environmental issues through the ECO-AG partnership.

Tomato brown rugose fruit virus: The identification of the tomato brown rugose fruit virus in many countries across the globe has caused our sector a great deal of concern, and many are worried for the security of their crop, especially given increased levels of global trade. As an organization, we have been working diligently on this issue since early 2019, ensuring our members had access to the most up-to-date information on the virus.

I will add that this is not a virus of concern for human health; it's only plant health.

Recent actions by the US to control the movement of fruit, seeds and seedlings into the United States, via a federal order, are particularly worrisome, especially given that fruit is not considered a high-risk pathway. We want to thank OMAFRA for their support on this matter over the last year—

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

Mr. George Gilvesy: —and ask for your continued support as we develop the tools necessary to effectively manage emerging community pests.

Other issues: Access to a reliable and appropriately skilled workforce, modern business risk management tools, effective recycling solutions, and an achievable timeline for the transition away from single-use plastics are all issues critical to our sector, and we urge you to review our full written submission for further details on these matters. You will receive the full report tomorrow.

We thank you for this opportunity to comment, and look forward to doing business in Ontario.

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

Ms. Catherine Fife: Good to see you, George and Justine. Thank you for being here today. Over the years, your sector has been very vocal on the cost of hydro, because it bears such an impact on your sector. Can you give us some sense or an update on how hydro rates or the cost of energy is actually impacting your sector?

Mr. George Gilvesy: Yes. I'll turn that over to Dr. Taylor.

Dr. Justine Taylor: Thank you very much. Yes, it has been a significant issue for us in the past. Energy costs, both natural gas and electricity, are significant production costs for our sector.

We have worked really closely with IESO over the past two years, I'd say, to further develop their programming so it's more complementary to our sector. We're now able to access the ICI program, which is essentially a class A usership program for those who are installing lights, which then allows us to access more competitively-priced electricity.

Ms. Catherine Fife: It's good to see you weighing in on the health of our Great Lakes. I know that your sector follows, of course, environmental reforms quite closely. Lake Erie in particular this year has had a terrible year with phosphorus.

You mentioned in your report that you'd like to leverage private sector funds to address that issue. Do you not see the government as a significant player in ensuring that our lakes remain clean and viable for a sector like yours?

Dr. Justine Taylor: That comment is specific to the sanitary project, which we do see as at least a regional effort to help further reduce phosphorus loading in the region, because there's a lot of expansion in the greenhouse sector and much of the expansion is occurring in areas that aren't serviced by sanitary sewers. There are a lot of septic beds. Septic beds are a known source of phosphorus loss, so that's the issue that we're hoping to address, but we absolutely consider government a partner and hope to work with them on many issues.

0910

Ms. Catherine Fife: So on that issue you're dealing closely with your municipality. Is that right?

Dr. Justine Taylor: Yes.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Okay. Under your other issues, you talk about an appropriately skilled workforce. Can you give us some sense as to how this is impacting your sector and where you see government potentially playing a role in that?

Mr. George Gilvesy: I'll address part of that. With the growth in our sector, it's very difficult to keep up with the skill level of people we need. We are short in virtually every aspect of the production chain. We're looking for improvements, right from basic fundamental production all the way through to the skills necessary for mid-management, supervisors, crop growers—people all the way up the production chain.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Do you access the seasonal agricultural resource program, the federal program?

Mr. George Gilvesy: Yes, we do. We are actually a large user of the Seasonal Agricultural Worker Program. It's critical to our success.

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

Ms. Catherine Fife: Over the years, there have been some health and safety issues with that program. Can you just give us some sense as to how your sector has adapted to that?

Mr. George Gilvesy: Health and safety issues with the Seasonal Agricultural Worker Program?

Ms. Catherine Fife: Yes. Yes, George.

Mr. George Gilvesy: Well, it's our lifeline. As I said, it's a key part of our success. Our growers take the relationship they have with the Seasonal Agricultural Worker Program workers who come to their farms very seriously. We've been working very closely with the farm organization that facilitates those people coming into Canada to give them as safe an environment as they can have.

Ms. Catherine Fife: In the past, the conversation around the federal and the provincial governments working more closely together on that program to ensure worker rights are maintained has arisen at this committee. I think there's a lot of room at the federal level to actually improve that relationship.

Mr. George Gilvesy: I'd like to actually add—

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

We'll have to go to the government side for their time of questioning. MPP Skelly.

Ms. Donna Skelly: Good morning, George.

Mr. George Gilvesy: Good morning.

Ms. Donna Skelly: It's always a pleasure to see you and to hear from your organization. I have two questions. The first is about the movement of goods and whether your sector faces any unique challenges moving goods either across Ontario, across the country or south of the border, and, if so, if you can identify those challenges and if you can offer any solutions.

Mr. George Gilvesy: That is one of the reasons we raised the rugose issue, because right now it has the potential of being used as a non-tariff barrier by the United States on the movement of tomatoes from Canada into the US, as well as, principally at the moment, product from Mexico from the United States. Because the disease is quite prevalent in Mexico, Americans are very concerned about the movement of those transferring the disease from Mexico into the United States production base. So that is why we've presented that here. There is trade risk with that issue. If you're looking at the amount of tomatoes that are going across the border, it is a huge impact. We're into hundreds of millions of dollars of tomatoes being exported across the Ambassador Bridge throughout the year.

Ms. Donna Skelly: Do you see any challenges in terms of actually moving the product—congestion, pinch points?

Mr. George Gilvesy: We're very pleased about the announcement about the highway 3 expansion down in—because it has been two lanes in part of it and four lanes in some. That has always been a congestion point, so that's welcome news for our sector. The expansion of the Ambassador, the new bridge into the United States, has also been—we've been very supportive of that initiative as well. Because we're dealing with a perishable, the more seamless and easier you make it to get it across, the better it is for our product to retain its qualities.

Ms. Donna Skelly: My final question focuses on excess soil. It has become a huge issue in my riding of Flamborough. Farmers, whether they accept it or not, are waking up in the morning with excess soil, usually from the GTA, being dumped on agricultural land. Is it an issue in this area as well? It's a big problem in my area.

Mr. George Gilvesy: I've not heard of that one affecting greenhouse producers at all, no.

Ms. Donna Skelly: It's interesting. It's the greenhouse producer in my riding where we're having the biggest problem with it.

Mr. George Gilvesy: Really? No, I've not heard of that one.

Ms. Donna Skelly: Okay. Thank you.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Any further questions? Seeing none, thank you so much for your presentation.

Mr. George Gilvesy: Thank you.

LONDON HEALTH COALITION

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Our next presenter is from the London Health Coalition. Please come forward. Please state your names for the record, and you can get right into your presentation.

Mr. Peter Bergmanis: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I am Peter Bergmanis, co-chair of the London Health Coalition.

Mr. Jeff Hanks: I'm Jeff Hanks, a registered nurse, also co-chair of London Health Coalition.

Mr. Peter Bergmanis: Thank you for the time of the committee for this important announcement from us.

After almost four decades of public hospital downsizing and restructuring, broken only by a brief respite from 2000 to 2005, after long-standing rationing of long-term care even while our population is growing and aging, the pressing need to restore care cannot be ignored. Further, it is unconscionable to leave aging and those with chronic illness to their own devices after they have paid all of their lives in their taxes for a public health care system that is supposed to provide for them. We must insist that urgent action be taken to resolve the crisis. While no single government can be blamed for how we got here, there is no question that cuts and rationing have gone too far.

For over a decade, the Ontario Health Coalition and local health coalitions such as ours have borne witness to the devastating effects of real dollar cuts to hospital funding. Year after painful year, the Ontario Health Coalition has documented for the members of this standing committee Ontario's descent to the bottom of the country on key capacity indicators in our hospitals. For instance, the government has set global hospital operating funding increases below the rate of inflation for 10 of the last 12 years, the longest period of hospital cuts in our entire history.

Measured on a per capita basis, the most recent data from the Canadian Institute for Health Information shows that Ontario ranks last in hospital funding. Ontario's government funds our public hospitals \$480 less per

person than the average of the other provinces. As measured as a percentage of provincial GDP, Ontario, possibly the wealthiest province in Confederation, spends the least on public hospital services. Ontario has the fewest beds per person left in the country. Ontario has the fewest nurses per patient in Canada. This is a humanitarian crisis.

London is a regional medical hub, with two teaching hospitals comprising a combined \$1.5-billion operating budget. Such a sum of dollars taken on its own, without the benefit of historical context, would seemingly paint a picture of a well-resourced medical centre of excellence. However, it must be understood that over the past two decades, London hospital restructuring has come at a hefty price tag of not only \$1 billion but incalculable lost health care assets.

Londoners have witnessed the closure of the London Psychiatric Hospital and the loss of a vital emergency department and intensive care unit at St. Joseph's Hospital. The closing of the ICU and CCU effectively downgraded St. Joe's Grosvenor campus from serving the community with the most medical beds in the city to that of an ambulatory care centre. Adding insult to injury, since 2012, London health sciences and St. Joe's combined have been forced to take cumulative cuts of almost \$200 million and the loss of hundreds of health care positions.

Such an enormous shift of health care dollars out of the public hospital system has had unfathomable consequences for hospital stability and the ability to provide access to quality care. Over 18,500 public hospital beds have been closed provincially; 2,000 have come out of London alone.

Approximately 80% of Middlesex-Elgin's psychiatric beds have been permanently shuttered. Mentally ill patients in the community are increasingly forced to wait days for admission while languishing in hallways or empty rooms, or worse: living on the streets. In St. Thomas, where psychiatric patients once received much-needed care, Apple TV is preparing to shoot a television series set in a dystopian future on the grounds of the former St. Thomas Psychiatric Hospital. A once vital component of regional health care has been reduced to a movie set.

Although housing approximately 1,000 beds, LHSC is chronically registering over 100% patient occupancy. Often "code gridlock" emerges, a troubling scenario with more patients than available beds—a situation that is neither acceptable nor safe. In-patient daily metrics and freedom-of-information requests reveal staggering occupancy rates. The London Health Sciences Centre's psychiatric unit can run over 165% occupancy. Medicine beds for acute care patients and surgical beds run at more than 100% occupancy for the majority of the time. By comparison, the OECD reports an average occupancy of acute care beds at 75%. Most often cited in academic literature, hospital target rates should be no more than 85% so they can absorb any kind of extra patient outcomes.

0920

Like so many other hospitals in the province, London's emerg departments are chronically filled to bursting. This is not because patients are inappropriately accessing care

for influenza or other viruses but, rather, due to systemic shortages in beds. It is not uncommon for patients seeking treatment at University Hospital's ER to wait over 13 hours. This is well above the provincial norm. The Victoria Hospital site is little better, with waits of over 12 hours. It has been reported that patients have sometimes waited days at a time before being admitted.

Since overcrowded conditions in emerg departments are known to lead to higher rates of patient mortality, it is of the utmost urgency that a capacity plan to reopen closed wards and operating rooms be developed so as to restore public hospital capacity to safe levels.

Code zero occurs when there are no ambulances available because all are held up at overcrowded emergency rooms—

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

Mr. Peter Bergmanis:—waiting to off-load patients. This is the situation in the London scene every day. A desperate attempt to deal with the severe overcrowding has led to "fit to sit" measures and LHSC officials pioneering hallway medicine protocols.

Budget cuts have led to OR closures and have led to a great stream of surgeons seeking extra income in the private clinics which are beginning to abound in our city. Because these surgeons are now moonlighting in another area, they're not available to the public system, causing further backlogs.

In short, long-term care is not a solution. It was never developed to be able to handle the complexity of the acute care patients that they are receiving.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you. I apologize to cut you off. Your time has come up now. We have to move to the government side for their time of questioning. MPP Piccini.

Mr. David Piccini: Thank you both very much presenting to the committee today—we appreciate it—and speaking on what is certainly an issue and a priority for this government, which is hallway health care and tackling these issues that you speak of.

I just picked up on something at the end there on acute care. Are you saying that alternate-level-of-care patients are best in hospitals and not in long-term care? Just for clarification.

Mr. Jeff Hanks: I think so. I think it's used as a scapegoat not to have more beds in general. I think that the ALC—mostly, they keep using that as an excuse. I think the head of health care realizes we're in a bed crisis, but said, "We're not going to fund any more beds." That just doesn't make sense to me.

Mr. David Piccini: I see where you're going vis-à-vis the bed funding. But just correct me if I'm wrong here, because my hospital CEO, the chief of surgery, and all of the physicians, when I've held physician round tables, have said that when we have 50% ALC patients in our ER, those would be better in long-term care. Subsequently, the government has invested in transitional bed funding to take alternate-level-of-care patients out of the emergency room and into long-term care. You're saying you don't support that?

Mr. Jeff Hanks: To have more beds available—we do support that. ALC patients, when I've worked on the floor, are hardly different from acute care patients. A lot of times, they'll suddenly become acute. So, categorizing an ALC patient is kind of a misnomer.

I think you can only shuffle the chairs on the Titanic so many times. Let's increase the overall beds. Those people are waiting in emerg because there aren't long-term-care beds, and we've closed complex care beds, which they would probably be better in. So, increasing the number of beds overall would be my suggestion.

Mr. David Piccini: Speak to me a bit about the challenges here. I know that in my area, in southeastern Ontario, we've committed to addressing the small and medium-sized funding formula, and subsequently increased the number of beds in my local hospital. Do you think that's a step in the right direction for our small and medium-sized hospitals?

Mr. Peter Bergmanis: What we're understanding—and you're probably well aware of the media reporting now—is that there is nothing but hospital overcrowding over the vast majority of hospitals in the province, so whatever amounts you may have received are probably pretty unique.

I would also add that the transitional care unit funding that we had under the Liberals—they cancelled it, by the way, the last time, before the election—has never been replaced. London Health Sciences Centre relied on St. Joseph's Healthcare to be able to handle any kind of surge in capacity with these transitional care unit beds; they're gone, and never replaced.

Mr. David Piccini: That's funny. It was in my local hospital—

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

Mr. David Piccini: —but that's certainly something that we can take back for around the province. I think we all agree that this isn't going to, with the flick of a switch, change overnight, but there are certainly steps in the right direction. I would say a systemic commitment to addressing the hospital funding formula is a major step in the right direction for our small and medium-sized hospitals.

Moving on to Ontario health teams: Do you think Ontario health teams, this sort of grassroots-led approach, are a step in the right direction, engaging community partners and seeking guidance at that local level?

Mr. Peter Bergmanis: I would only add that it would be, if it is completely in the public interest and there is no involvement of the private sector—

Mr. David Piccini: What involvement—

Mr. Peter Bergmanis: —which are motivated by profit as opposed to the public good.

Mr. David Piccini: Can you point to the private sector? I was selected as one of 24—

Mr. Peter Bergmanis: Well, we don't have enough info, unfortunately.

Mr. David Piccini: So you can't.

Mr. Peter Bergmanis: I can't point to it because I don't have information.

Mr. Jeff Hanks: The government has created a superagency, and it has unprecedented powers to privatize anything they want. They don't have to meet in public anymore—

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

Ms. Laura Mae Lindo: Hello. Thank you very much. I just want to start by saying thank you for all that you're doing to ensure that our system remains patient-centred and that this discussion remains patient-centred. We have been hearing a lot about the crisis in health care. People are using the word "crisis." In Brampton, they've just declared a health care emergency, so we know that this is actually the reality of the steps that are being taken and the impact of the steps being taken.

I'm wondering if you can speak to us a little bit more about the impact of the underfunding of our health care system, and the reason why it's important for us to pay attention to investments in the public health care system as opposed to the private.

Mr. Jeff Hanks: Even with the SARS-like crisis going on right now, they're cutting public health care funding. That's really not a good thing, because every dollar you spend in public health care means \$6 more that you don't have to spend.

The other thing is that when I worked in the hospital, we would go to work and put our lives at risk. Patients' lives are being put at risk now, because there are not enough beds. They were putting five people in a four-bedroom ward, which means that it's a lot easier to have an outbreak, because you can have MRSA and VRE. There are people going to surgeries for the fourth time and getting it cancelled for the fourth time. They're shutting down hospital beds at the height of the flu season. They're cutting \$10 million in elective surgery. They're contracting out services. It's just a nightmare.

This is a real crisis. Health care workers are burning out. They're getting beat up. People in nursing homes are getting murdered, patients by other patients, because there are not enough staff. Nurse-patient ratios are leading to us seeing people die unnecessarily. Having to do procedures that are not in the right place in the hospital—that's not right. Actually, you should be scared and alarmed that your family members have to go into the health care system right now.

Mr. Peter Bergmanis: I would also add that there is a private consulting firm, KPMG, that has been retained and is being paid through public dollars at London Health Sciences to assist in how to divest from public services that they currently provide, because it's not being funded by the government.

Ms. Laura Mae Lindo: Thank you.

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

Mr. Ian Arthur: Good morning, and thank you for your testimony. Just quickly, those are some pretty shocking things to hear, that lives are actually being put at risk in our public health care system.

Ontario ranks lowest in per capita funding for health care in Canada, or one of the lowest in Canada. Do you see

any avenue forward other than adequately funding it to a level at least at the national average per capita?

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

Mr. Peter Bergmanis: Actually, I don't see how we can't. As Jeff alluded earlier, we're on the Titanic here, and shuffling chairs around isn't going to save one other person. Unless we actually right this ship up—we could use, easily, a cash-flow influx of 5.3% annually. This is more than the Ontario Hospital Association suggested, and that's just to keep us on par with a growing population, an aging population and the inflation rate.

0930

We know that if we don't turn this around, this is going to be a catastrophe. We have created a humanitarian crisis. It is truly that. All Canadians—Ontarians—should be very alarmed at what's happening in their hospitals.

Mr. Jeff Hanks: In the news, on the way here, we heard about a cardiac surgeon who just quit. He said that you're not funding our program properly. Not only that, the overcrowding—

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

TEAM RUBICON CANADA

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Moving along to our next presenter, from Team Rubicon Canada, please come forward. Please state your names for the record. You will have seven minutes for your presentation.

Mr. Bryan Riddell: My name is Bryan Riddell.

Ms. Ashley Pardy-Serre: And I'm Ashley Pardy-Serre.

Mr. Bryan Riddell: Good morning, committee members, and thank you for the opportunity to speak to you today about what is a very important and urgent matter for Ontarians. Again, my name is Bryan Riddell. I'm joined by my colleague, director of development Ashley Pardy-Serre. We're here on behalf of Team Rubicon Canada.

Team Rubicon serves communities by mobilizing veterans to continue their service, leveraging their skills and experience to help people prepare, respond and recover from disasters and humanitarian crises. It is because of this mission that we've asked to address this committee. We see a great and unprecedented requirement for this committee to invest in Ontario's disaster resilience.

Over the course of my career, I've served as an officer in the Canadian Armed Forces and I'm a veteran of both the Afghanistan and Iraq conflicts. During my time working with Canada's special forces, we often internally cited what had been asserted as a fundamental truth of our profession: "Competent special operations forces cannot be created after emergencies occur." This is also the principal driver behind Team Rubicon's emphasis on preparation. Ontario has been a busy area of operations for us since our inception in 2017, and it has become clear to us that the need for organized, streamlined and prepared disaster volunteers has never been more necessary.

Budget 2020 will impact Ontario's ability to respond to and mitigate disasters in the near term and in the years that follow. Public Safety Canada recently noted that disasters in Canada are increasing in frequency and severity across the country, citing that between 2008 and 2018 there were 195 recorded disasters across Canada, costing tens of billions of dollars and displacing hundreds of thousands of people. One of Canada's largest single disasters, the wild-fire in Wood Buffalo, Alberta, has exceeded \$9.9 billion in direct and indirect costs since 2016.

In Ontario in the last decade, costs for a single disaster peaked at \$943 million in insured costs alone. It's incumbent on us to seek out ways to reduce the direct and indirect costs in any way we can, and we are proposing three ways that this may be achieved through financial support to the charity and not-for-profit sector.

Public Safety Canada notes that the return on investment for whole-of-society disaster prevention and mitigation activities could generate savings of \$6 for every \$1 invested in prevention. We share in this assertion, and would further add that a dollar invested in charities and not-for-profits could yield even greater savings to communities.

Taking from this, our first proposal is that the committee consider dedicating sustainable and predictable allocations to support the efforts of charities and non-profits to enhance disaster preparedness. Specifically, we recommend the committee considers a commitment of financial support for member charities and non-profits of the NGO Alliance of Ontario. We believe that providing dedicated financial support to this alliance would be a great step forward in building Ontario's whole-of-society approach to emergency management in budget 2020.

Through Team Rubicon's operations, we've identified that military veterans are uniquely suited to disaster relief efforts. Within our veteran membership, military training and experiences provide veterans with the characteristics and a skill set that can be naturally transferred to emergency management, positioning them to be effective disaster volunteers. Efforts to include some of Ontario's 230,000 veterans in local preparedness and response would undoubtedly strengthen community resilience.

In this regard, our second proposal is that this committee considers providing a new funding opportunity to include military veterans in community preparedness, response and recovery initiatives. Offering a new but familiar purpose for our veterans, their continued service to those in need is also providing a renewed sense of identity and community beyond the uniform. We urge this committee to consider the value of such a unique budget allocation, one that could promote volunteer service to communities, protect vulnerable Ontarians, and simultaneously help to repurpose and reintegrate veterans into civilian life.

In 2017, MNP determined that more than half of Canadians are living within \$200 per month to pay all their bills or meet their debt obligations. This reality, set against a disaster situation, leaves many Ontarians vulnerable. The need to mobilize competent and high-readiness volunteers

to support response efforts can help to mitigate these vulnerabilities.

In our view, when disaster strikes, speed of coordinated response is paramount. If we assess that half of our population would suffer hardship immediately in the event of a disaster, we have to somehow reduce the risk this presents.

Accordingly, our third and final proposal is that the committee gives consideration to set aside a \$1-million emergency fund to support the costs of rapidly mobilizing and sustaining skilled volunteers across the province, following municipal requests for provincial assistance.

At Team Rubicon, many of our volunteers maintain day jobs while remaining at the ready to deploy on a moment's notice. But this level of readiness and commitment is not entirely unique to Team Rubicon. Within Ontario, there are many charities and NPOs active in emergency management. Through the rapid deployment of skilled volunteers, we can help mitigate emergencies and disasters in our communities, and ultimately help get Ontarians back on their feet at a reduced cost, and within a drastically shorter time frame.

Taking again from my comrades in arms, competent and skilled volunteers cannot be created after emergencies occur. We ask your consideration in providing sustainable, predictable and accessible funding in order to help the province and its people prepare, respond and recover.

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

Mr. Bryan Riddell: When disasters strike, we need to be ready to strike back. Thank you for your time.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you. We'll to the opposition side. MPP Lindo?

Ms. Laura Mae Lindo: I just want to begin by saying thank you for your service.

Over the course of the last few years, we've heard a lot about cuts to supports for our veterans. I think it's fantastic that Team Rubicon has found a way to ensure that veterans still have a sense of purpose, as opposed to feeling the impacts of cuts and lack of investment in the care that they require.

With that, I'm wondering if you can speak a little bit about the importance of that, of ensuring that veterans do feel the sense of purpose at a time when we do need their help.

Mr. Bryan Riddell: Yes, and I speak from personal experience over the last two years in my transition out of the military, specifically to take on this opportunity to lead veterans. The transition is difficult for them. Leaving a very tight-knit community, one that is high-performing, one that becomes very much a part of their life and for their career, can be very isolating. But from my perspective—the emphasis for Team Rubicon is to help veterans own and embrace and change their own narrative around the value that veterans can provide.

Recent studies in the US and Canada have shown that veterans, while often the object of change for a lot of organizations, I think, more importantly could be the agents of change. I think that veterans have an opportunity to be civic assets in their communities long after they've

hung up the uniform. I think that's very important, and that's one of the things that we push very hard on.

Ms. Laura Mae Lindo: Thank you. I totally agree. Thinking more broadly, a lot of non-profits and charitable organizations do spend time trying to ensure that people who are on the margins are given a sense of purpose and are provided with an opportunity to show what they can give back. I would love you to speak a little bit more about the importance of sustainable and predictable funding, because often something that we hear in that sector is that the funding is not sustainable and not predictable.

Mr. Bryan Riddell: Yes. I know that with some of my partner charities, such as the True Patriot Love Foundation and Wounded Warriors Canada, we say: "We do what we do best, and we partner with the rest." Many of them are working very hard to try to raise funds every year.

With the end of Afghanistan, there are concerns, I believe. I don't want to speak for them, but many of the concerns I've heard voiced are that veterans are being somewhat disregarded—and this is more to speak to Canadians—and just not really talking about it as much anymore, with the end of this conflict. I know colleagues who are still engaged very actively in overseas missions, and I think that it's incumbent on Ontarians and Canadians to continue to understand that we have people that are continuing to serve in harm's way. But I won't speak specifically to any specific contributions to other veteran causes. I'm not qualified to be able to speak to that; apologies.

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Ms. Ashley Pardy-Serre: I'll just jump in quickly here too. With a sustainable and predictable source of funding, that allows charities to plan and really get involved in having an activity that has longevity and something that can make a sustainable impact within the community. So one-off, short-term funding is not as advantageous as long-term funding, which allows for better planning and programming to have those impacts and changes that we're looking for.

Ms. Laura Mae Lindo: Beautiful. And with Team Rubicon working on emergency situations, the importance of also thinking about climate change and the need to provide the long-term look in the same way is probably really important as well?

Ms. Ashley Pardy-Serre: Absolutely.

Ms. Laura Mae Lindo: Thank you.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you. We'll move to the government side now. MPP Smith.

Mr. Dave Smith: Thank you very much. I'm going to echo a few of MPP Lindo's comments. Thank you very much for your service to the country. I agree with her completely that the federal Liberal government's cuts to veterans has been disgraceful. We need to be looking after people who are willing to put their name forward and put themselves in harm's way to help other people in this country.

With that in mind, your number-two request: There wasn't actually a dollar value attached to it. How much money are you envisioning, and how would you use that?

It simply says to consider “new funding to include military veterans in community preparedness.”

Mr. Bryan Riddell: What we’ve identified over the last 18 months is that there are a lot of opportunities to train and educate volunteers, especially in emergency management practices. One of the things that we’ve found is—and this extends to our northern communities. I can give you an example. When the Bearskin Lake issue presented itself, there was one member of a charity who was deployed up to that area. When we asked them, “What help do you need?”, they said, “We need people who understand incident command in emergency management, and we have one person on the ground.”

The ability and our ability to be able to even just send people in that have that understanding can help put a community at ease. Even outside of Team Rubicon’s specific mandate, I believe that there are opportunities for training and educating veterans and adding to the millions of dollars in training that they’ve already received, just to slightly transition their skills and their language into emergency management vernacular. I think that’s a big part of it.

In terms of dollar amount, there are organizations like ICS Canada that could provide this training for free for veterans if they were supported by additional funding. I think anything around the million-dollar range would be very effective for that. But I don’t believe it requires a significant investment.

Mr. Dave Smith: Thank you very much. I’m going to turn it over to some of my other colleagues who have questions.

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

Mr. Kaleed Rasheed: Bryan, thank you so very much for all your service to our country. As a grandson of a veteran myself, I can say that my grandfather was a proud, proud Canadian. In a word, thank you so much for your service.

My colleague Dave Smith actually stole my thunder. That was my question as well, about the funding. But I can tell you that my colleagues and I, here and I think all across the aisle, thank you so much, from the bottom of my heart, for the great service.

Mr. Bryan Riddell: It’s an honour to serve, and may I say thank you for your service, as well, to Ontarians.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you so much for—oh, another question. MPP Fee?

Mrs. Amy Fee: I’m obviously going to echo that as well. Thank you so much, both of you, for your service to our country. Supporting veterans has been something that has been a passion of mine for many years. I have many family members that have served in the military. My oldest daughter is a now a member of the air cadets at the Breslau airport, here in the area.

Mr. Bryan Riddell: Excellent.

Mrs. Amy Fee: She’s already talking—she’s 13 years old—about how she can join the reserves when she turns 16. She wants to go to RMC. It’s that passion, that drive, when she has met veterans, about how to support the community.

We’ve talked about the bigger things that you’ve helped out on when disasters have happened. Are there any smaller-type projects—you did mention stuff in the north about helping communities out—that you think, if money was invested, veterans could be helping out in?

Ms. Ashley Pardy-Serre: I can speak to that too. Community service projects: As a national organization and as an organization that’s very active in Ontario, we have a number of community service projects that we do throughout the year that are led by our local disaster response units. The one in Ottawa, for example, has been very active in helping in the aftermath of the Ottawa Valley floods—

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

LONDON AND DISTRICT LABOUR COUNCIL

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Next, I would like to call on the London and District Labour Council. Please come forward. Please state your name for the record. You will have seven minutes for your presentation.

Mr. Jeff Robinson: Jeff Robinson, executive board member with the London and District Labour Council.

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

Mr. Jeff Robinson: Thank you for the opportunity to speak today.

Conservative government policies have negatively affected Ontario’s high-quality public services, weakened our social safety net, undermined working conditions and the democracy of our workplaces, and have restricted access to justice for many Ontarians.

Government policies have failed to recognize the experiences of equity-seeking workers, and have endangered the health and safety of our workplaces and our communities.

The 2020 budget provides an important opportunity for the Conservative government to change course. We need a government that governs for the many, not the few. Ontario needs public services for all.

There is a significant risk that this fiscal plan will not provide enough resources to meet the need for key public services. Instead of generating more revenue to use for public services, this government’s regressive policy agenda will reduce revenues. It is time that the government ensures that big corporations and the wealthy contribute their fair share of taxes to increase revenues, and then uses those revenues to fully fund public services for everyone.

The government must change course to invest in and strengthen access to publicly delivered universal services and programs for all Ontarians; stop the privatization of our public services and assets; and guarantee professional-level wages for all public sector workers.

I’d now like to speak on a few topics that I find important for my community of London. The first is education.

The government’s current education strategy will undermine the quality of our public education system by

decreasing student funding, increasing class sizes and moving to mandatory e-learning. Instead of bargaining in good faith with teachers' unions, this government passed Bill 124, which infringes on the charter rights of workers to free and fair collective bargaining.

The government's plan on education is hurting families in our communities. Instead of going to work yesterday, my wife and I took our eight-year-old daughter to the picket line to walk with her elementary school teachers as they fight for a better education system for all. The support for the teachers in our communities is tremendous, and we were one of many families who came to walk the picket line in solidarity.

As an aside, it is important for me to mention that our family will not be accepting the compensation money that Premier Ford and Education Minister Lecce have offered to the parents affected or inconvenienced by these rotating strikes. This money should be put toward our world-class education system and not toward bribing parents to gain public support.

The government must remove its demands for increased class sizes and e-learning. These proposed changes are not in the best interests of our children and cannot be packaged as such.

To make Ontario a better place to work and live, everyone must have decent working conditions. In November 2018, the passing of Bill 47 wiped out many of the gains workers had made through Bill 148. For example, the \$15 minimum wage will be delayed until at least 2025. Two paid sick days for all workers, equal pay for equal work, fairer scheduling, and laws that would have made it easier for workers to join unions have all been taken away.

At my workplace in London, this has had a significant impact on our temporary workers. These workers do the same work as their full-time co-workers, day in and day out, but work for a much lower wage, without health benefits or sick days. Cancelling the equal-pay-for-equal-work provision costs these workers \$17 an hour.

This government must:

- ensure higher employment standards for everyone;
- ensure everyone who wants access to a union can access union protection. This includes providing access to workplace information when a union is engaged in an organizing drive, and extending card-based certification to all sectors;
- stop interfering in collective bargaining processes, like introducing back-to-work legislation, allowing replacement workers, and breaking contracts; and
- respect and uphold the right to free and fair collective bargaining.

On retirement security: Using my workplace as an example, on the surface my employer has never broken any Ontario pension laws, yet our defined benefit pension plan has a transfer ratio of just 0.56. This occurs because our employer is using money to advance their own business interests instead of paying down the \$230-million deficit of our pension plan.

This government needs to strengthen benefit security for existing pension plan members and increase the pension insurance coverage to reflect inflationary pressures and work with the federal government to prioritize pension funds over all other creditors in the case of bankruptcy.

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Everyone must be treated fairly. However, in the 2019 budget, the Ford government once again targeted immigrants and refugees, eliminating two thirds of the funding for refugee and immigration cases, forcing layoffs at Legal Aid Ontario, delaying justice through the courts and discouraging vulnerable people from seeking legal remedies.

We need the government to ensure access to justice for every Ontarian and examine all policy through an intersectional equity lens to eliminate systemic discrimination of all forms by challenging fascism, white supremacy, colonialism, racism, bigotry, misogyny, xenophobia, homophobia and transphobia in all forms.

We all deserve access to healthy, safe and sustainable communities and workplaces. WSIB statistics show that in 2018, 228 people died from a work-related injury or illness in Ontario, and lost-time injuries have increased by 33% since 2015. The importance of health and safety extends beyond our workplaces to our communities and our environment. The United Nations has declared that we are less than 10 years away from irreversible damage to our planet. Nonetheless, the Conservative government's inaugural move was to eliminate the cap-and-trade program and cancel 758 green energy contracts. As Greta Thunberg would say, "Our house is on fire."

The government must ensure healthy and safe workplaces and communities for all. They must:

- guarantee universal workers' compensation for every worker;
- expand the definition of occupational disease and compensable injuries so workers are treated fairly and without discrimination;
- abolish the unfair practice of deeming at the WSIB;
- properly fund workplace disability prevention initiatives;
- jail negligent employers for killing workers;
- secure clean air and water, and a sustainable environment for everyone; and
- achieve net-zero greenhouse gas emissions through a fair and just transition for all communities and workers.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you. Sorry to cut you off; the time has come—

Mr. Jeff Robinson: I'm done. I just want to say thank you.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you. We'll go to the government side this time for questioning. MPP Skelly.

Ms. Donna Skelly: Good morning. Thank you for your presentation. All of the points have been well documented, but we have no further questions.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): No further questions? We'll move to the opposition side. MPP Fife.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Thanks, Jeff, for coming from London to present to the budget committee. I'm told that this committee has heard from various labour councils from across the province, and the government has no questions of any of those delegations. But I do; I have a couple of questions. You heard earlier, the London Health Coalition speaking about the state of health care, and I know your members as well who are representative of front-line health care workers have been speaking through the district labour councils across this province as to the state of their working conditions, including workplace violence and obviously high stress and mental health issues. What are front-line workers telling you? Are they feeling secure with this government with the measures that they have taken with regard to worker rights? Obviously, they walked back minimum wage and sick days and vacation days. Do workers in the province of Ontario legitimately feel that they're being attacked by this government?

Mr. Jeff Robinson: Well, I think so. The first move was to cancel the green energy contracts, and I think the very next thing they turned their sights to was working people. They had a little tax break, but studies prove that the extra dollar increase was going to be much more beneficial for workers. I've already articulated what the equal pay for equal work provision has done in my workplace—\$17 an hour for those folks. It's enormous. It would have over doubled their wages. Having people go back to doctors for sick notes again, putting that burden on the health care system, having people come to work sick, because they have to choose between coming into work or paying their bills and putting food on the table, and spreading disease to other workers—no, I don't think the government has shown that they care about working people. By eliminating the increase to \$15, it goes after our most vulnerable people in society.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Thank you, also, for referencing the issue in education right now. This government clearly has, with Bill 124, which of course we opposed—we've been through this before. We've seen it before with Bill 115, when the government imposed a contract—at that point it was the Liberals who did this—and the education workers and their unions took the government to court and the government lost, because there's still this thing called contract law in the province of Ontario. So the government is going to lose this piece of legislation in the courts, and yet they're going to drag—

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

Ms. Catherine Fife:—our excellent education system through hell and back. They clearly have no exit strategy. Thoughts on education—and as a parent, really, because I appreciate the fact that you're going to be donating some of that money back to the education system.

Mr. Jeff Robinson: Yes, absolutely. My wife is a part-time worker in St. Joseph's hospital in London, and when the government took away something like emergency leave days—she had to take yesterday off unpaid. It's really hurting families, and for what? All the teachers are trying to do is protect the education system. My daughter doesn't want increased class sizes.

Ms. Catherine Fife: And mandatory e-learning.

Mr. Jeff Robinson: Of course not. She wants to be taught by a licensed professional in the classroom.

Ms. Catherine Fife: There are actually parts of Ontario that don't even have broadband; they can't even take e-learning. This government is imposing that.

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

KITCHENER-WATERLOO SYMPHONY ORCHESTRAS CANADA

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Our next presenter is from the Kitchener-Waterloo Symphony. Please come forward. Please state your name for the record. You will have seven minutes for your presentation.

Mr. Andrew Bennett: Good morning. My name is Andrew Bennett. I'm executive director of the Kitchener-Waterloo Symphony, which is the largest orchestra in this province outside of Toronto and Ottawa. I'm really grateful to have the opportunity to present.

I'm here today also as chair of the advocacy committee of Orchestras Canada, which is the national service organization for orchestras. Orchestras Canada has 65 members in Ontario, and we're making a written submission. Today I'm making a submission based on our local experience, but obviously I can refer also to the provincial situation more widely.

I'd like to start with talking a little bit about the way in which arts funding is done in this province. As I'm sure almost everybody here knows, provincial funding for the arts is made through the arm's-length Ontario Arts Council. I want to stress that that body is trusted and respected in the arts. They use rigorous processes to allocate funds, and when they make an award, it brings credibility to recipients.

In this region, the Ontario Arts Council application process is treated as a gold standard, insofar as the municipalities, in the way they allocate their own funds, use the OAC application process as the key reference. It tells you how valued it is. And everybody around this table is aware, I'm sure, that public spending on the arts is overwhelmingly popular with Ontarians.

Provincial funding is only part of the financial mix. In my organization, Kitchener-Waterloo Symphony, more than 70% of revenue is from ticket sales and from corporate and individual donors. Of the 28% from governments of all levels, about a quarter is from the province via the OAC.

It's easy to say, "Oh, well, it's not important." No, it is absolutely crucial. It bridges the gap to make our organization sustainable, and this sustained funding through the Ontario Arts Council allows us to succeed and to deliver.

Provincial funding supports jobs. Nearly 100 people in this community have the Kitchener-Waterloo Symphony as their main employer. It's a big deal for a lot of people. It's not just the art we deliver; it's the economic development we deliver locally.

We are, I think, really effective at forging partnerships in this community. For example, we worked with Wilfrid Laurier University, the faculty of music there, to deliver a semi-staged performance of the opera *Carmen*. There is no staged opera of any scale in this community. We achieved that with them in partnership. It was not just great for the audience, for those who were able to be there; it was also great in terms of having opportunities for those students to collaborate at a professional level.

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It's also the symphony, through employing very, very skilled musicians, that allows us to have musicians in this community who can, in turn, teach in the music faculty at Wilfrid Laurier University. The two things go together.

In the field of elementary and secondary education, the symphony is really valued for its extensive program of concerts, the pre-concerts we do for schools and the follow-up material, all of which enrich the experience of hearing the orchestra live, which is very much part of the experience right the way across this region.

Symphony orchestras are also, in very different ways, contributing to community building. I'm thinking of a couple of examples. One would be the simple way that, through our performances, we enliven downtown areas at night and provide a stimulus for other businesses. This very hotel in which we are today, every time the symphony gives a performance, will get extra room bookings. The economic multipliers are considerable and valued.

We're also extremely good at making new Canadians feel welcome in our community. There's an amazing 2018 study, titled *Culture Track*, which looks at the national situation regarding cultural activities right the way across Canada. It shows that, nationally, classical music events attract nearly twice the proportion of first- and second-generation Canadians as the rest of the population. It's quite remarkable that we are able to attract people directly and immediately, when they come to this country, to be part of a community in a very obvious and expressed way.

I think it's a myth, but a dangerous one, that orchestras and other large cultural organizations are only for certain sections of the community. Yes, we do have very high artistic standards—in the case of the symphony, elite musicians—but we actively welcome everyone. I'm fond of saying, "Look at the season brochure for Kitchener-Waterloo Symphony or any orchestra across this province, and see if there's nothing you find remotely interesting." In shameless promotion, I left a few copies here, not as an official submission but to test you. If you can't find something, please let me know, and we'll do something about it. I genuinely believe that orchestras are providing this, right the way across the community.

Similarly, we attract an amazing range of partners. For our Yuletide concerts, which happened a few weeks ago, we were able for the first time to put the newly formed Waterloo Region Mass Choir onstage here, a new gospel choir, who had a blast, and our audiences were delighted with their contribution.

So what are the opportunities in addition to the crucial investment made through the Ontario Arts Council? Other

parts of Canada are actively providing arts experiences for schoolchildren that go beyond pure educational delivery.

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

Mr. Andrew Bennett: The wider value of music is well documented.

Similarly, continued support from Trillium funding for start-up for new and scalable activities is very important.

Finally, corporate supporters, in particular, need more encouragement right across the province to help fund the arts. A matching scheme for significant corporate and individual donations at a provincial level would encourage the private sector to be even more generous. And, believe me, we need that.

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

Ms. Sandy Shaw: Thank you very much for your presentation this morning. I just feel compelled to make a plug for the Hamilton Philharmonic Orchestra. We're so proud of that orchestra and of the way it has been turned around under the direction of Diana Weir. Honestly, there has been so much excitement around orchestral music, with Gemma New, the conductor. It speaks to exactly what you're saying, that this is about city-building and having pride in the communities. It also certainly makes a good business case; there is the economic multiplier. We see it in Hamilton. We see it every time there's an orchestra.

I want to talk a little bit about what we've seen, which is recent cuts to arts funding through the Ontario Arts Council. If you could just speak a little bit about how those cuts have impacted what you're trying to do in this sector.

In your answer, because we have a short time, maybe you could touch on what I thought was the most egregious thing—that they cut the Indigenous Culture Fund. The millions of dollars that this government cut from the Indigenous Culture Fund was also part of a commitment to truth and reconciliation. So that wasn't just money that was cut; that was a promise that was cut that we would recognize our obligation under the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. If you could just talk, in the time that you have, about how the cuts are impacting you, and particularly how you see your organization rebounding from that.

Mr. Andrew Bennett: Certainly, as I said, it's a complex mix. I was struck by a local business leader, very well known in this region, who said that, having served as chair of the board of the symphony some years ago—he had worked across the financial sector and so forth—he had never seen anything quite as complex as the funding for a symphony orchestra. Every time you take one little piece away, you do damage to something else. It is incredibly complex, particularly the matching arrangements we have. If we get one amount of money from just one area, it allows us to attract money from another.

It has been disappointing, inevitably, that we were cut in funding from the Ontario Arts Council. We very much hope, at the very least, that can be reversed: the cut to all the clients of the Ontario Arts Council of 8%.

In a way, it's particularly difficult, not because it was a cut—which, of course, is problematic—but because it

effectively wiped out the increase in federal funding which we had received. In other words, the progress that we thought we could make in one area—effectively, we go back to square one. I think I can speak for all arts organizations in that respect.

We're very lucky at Kitchener-Waterloo Symphony that we have an artistic collaborator, Barbara Croall, who is from Odawa First Nation. She is our composer in residence. We do a huge amount of work, whether it be through her, through inviting an artist like Jeremy Dutcher to our Pops program—we've got a very healthy amount of work relating to First Nations culture, of which I am very proud. It would be lovely to be able to expend money—

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

Mr. Andrew Bennett:—in order to do more, but at the moment that isn't possible, for the reasons you've set out.

It would be great to have further partnerships in this region, particularly with Six Nations, based upon that. Again, that isn't possible. I just hope it will be in the near future.

Ms. Sandy Shaw: I would like to believe that this government understands and values arts and communities. In the short time we have left, if you had to make a pitch so that they understand the true value of the arts—not just the symphony—to communities, what would you say to the government?

Mr. Andrew Bennett: I would say: I would love you to have been there last Sunday at a Bridge to Music recital. Children from less economically favoured families were showing their skills as a result of a short program of training. There was music but there was also discipline, there was self-esteem and there were new pathways for success. We can deliver the last—

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

Mr. David Piccini: Thank you very much for your presentation. I'm an avid goer to Westben in Northumberland. I hear you on what you are saying. We are in a difficult position, given the deficit. If I think to my portfolio, we spend \$4 to service our debt for every dollar we spend on post-secondary education. Imagine if we could slightly get that balance in check, how much more we could invest in the arts with a credible path to balance.

I wanted to speak to you—you mentioned about post-secondary quickly. Of course, we launched independent Indigenous Institutes in the Quality Assurance Framework, which was part of truth and reconciliation under the Indigenous framework. I just want to talk about that relationship with post-secondary, be it Indigenous or be it Wilfrid Laurier. I spoke to Deborah MacLatchy about the work she's doing with you, and full credit for that. I'm wondering what else we could do maybe to scale that around the province, with our post-secondary institutes.

Mr. Andrew Bennett: I think anything that gives support to partnership building is, of course, very welcome.

I think that, clearly in the case of—specifically, you referred to Indigenous communities and Indigenous education—in the same way as the symphony, which is to

listen to what Indigenous people actually want, with humility and with active listening, then I think that's equally important: that one listens to what people actually say they need rather than deciding for them. I think there has been possibly a little tradition of that—

Mr. David Piccini: Agreed.

Mr. Andrew Bennett:—which is not to be encouraged.

Certainly, at the symphony, we want to listen to people and work with them. I would say that anything that can be done to facilitate the work of, particularly, the arts and humanities funding within universities will only have positive impacts for organizations like the symphony.

Mr. David Piccini: I'll turn it over to my colleague. The community impact piece and the outcomes-based funding that we're shifting to will incentivize local partnerships. So off-line, I would be keen to take your model and perhaps apply it across the province.

Mr. Andrew Bennett: I'm happy to do the same.

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

Mr. Kaled Rasheed: Thank you, Andrew, for your presentation. As part of the budget consultation, what's the dollar amount or what's the funding you're looking for for your program over here?

Mr. Andrew Bennett: I think I'm going to say simply that the written submission from Orchestras Canada will expressly cover that, so I think—

Mr. Kaled Rasheed: But if I may ask—

Mr. Andrew Bennett: Certainly, for my organization—

Mr. Kaled Rasheed: Yes, for your organization.

Mr. Andrew Bennett: For my organization, I would love to see an immediate reversal of the cut of 8% to our grant of approximately \$380,000 a year from the Ontario Arts Council. If that could be achieved in the current year, that would be a huge step forward.

Mr. Kaled Rasheed: So \$380,000 you're looking for?

Mr. Andrew Bennett: No, the 8% for just my organization.

Mr. Kaled Rasheed: Okay, 8%.

Mr. Andrew Bennett: It's a small amount of money in the sea, but I appreciate it's got to be part of a provincial plan.

Mr. Kaled Rasheed: Thank you, Chair. I think my colleague over here—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Any further question? MPP Smith.

Mr. Dave Smith: Thank you very much for that. Katherine Carleton is the executive director of Orchestras Canada. She's actually in my riding. We've had a few conversations. She said to me that—and I'm touching on something you had brought up in your earlier testimony—that there's an economic impact whenever you have any of your events.

There isn't a tool, though, that is designed specifically for an arts- or culture-based event to show the economic impact of it. There are tools specifically for sporting events; there are tools for other things like that. Is there

something that you know of, then, that could be used to demonstrate what that actual impact is? Because it then strengthens your case to say that we need to be investing in that because there is such a high return.

Mr. Andrew Bennett: Absolutely. We use the local regional tourism multiplier to calculate exactly—to estimate, obviously—what the economic impact is in our area. That, dollar for dollar, is, I think—

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

ADVANTAGE ONTARIO

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): We'll move to our next presenter from AdvantAge Ontario. Please come forward. Please state your names for the record. You will have seven minutes for your presentation.

Ms. Jane Sinclair: Good morning. My name is Jane Sinclair. I'm the board chair of AdvantAge Ontario and general manager of health and emergency services for the county of Simcoe. I'm here with Lisa Levin, who is the chief executive officer for AdvantAge Ontario. We want to start by thanking you very much for this opportunity to present this morning.

AdvantAge Ontario has been the trusted voice of senior care for 100 years. We are the only provincial association that represents the full spectrum of seniors' care, giving us a unique perspective on how, together, we can best meet the needs of Ontarians. Our members include municipal, charitable and not-for-profit long-term-care homes, retirement and supportive housing, as well as seniors' community service providers.

The challenge that we face: Today I would like to speak about our 2020 pre-budget submission, *The Way Forward*. We called it that because it sets out recommendations that will take us forward to the 21st-century seniors' care system. I encourage you to read our full submission, but today I will focus on our three key recommendations.

But before that, I'd like to say that we have been very pleased to work closely with this government to address our shared priorities in seniors' care, but we know there's still much to do. In Ontario, seniors now outnumber children under the age of 15. By 2046, they will represent nearly a quarter of our population.

We need to work together to be prepared. Already we are seeing the impact of this enormous demographic change. Some Ontarians are unable to access supports they need at home. Long-term-care wait-lists have hit a record high. Too many seniors unnecessarily take up hospital beds while people with acute care needs are treated in hallways.

The health human resources crisis is challenging in urban areas and it's desperate in rural Ontario. We simply do not have enough people to provide front-line care, and people on the front lines are often prevented from delivering effective and compassionate care by overly prescriptive regulation and red tape. This deters health professionals from coming into the seniors' care sector, and

the staff who do must spend precious time on documentation and compliance in areas that do not benefit resident care. As this government works to cut red tape, long-term care can and should be a priority area. Certainly, there is a significant opportunity to eliminate cumbersome regulation while protecting residents and improving care.

The government has taken some important, positive actions in the last year:

- allocating more than half the promised new long-term-care beds needed;

- committing to a long-term-care staffing strategy;

- investing in home care and community services, including seniors' supportive housing; and

- creating a dedicated Ministry of Long-Term Care.

These are very promising changes.

Now it's time to take the next step on the way forward to meet Ontario seniors' needs.

Our way forward: Our first recommendation is more people to care for people. This is a very important recommendation. We need more people to provide this care. Ontario seniors can't get the care and support they need without qualified, compassionate people on the front lines to provide it.

The province should work with system partners to develop and implement a health human resources strategy that addresses the needs of seniors wherever they live. In our submission, we put forward a number of tactics, including providing tuition relief and on-the-job training for people studying to be health professionals, eliminating barriers employers face in hiring and deploying staff, and cutting red tape that takes workers away from front-line care.

Our second recommendation is funding stability. We need funding stability to improve care. Under the current, overly complex model, long-term-care homes are subject to major annual funding swings. This can lead to layoffs and reduced levels of care, even when residents' needs grow. On top of this, the current model perversely reduces funding to homes as resident outcomes improve, penalizing them for providing better care and creating more independence. The province should work with the sector to stabilize long-term-care funding, and this must include inflationary increases to keep pace with the rising cost of providing complex care.

Our third and final recommendation this morning is for support for continuums of care. We need to encourage and support new models of integrated and person-centred seniors' care in the community. Not every senior will need long-term care as their independence declines. However, the reality is that there are few options for Ontarians as they age other than long-term care, limited public-funded home care and retirement homes for those who can afford them.

We need to fill the missing middle with a strong community support sector and robust supply of affordable supportive housing options. Seniors' campuses are another innovative option that bring different kinds of care, supports and housing together in one location. This creates vibrant communities where people can easily transition as their care needs grow.

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

Ms. Jane Sinclair: Flexible regulation and reduced red tape will help spread innovations like campuses.

In closing, government is already demonstrating its commitment to strengthening seniors' care. These and our other recommendations will build on this momentum to make Ontario the best place in the world to grow old.

Our association has 100 years of experience responding to the needs of seniors. We know the way forward to a 21st-century seniors' care system, where our grandparents, parents and future generations can age gracefully in their homes. We are eager to continue to work with this government, partners, residents and families to make that a reality.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you so much. We'll start off with questions from the government side. MPP Fee?

Mrs. Amy Fee: First of all, thank you for being here this morning. I'm just wondering if we can go to PSWs' situation. To me, it's something that I've been advocating for, and something that I really want to see, that people who enter into the field feel supported, that they're there because they want to be there to help people, and that they feel like the community is around them. I think we're seeing a lot of burnout around PSWs. We're seeing a lot of the struggling around PSWs. I'm just wondering about your thoughts around what our government can do to make sure that we are supporting our PSWs.

Ms. Jane Sinclair: Thank you for that question. We think there are a lot of opportunities to work with the government, to partner to address the shortage in personal support workers. In my community in the country of Simcoe, we have four long-term-care homes. We are the top choice, right at the top of the application list, a reputable employer. We average nine PSW shortages every single day in our four long-term-care homes. It is a critical situation for all of us across the province.

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There are a number of opportunities that we can partner with this government around supporting more people to enter into the field of personal support workers—so looking at tuition support and looking at abilities for people to learn on the job. In early childhood education, for example, under social services, there are apprenticeship programs, and there are funding grants through the local community colleges, to help support people who are interested in entering into that field. There's a great opportunity for us to partner with this government.

We can also look at the Ministry of Education and our secondary school level and focus on our youth, building co-op programs in high schools, where these young individuals can get experience working in long-term-care homes, look at the fulfilling nature of the work and be a step closer in terms of a micro-credentialling-type opportunity to work towards a full PSW designation. So there are a number of different opportunities, we feel, and we're looking forward to working with this government on them.

Ms. Lisa Levin: If I could just add to that piece as well: One of the reasons PSWs are so burnt out is because the

funding hasn't increased as the acuity in the homes has increased dramatically. That's why one of our asks is to increase funding for more hours of care in long-term care.

Mrs. Amy Fee: Thank you.

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

Mr. David Piccini: Thank you very much. I appreciate the collaborative approach you've taken to working with the government. Obviously, there's a lot of work to be done on long-term care. I know that the 7,800 PSWs are a step in the right direction, but there's a lot more to be done.

You spoke about the campus-of-care model. I know, in my conversations with Algonquin College in Ottawa—they've got a great partnership they're looking at with Perley Rideau. That's a city that has the benefit of a post-secondary institution to partner with for the HR training component. But in rural Ontario—talk to me a bit about what you would love to see that campus look like.

Ms. Jane Sinclair: Absolutely. Thank you for that question. I can speak from our experience from the county of Simcoe. Much of the county is rural. One of our four long-term-care homes—approximately five years ago, we redeveloped and we built an entire campus continuum for seniors. We have an expanded long-term-care home, affordable housing for seniors, life lease apartment suites, garden homes and retirement living. We have seen such huge success with that model.

It not only reduced the tax levy for the local residents—year 1, by approximately \$400,000—but through that model we are serving seniors not only their housing needs but their personal support needs. We're doing it within a campus and we're promoting a social component that really is not spoken about much, and it is a very important component of your health.

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

Ms. Catherine Fife: Lisa and Jane, thank you for your presentation. It's so timely right now, I think. We really are at a tipping point in the province of Ontario with senior care. Even last night, the city of Brampton declared a state of health care emergency because they lack long-term care and they lack primary care as well.

Your point around too many seniors unnecessarily taking up hospital beds: Never before have we had a such a clear picture of what these numbers look like. The city of Ottawa, for instance, spends \$1.8 million a week on seniors who are ALC patients who should be in long-term-care. There's actually an economic and financial case to be made for investing in long-term care, and yet we've seen a resistance or a reluctance on the part of this government to approve the licensing. We see this as a major barrier. Perhaps it's because they're giving some thought to the senior care campus model, which, I have to say, is the future for seniors. Thank you for validating it in your presentation. It is so important.

Do you have some sense as to, when you were talking with the government, why these licences have not been approved, especially in rural communities? I just came from ROMA, which is your rural municipalities, and they

are desperately asking for the licensing approvals to be fast-tracked. They've been sitting there for a year and a half. The government has only reannounced those Liberal beds. Do you have some sense as to what the holdup is?

Ms. Jane Sinclair: With long-term-care redevelopment, I think there's a long history of red tape and bureaucracy in terms of fast-tracking and getting those beds built and opened. I think this government has made that commitment to expand the number of beds. We're really excited about that. They have committed to working with us to reduce some of that red tape and trying to fast-track. We're very excited about that commitment and we want to work with them. I know currently there is a call for new bed proposals, and I can speak for ourselves within the county of Simcoe that we have submitted, we are eagerly awaiting and looking forward—

Ms. Catherine Fife: Can you tell me when you submitted that? When did you submit your application?

Ms. Jane Sinclair: Just within the last two months. We have been working with the staff at the provincial level to ensure we have all the data for the submission and just have completed the process of submission.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Because we have not-for-profit homes here—in Cambridge, 68 beds. Forest Heights has been waiting for a year and a half. Parkwood has 38 beds for a dementia unit, which I know are desperately needed across the province. They have 38 beds.

I just want to let you know that the care campus model is the model that we are very supportive of. I also want the government members to hear that as well. My bill, Till Death Do Us Part, will also ensure that seniors are not separated in that model.

We can actually build long-term care right, but to date there has been no overall vision for how seniors are to be cared for. The PSW piece is very much a needed piece of that. We agree with all your points why PSWs are leaving the sector or not entering the sector. They've certainly been taken for granted for too long, and that time has to change.

Ms. Jane Sinclair: Thank you for those comments.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Thank you very much.

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

ONTARIO GOOD ROADS ASSOCIATION

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Next, I would like to call on the Ontario Good Roads Association. Please come forward. Please state your name for the record. You will have seven minutes for your presentation.

Mr. Scott Butler: Seven?

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Yes.

Mr. Scott Butler: My name is Scott Butler. I'm the manager of policy and research for the Ontario Good Roads Association. We are a municipal association of 430-odd municipalities, and for 126 years we have been representing transportation and infrastructure interests to our provincial colleagues at Queen's Park, as well as our federal colleagues on Parliament Hill.

MPP Fife just brought up a reference to ROMA, and I'd like to start there. I read with a great deal of interest the Premier's speech at ROMA as well as his comments afterwards to the media. He promised the municipal sector no surprises. I think that's perhaps somewhat short-sighted, because he also compared himself to Santa Claus. He said he felt like Santa Claus. Even in this sort of hyper-partisan time, I would like to think that Santa Claus provides positive surprises, not just negative surprises, to the people of Ontario.

In that spirit, like Santa, once a year, I find myself here to offer up really great surprises in the hopes and expectations that my esteemed colleagues at Queen's Park may seize on them and bring them to fruition.

That said, I want to talk about three things. I want to talk about road safety, I want to talk about asset management planning at the municipal level, and I'd like to talk about project bundling. In almost as long as Santa has been delivering presents, I feel I've been here appealing for project bundling to take off in this province.

Essentially what we're asking for is the province to provide some leadership that says to the municipal sector, "We'll work with you to formulate projects that do what IO does on a grand scale every day." Municipal projects tend not to be nearly as capital-intensive, for the most part, in this province, certainly not to the extent that IO would be interested. But if you begin aggregating all of those projects—think about something like bridges. They lend themselves quite nicely to this sort of approach. What we've seen in leading jurisdictions—in the United States, in subnational jurisdictions—is that it's possible to do this and realize some significant savings.

When we first came forward in 2013, we said that our model demonstrated savings in the neighbourhood of 13% to 20%, looking simply at bridges. If we were able to get a critical mass of municipal assets together, put them into a single tender and put them out, we thought we'd realize that.

What's happened in the interim is that a lot of the barriers that were in place in 2013 have been resolved by municipalities. Their data are in much better standing. We can provide much greater certainty than the private sector. More interestingly, examples such as the most recent one completed in Oregon have shown that it can be done in a way that supports small and medium enterprise within these communities, where these initiatives are likely to take place.

1030

When we look at the assets that municipalities or other public sector institutions have at their disposal—I know that the Minister of Education has talked about schools as being one opportunity; certainly bridges and culverts are another significant opportunity that are ripe for capitalizing on.

With regard to road safety: Again, going back a year ago to the 2019 ROMA conference, the Premier announced—I think to considerable fanfare and interest in the municipal sector—that he was ready to move forward on reforming joint and several liability. As one might

expect when one dips their toes into the realms of personal injury lawyers, things get complicated rather quickly, and what we've seen is that the intention is there and the desire is there to modify this aspect of tort law, but what's happening is that it's becoming increasingly difficult—

Interruption.

Interjection: My apologies. Sorry.

Mr. Scott Butler: No worries.

What I would say is that road safety is fundamentally predicated on municipal fiscal well-being. What we know is that when accidents happen in roadways, they're expensive to litigate. They're expensive to settle. Vision Zero does offer a way not to address the tort aspect of the law, but to simply prevent those accidents from occurring in the first place.

We met with many of you as part of our advocacy day, asking for the province to take steps forward on this, and we were heartened to see the support we received from the Associate Minister of Transportation and the Minister of Transportation, and more recently even comments coming from the Premier himself, indicating that this is a priority. A very small investment that would bring together a round table of experts to provide some advice about how we can do this in a quick and effective way would be a prudent expenditure on the province's part. It would benefit municipalities and it would address that underlying concern that joint and several liability keeps hanging over the heads of the municipalities.

Finally, asset management planning: We were the instigators of the regulation when it came forward. We still believe in it wholly. It's fundamentally the right thing to do, for the right reason. What we're now seeing, as we enter year 3 or 4, depending on how you account for time, is that asset management planning is becoming more complex—we knew this; it's part of the regulation—and municipalities are confronted with a horizon on July 1, 2024, where they're going to be obligated to report out in ways that are beyond their means currently.

Asset management plans do function as insurance policies for the provincial sector. We fundamentally maintain that that is the case. They provide you with—

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

Mr. Scott Butler: —the insights you need to make prudent decisions and to make the right decisions at the right time. It is incumbent upon all parties, both the province and municipalities, to make sure that those plans are as robust as possible.

What we're seeing is that smaller municipalities are burdened by the double jeopardy of having very complex assets and small populations to support this process. We would like to see the province come forward with further supports that allow municipalities to dedicate resources specifically to those asset management plans.

With that, I wish everyone a merry budget season.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you. We'll start with the opposition side for questioning. MPP Fife.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Thanks very much, Scott, for being here. Yes, the Santa Claus comment at ROMA did not go over very well, I have to say—

Mr. Scott Butler: I unfortunately wasn't there; I just read it.

Ms. Catherine Fife: —nor did the promise of an increase of 50% in certain road maintenance projects when that road maintenance project is zero; 50% of zero still is zero.

Mr. Scott Butler: That's my understanding of math.

Ms. Catherine Fife: But also, just to your points around asset management, transparency and predictability, which municipalities actually need: You will have seen the draft transit plan that was announced last Friday by the Minister of Transportation. They've moved away from five-year capital plans, which were open and transparent. They have a draft plan which is out for draft comments on the comments that they already drafted.

I guess my question to you is: From a good-roads perspective, when municipalities and the provincial government have already invested—for instance, Highway 7. You know, Highway 7—Groundhog Day?

Mr. Scott Butler: Yes, I do.

Ms. Catherine Fife: We've already spent \$120 million on this project, both municipally and provincially—on land expropriation, on design, on bridges—and yet that project is now very far down the line. Can you speak to the economic impact of a government that is so haphazard around how they plan transit or how they make decisions around which projects receive funding? We have some concerns around that process.

Mr. Scott Butler: I would say that no one party has exclusive domain over interfering in the political aspirations or the infrastructure or the transit aspirations of the municipal sector. We've seen it time and time again, going back to Confederation, frankly.

If we look at this in a non-partisan way and with an eye towards identifying a solution, asset management planning is the one vehicle that municipalities have to be able to do this. It's predicated on sound engineering. It's predicated on astute capital forecasting and budgeting implications. It builds in things like maintenance cycles.

If there was a way that we could give priority to those decisions—because those plans are ratified by council. They're democratic documents, fundamentally. If we could protect those decisions and allow municipalities to move forward when they've made those difficult decisions, when they've established those priorities, knowing that we're doing so in a way that is founded in democratic principles and is founded in the sound science of engineering and transparent accounting principles—it's in everyone's best interest.

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

Mr. Scott Butler: We struggle to get people moving, and yet at the same time we have very little reluctance to interfere with decisions that have been made. It is, I think, from a governance perspective, one of the most challenging aspects that municipalities are confronted with today.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Yes, and thanks for your comment on Vision Zero. That's helpful for us.

Joint and several liability: Nothing is happening with that. That is in a dead zone, as far as I was concerned.

There was almost no mention of it at ROMA. Consistently over the last eight years, it has been an ask of government. Obviously, municipalities are bearing the brunt of that lack of leadership at the provincial level.

Mr. Scott Butler: Yes. I would say that the municipal sector has gotten together and put together a task force to provide some recommendations. Even though we're the ones pushing for this—

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

Mr. Scott Butler: I'm going to take the time, because I got cut off there, just to finish this question.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): They're out of time, so we have to move to the government side for their time of questioning now.

Mr. Jeremy Roberts: I'm happy to give to him 10 seconds.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Sure. Go ahead.

Mr. Scott Butler: What we've realized is that this conversation is much more difficult than even we appreciated at first, because fundamentally we want to make sure people are protected when they're hurt. We don't want to put anybody in a position of being compromised because of changes we've imposed. Justice is difficult.

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

Mr. Dave Smith: I want to go back to your asset management comment. You had said that July 1, 2024, is when the reporting needs to be done and you don't think the smaller municipalities are going to be a position where they're going to be able to do it. You had said that you were looking for some support here, but you hadn't defined specifically what type of support you're doing.

Before you answer it, I do have to make an anecdotal note on it that when I was first elected, I was very surprised when talking to my different municipalities about what some of their needs were and they couldn't tell me what they actually had for assets, the lifespan of them, where they stood in it and what their expectation was on how soon they were going to have to replace and repair and what the lifespans would be. So I'm very interested in your take on specifically what type of support you're looking for for asset management for those smaller municipalities.

Mr. Scott Butler: Okay. To your point about not understanding what they own and what state it's in—yes. That was the reason we actually went and engaged the province to begin doing this. It's good public policy to have this in place. There were a number of steps that allowed that state of affairs to be realized, but time was up on it. We needed to move forward. We knew we were on the right side of history there.

1040

The 2024 horizon takes asset management planning, really, from a rudimentary aspect and begins imposing a new set of obligations on the municipal sector. They have to think about things like levels of service. There is lots of technical detail in there.

In terms of support, I think, quite simply, there is no one tool that's going to work for the 375 municipalities that would be OCIF-eligible communities, aside from

money. Under a matching program, there may be a determination to bring staff on board. There may be a decision to engage third-party vendors to do some of this work for them. They may just simply need to upgrade some of their IT services. There are lots of options available. But I think that if we were able to come up with some predictable funding that gets specifically dedicated to asset management planning, the actual practice of the planning, the benefit would be accrued pretty quickly to both the province and to the municipal sector.

Mr. Dave Smith: So how much money are you looking for us to add?

Ms. Scott Butler: Well, when we ran the numbers initially, and this was about three years ago, we were looking at—I mean, this was grand, you guys picking up the tab for everything, because you put the regulations on us—it would be \$175 million over seven years. Obviously a lot has changed in that time. Municipalities have begun doing a lot of this work. We'd have to go back and look at what the numbers would look like on a go-forward basis, accounting for activities that have already occurred. It would be less than that, I assure you.

Mr. Dave Smith: It's difficult to put a dollar value in the budget if we don't have a dollar value asked for. That's why I'm asking that.

Mr. Scott Butler: I don't have that in front of me right now. I could put the \$175 million in and we'd all be benefactors of it, but I'd like to think, when we're saying that everything is predicated on good accounting principles, that we'd be providing the same. Yes, we could quickly crunch those numbers.

Mr. Dave Smith: Thank you. I appreciate that.

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

CITIZENS' CLIMATE LOBBY

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Moving along to our next presenter, from Citizens' Climate Lobby: Please come forward. Please state your name for the record: You will have seven minutes for our presentation.

Ms. Caterina Lindman: Thank you. My name is Caterina Lindman. I'm from Citizens' Climate Lobby. I'm the leader of the KW chapter.

I'd like to start with a land acknowledgement. We are on the traditional lands of the Attawandaron, Anishinaabe and Haudenosaunee peoples. Right now we're sitting on the Haldimand tract, the land six miles on either side of the Grand River, which was promised in perpetuity to the Six Nations confederacy for their role in the American Revolutionary Wars.

Of that 950,000 acres of land, less than 5% is in Indigenous control. In 2006, Six Nations protested the Douglas Creek Estates development. Eventually Ontario bought the land for \$1 million from the developer, and negotiations on that site continue. I just bring that forward because a land acknowledgement isn't just about something in the past; we can always bring it to today, and it's a call to action.

It's also important to note the following five facts about climate change. We're on track, if we continue with business as usual, to hit 4 degrees of warming, if we continue to rely on fossil fuels. Four degrees of warming is much worse than it sounds. According to the World Bank, devastating impacts on agriculture, water resources, ecosystems and human health will follow. Sea levels might rise by up to three metres by the end of the century. Hunger, disease, wildfires—an example: Australia has wildfires and we're only at 1.2 degrees Celsius right now.

So it's a cause for worry, and feedback loops can make it worse. Example: As the ice melts in the Arctic, it takes in more heat. It's absorbed in the oceans instead of reflecting that heat back from the white ice surface. The methane could be released if the tundra thaws, and that would increase the warming even more. As there's more heat, that creates more water vapour, and water vapour itself traps more heat. So it's a feedback loop that we don't really want to get into. Feedbacks are not necessarily inevitable, but the problem is urgent. Carbon dioxide stays in the atmosphere for thousands of years, so the number to focus on is our total cumulative carbon emissions. As a result, we need to leave most fossil fuels in the ground.

Currently, if you think of what our carbon budget is, to stay at 2 degrees, we're going to blow past that target in the next 15 to 30 years. Canada has pledged to go carbon-neutral by 2050. That's 30 years away. That might be a little too late. What if we burn through the carbon budget in 15 years? That's 2035. So we need to take some drastic action. That's why there have been some declarations of climate emergency, notably in the Waterloo region and Canada as a whole. Because we need to leave most of the world's fossil fuels in the ground—particularly the tar sands, as they are more energy-intensive to extract and upgrade them to other sources. Ontario's budget needs to reflect this reality.

What can we do to keep our climate system within safe limits? There are lots of things we can do to transform our economy into one that respects nature, Indigenous peoples and communities. A lot of them have to do with how we count things. I'm an actuary by profession—I'm retired. We always thought that we could influence behaviour through economic incentives. What we tended to pay agents to do, they would do. I definitely see a strong link between how we set things up economically and what actions and what behaviours we get.

These are going to be radical proposals, but that's the direction we need. We're in a desperate situation with the climate crisis. It seems like everyone is waiting for someone else to act. We need to take leadership. I would like to see the Ontario government include the value of ecosystem services in the annual provincial budget. Without this accounting, the ecosystem can be destroyed without it counting for anything. Right? That's one of the big flaws of our capitalistic system. Environmental and climate degradation has real-world consequences, so it should not be hidden or free.

Citizens' Climate Lobby, with respect to fossil fuels, advocates for the elimination of fossil fuel subsidies.

Subsidies make fossil fuels less expensive. What is missing are the costs in terms of causing climate breakdown. Fossil fuel subsidies need to be stopped. This money should then be redirected into transitioning infrastructure to use less carbon; for example, retrofits, robust public transportation and so on.

We also advocate for a strong price on carbon. That strong price is reflecting the damage it's doing. Is there anything more problematic than destroying the life system of the world that supports human life and also other creatures? It has got to be a really high cost. With a strong price on carbon, the money should be returned to households.

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

Ms. Caterina Lindman: Thank you.

This protects lower-income people from price increases, and it's also fair. You pay according to how much you pollute, and every person gets an equal share of the revenue. It gives everyone a financial incentive to lower their carbon footprint, and it gives the signal to business to create low-carbon alternatives. It would also stop companies from investing in fossil fuel infrastructure because it would become uneconomic. That's the type of leadership we're looking for from the Ontario government.

The other thing I'd note is that the Oxford food study found that 83% of the land is used for animal agriculture and only provides 18% of our calories. So it makes more ecological sense to shift more to a plant-based diet, and if it was a whole-food, plant-based diet, that has good health outcomes as well. The Ontario government spends a lot of money on health care—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you. Sorry to cut you off. We'll have to move to the government side for their time of questioning. MPP Roberts?

Mr. Jeremy Roberts: Thank you so much for your presentation.

Two questions for you. As part of our government's environment plan, one of the things that we've launched, as I'm sure you're aware, is our first province-wide, multi-sector climate change impact study, to try to identify what the impacts are going to be specifically on communities, and to try to figure out some ways that we can mitigate some of those changes that are coming.

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I'm just wondering if you have any input for us on different things that we should be looking at across the Kitchener-Waterloo and surrounding area that could provide some feedback as we continue to develop that plan.

Ms. Caterina Lindman: I think that in farming communities, there are some ways to mitigate the impacts of farming. We should transition away from chemical fertilizers, because those rely on fossil fuels, and go to organic farming. I think there's a lot of good work being done on no-till agriculture, the use of bio-char, cover crops, rotation and so on.

Dianne Saxe proposed, when she was the environmental officer, that people be given a 5% crop insurance premium reduction if they plant cover crops, because that keeps live roots in the soil year-round, which helps prevent erosion, so then it pays for itself because of less damage.

Mr. Jeremy Roberts: Great. I appreciate that input. My second question is whether or not your organization is supportive of nuclear power as part of a move towards making Ontario's energy makeup carbon-emission-free.

Ms. Caterina Lindman: I guess we're nuclear-power agnostic. We want a true price on fossil fuels, and then the market can decide.

Having said that, personally, I see some of these retrofits just not making economic sense. Refurbishing aging nuclear reactors—it looks to me like an investment in solar or wind would be more economically viable.

Mr. Jeremy Roberts: I appreciate that input. I believe my colleague has questions.

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

Mr. David Piccini: I just want to build on the refurbishment. You said “not viable.” Do you know what percentage of our power right now is nuclear—right now on Gridwatch?

Ms. Caterina Lindman: A lot of it. No, I don't have—

Mr. David Piccini: The reality, the tough piece—what I grapple with, because I hear you—is that it's 70% plus. Refurbishment—if we're serious about transitioning to a carbon-neutral economy, the fastest way to get us there is through nuclear power. It's not only a phenomenal job creator; looking at small modular nuclear reactors, SMRs, it presents an immense opportunity for us to power and to support the northern communities and rural communities that we visited this week.

You're still agnostic? There's no way we can bring you over to see the light, as it were?

Ms. Caterina Lindman: I guess I'm not saying absolutely not, right? I thought that was—

Mr. David Piccini: Okay.

Ms. Caterina Lindman: The Ontario Clean Air Alliance: Have you heard of them, and are you familiar with their arguments?

Mr. David Piccini: Yes.

Ms. Caterina Lindman: I'm quite persuaded by those, personally. But the Citizens' Climate Lobby is agnostic.

Mr. David Piccini: Okay. Thank you.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Mr. Smith, you have 30 seconds.

Mr. Dave Smith: Just on the nuclear refurbishment as well: When we're refurbishing the reactors, we're doing things that hadn't been done in the past, and it creates other opportunities for us, like cobalt-60, cobalt-90 and so on, the medical isotopes that we were not producing in Ontario previously. The technology has changed, and when we refurbish the reactors, we're actually introducing that as an option as well. Now we have the ability to have our medical isotopes 100% made here in Ontario.

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

Mr. Ian Arthur: Good morning, and thank you for your presentation and for coming in. I want to talk about some of the broader things. Transitioning to a clean energy

mix—I don't think there's a lot of debate that that desperately needs to be done.

You spoke briefly about the carbon budget and the time frame that we have left in terms of making sure that we stay under that carbon budget.

When I'm speaking—deniers aside—with skeptics of what we have to do, two of the most common points raised are that we only account for 1.6% of global emissions in Ontario, and how are we going to achieve any of these goals if China continues to emit?

But China is making some remarkable moves. They're actually cancelling planned coal plants left, right and centre, because they're transitioning so quickly to a clean economy. They're building nuclear, yes, but they're also the most rapidly expanding area of green energy, solar and wind, on the entire planet, and they're about to leapfrog the rest of the planet: \$300 billion has been invested into solar in China.

Could you elaborate on the economic drivers, and do you think that our backing away from that transition is actually going to hurt us economically in the long run?

Ms. Caterina Lindman: Sure. I guess the common thing—“Oh, Canada's only 1.6% of the problem,” but we're less than 1.6% of the people, so on a per capita basis, we definitely have—

Mr. Ian Arthur: We're some of the worst offenders in the world, actually.

Ms. Caterina Lindman: Yes. We're some of the worst offenders, right.

The other part of your question was—yes. There are, I guess, three big factors with the transition to clean energy. One is, if and when the governments actually say, “We're going to do Paris, and we actually mean it. We mean what we say; we said what we mean,” and so on, then that is going to create a lot of stranded assets. That's a problem with fossil fuel infrastructure.

Secondly, oil is getting more and more expensive, so there are higher costs associated with getting the last drops of oil. The tar sands are a prime example of that.

Thirdly, the cost of renewables keeps going down. That's another economic driver. Even the BlackRock announcement about a week ago, that the largest investment fund in the world—Mr. Fink has said, “We're going to start taking the environment seriously when we invest.”

Mr. Ian Arthur: Certainly, before the cancellation of the cap-and-trade program, Ontario—and Toronto, specifically—was poised to become the green investment capital of the world in terms of dollars that were coming in to put into green tech on a global scale. So by cancelling that program, we have actually shut the door on a huge amount of economic opportunity. Do you think that sort of policy, frankly, is stuck in the past and not looking to protect the economic futures of Ontarians?

Ms. Caterina Lindman: Oh, absolutely, yes. We want to keep a safe planet. That's number one. Our economics should be lined up with that.

Mr. Ian Arthur: I also agree with you from an environmental perspective, but I think that it's particularly important for this government to hear the economic costs

that our actions are actually having on this province—not necessarily in the immediate short term, but they’re going to continue to be exaggerated as we feel the repercussions of these decisions down the road.

Ms. Caterina Lindman: Yes.

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

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

WATERLOO REGION HOME BUILDERS’ ASSOCIATION

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Our next presenter is from the Waterloo Region Home Builders’ Association. Please come forward. Please state your names for the record. You will have seven minutes for the presentation.

Ms. Maria Kyveris: Hi. I’m Maria Kyveris from the Waterloo Region Home Builders’ Association.

Mr. Mike Collins-Williams: I’m Mike Collins-Williams from the Ontario Home Builders’ Association.

Ms. Maria Kyveris: Mr. Chairman, members of the committee, good morning. My name is Maria Kyveris. I serve as the president of the Waterloo Region Home Builders’ Association. In my professional capacity, I am the vice-president of building and land development at PK Custom Homes.

Joining me is OHBA director of policy Mike Collins-Williams. OHBA represents 4,000 member companies organized into a network of 29 local home builders’ associations, including our 170 members here at Waterloo Region Home Builders.

I want to thank you for the opportunity to speak about our budget priorities and most importantly to speak on behalf of aspiring home believers that seek the Canadian dream of home ownership.

Here locally, we applaud the government’s Housing Supply Action Plan and Bill 108, the More Homes, More Choice Act, as a measure to address housing affordability and choice for consumers. Our local members, however, continue to report the influx of buyers coming from the GTA to look for housing opportunities that either aren’t available or aren’t affordable in their local communities. Quite simply, people are seeking the right housing in the right location for their families. A lack of supply of the types of housing that families need is creating hardship for many and helping drive prices to unaffordable levels.

The new housing, land development and professional renovation industry supports 21,000 jobs here in Waterloo region and over 530,000 jobs across Ontario. Governments receive billions of dollars in revenue from the home building industry, and with a healthy housing market and ultimately a market that delivers more supply, the industry will deliver even higher tax revenues to the provincial government. We are your best asset when it comes to generating more dollars into the system. This morning, our association would like to offer some suggestions that we feel will support housing affordability and choice for

consumers here in Waterloo region and throughout the province of Ontario.

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First, infrastructure: With the billions of dollars in revenue our industry generates, the government should support and redirect resources to fund strategic, growth-related, key infrastructure projects that open up multiple parcels of potential inventory aimed to increase supply and meet demand—for example, key road connections, trunk sanitary sewers and water mains, and pumping stations.

Second, transit: We remain concerned with how the province proposes to move the millions of people projected to move into Ontario over the next 10 years along our already-congested provincial highways. We are not keeping up with the pace of growth when it comes to our transportation network and in addressing the long delays in making transit-related improvements.

The final point I want to touch on is skilled trades. A fundamental and critical component to ensure growth is met is increasing our skilled trades workforce. The residential construction industry will need to attract and train approximately 137,000 workers across Canada over a 10-year period to keep up pace with anticipated retirements and increased demand. Ontario will be greatly affected.

One issue that has an impact on recruitment in the case of construction workers is the fact that construction isn’t widely considered a real career. Apprenticeship should be looked at as offering the same opportunities as university and college. We need to work together across party lines to crush those stereotypes, as these are all very well-paying, rewarding and highly skilled jobs.

We recognize that the provincial government is taking action and has made some initial steps, but we need more in promoting these opportunities. We need to sell construction. We need educators, and parents behind us. We need more government initiatives that promote skilled trades at all levels of education. Our members are ready to hire apprentices and our members desperately need more labour supply to build.

I’m now going to turn it over to Mike for further comment.

Mr. Mike Collins-Williams: Right now, due in part to the government’s open-for-business strategy to make it easier to live and work in Ontario, we have a strong economy that is attracting people from around the world. That fact, combined with federal immigration policy, means that growth in Ontario is higher than it has been in decades. This means we cannot have a business-as-usual approach to housing. It means that we cannot simply strive to plan and build in the same manner as we have in past decades. This is why we have been very supportive of the Housing Supply Action Plan and of Bill 108, the More Homes, More Choice Act. This coming budget provides a critical opportunity to take additional steps to implement the Housing Supply Action Plan and the Made-in-Ontario Environment Plan.

As you all know from the communities that you have been elected to serve, high home prices and high rents

have affected all parts of Ontario, where a lack of supply has made ownership more difficult and quality rental housing harder to find. This is exactly why transformative action by the province is required to address the complex issues impacting the housing system and our members' ability to deliver new supply.

From our perspective, amendments to the Planning Act through Bill 108 are going to reduce timelines for well-planned projects to move through the approvals process, and Bill 108 fixes issues with what was a far-too-slow LPAT appeals process.

We also are supportive of legislative amendments in Bill 108 to lock in development charges at the time of approval to create cost certainty for housing purchasers. Such a change in policy will improve affordability by not allowing tax increases later in the process.

The provincial government also made legislative changes to defer development charges over five years for purpose-built rental housing and over 20 years for non-profit housing. Both are excellent changes to encourage more rental and affordable non-profit housing supply.

There is still work to be done on the Housing Supply Action Plan, and we look forward to rolling up our sleeves and implementing the plan.

In closing, I'd like to talk about the huge elephant in the room. I think we all know and understand that Ontario is growing, but the real elephant in the room is that we aren't—

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

Mr. Mike Collins-Williams: —we aren't talking enough about this magnitude of growth. The Ministry of Finance projects that there will be 2.6 million more people living in Ontario by 2031. In order to welcome all these new neighbours, we will need to build one million new homes over the next 10 to 12 years. A lot of that growth, I'll just say in closing, is coming to Waterloo region. According to the growth plan, by 2041 the population of Waterloo region will increase from a 2016 census population of 535,000 to a projected 835,000 people.

Thank you very much. We look forward to your questions.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you so much. We'll go to the opposition side. MPP Lindo.

Ms. Laura Mae Lindo: Thank you for bringing all of this to us today. Being the representative for Kitchener Centre, I just wanted to take a minute to ask you your opinions because it's so important, as you said, to be funding strategically when we're thinking about the growth, especially in our region.

I'm just curious to know if you can speak a little bit about affordability. As you had said, we've got a lot of new folks who are coming in, and we know what we're anticipating in terms of the population and folks looking for new homes. But we have a lot of people here who, right now, can't afford the homes that are being built.

What I would love is for you to assist the government in making some decisions that take all of that into account, because everything is so interconnected. If you could speak a little bit about the affordability piece, I'd greatly appreciate it.

Mr. Mike Collins-Williams: When we think about housing, we have to think about the entire life cycle and the entire affordability spectrum, right from ownership of new, single-family housing, to assistance for the homeless, seniors' housing, market rental housing, and below-market rental affordable housing.

We really need more supply of all types of housing. There are different levers the government can push and pull to affect different types of housing supply. Some changes, such as speeding up timelines in the Planning Act, can help all types of supply.

But other, very specific changes, such as recent changes to the Development Charges Act—which just came into effect on January 1, so this is very new—allow for a purpose-built rental project to spread the development charges out over five years. Rental is very different than ownership. A developer pays the development charge all at once for ownership, but they also receive the money all at once for selling that unit, whereas rental is spread over many years. So, sometimes little tweaks to how the money flows in and out of projects can be very helpful.

More specific to the affordable housing side, the changes to the Development Charges Act to allow those development charges to be paid over a 20-year period are huge. Organizations like Habitat for Humanity can spread those payments over a much longer period of time.

Ms. Maria Kyveris: If I can also add—it's understanding your real supply. There is a theoretical supply that's out there that is based on a map and what is theoretically serviceable, versus what is actually on the ground today and what is actually available to pull a building permit on. Mike mentioned to me that at the provincial level, there are current talks going on right now about how we calculate our land supply, and making sure that it's actual, not just theoretical. You can say you have 1,000 units, but if only 200 are building-permit-ready, you're already short 800, for example.

So that's important, to understand exactly what you have coming to supply.

Ms. Laura Mae Lindo: Beautiful; thank you. I just wanted to ask you another interesting question. You were speaking about the need for investment in skilled trades, which I totally agree with. I'm wondering if you can take half a second to talk about the importance of investing in education, like high schools, where they've got programs that are already getting kids invested in construction, for instance—the importance for the government to pay attention to why those investments, and the fight that we're having around education, need to be taken seriously in order to provide this support that you're asking for.

Mr. Mike Collins-Williams: Broader, and sort of philosophically, for the last couple of decades—and I think the issue is also for our industry, for parents, for government, and for schools—for better or for worse, we've been pushing a lot of kids towards the college and university routes, and there has not been enough promotion. Some of that rests on our industry, to do a better job as to the opportunities that there are in the construction industry. These aren't just manual labour jobs. These are—

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

Mrs. Amy Fee: I'd actually like to jump off of that. I do want you to finish your thought on that question. But I want to look specifically at trying to encourage women and young girls into the trades, and any thoughts that you have on that. I think that something we also need to be working on is not just breaking down that stigma around the trades as a career, but also breaking down that stigma around, "Can women actually do this as a career?"

Ms. Maria Kyveris: I can speak to that; I feel like it's a little appropriate. I think that also has to come from the private sector, in accepting those individuals in the industry but promoting it from a young age.

I myself am a professional engineer. I went to school at Waterloo and became an engineer, and was one of maybe eight women who graduated from my class.

Again, we need to promote women in this industry, and companies and organizations need to work to support these women throughout their career within that industry.

So I think it's a joint effort between the private sector and government to promote women to try to get in and then to support organizations to give the women the support they need throughout their career.

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Mr. Mike Collins-Williams: We have a wave of retirements coming in. For better or for worse, a lot of our labour supply that exists in skilled trades is, frankly, getting much older, so we would be shooting ourselves in the foot if we're only looking to half the population to solve the issues. There are certainly more younger women on construction sites, but we need to do a better job.

What I would add to that as well is, when we're looking to immigration to help solve some of our issues with skilled trades, there perhaps needs to be more done to recognize either foreign credentials or have a faster path for those credentials to be recognized. There are a lot of very skilled people coming from around the world here. Sometimes it's a challenge for those skills or credentials to be recognized.

Mrs. Amy Fee: Great. Thank you.

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

Mr. Kaleed Rasheed: Thank you for your presentation. During your presentation, you talked about Bill 108 and Bill 138. Can you please just elaborate as to how we can continue to support your organization based on just these two bills?

Mr. Mike Collins-Williams: The Housing Supply Action Plan was tabled in May. Out of that plan, Bill 108 implemented a number of key issues within that plan. We see it as a very strong start. There are still some elements of Bill 108 that haven't been proclaimed, and some more regulatory work to be done. The process doesn't end just when the legislation is tabled.

Also, a lot of it falls onto our industry. This government has provided some tools to help move things through the system faster. So it's up to our members to make some

investments and take some risks to try to bring more supply to the market.

But there's more that can be done. We can look at further amendments to the Planning Act in some specific areas, and further amendments to the Development Charges Act. But we're certainly very supportive of the direction of Bill 108 and the work that Minister Clark and his team have done at the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing.

Mr. Kaleed Rasheed: Okay. Thank you, Mr. Chair. I think my colleague has—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you. MPP Smith.

Mr. Dave Smith: In the 45 seconds or so that we have left: One of the things that I'd like to hear from you about is purpose-built apartments. I know that in my area it's eight to 12 years from the time they start the process until they actually have somebody moving into it. Is that similar here? Do you have any suggestions on how we can speed that up? The longer it takes, the more carrying cost there is to the developer and the more expensive the unit becomes.

Mr. Mike Collins-Williams: In the couple of seconds I have left, the good news is that some elements of the Housing Supply Action Plan are working. We have more purpose-built rental housing physically under construction right now in Ontario than we have had in about three decades, but we need to—

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

Mr. Mike Collins-Williams: There's more to be done, but we're on the right track.

WATERLOO REGION COMMUNITY LEGAL SERVICES

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Next, I would like to call on Waterloo Region Community Legal Services. Please come forward. Please state your name for the record. You will have seven minutes for your presentation.

Ms. Shannon Down: Good morning. My name is Shannon Down. I'm the executive director at Waterloo Region Community Legal Services. I'm here on behalf of the clinic. We're a local community legal aid clinic. We provide legal services which are free to low-income people who live in Waterloo region. Our catchment area includes Kitchener, Waterloo and Cambridge, as well as the townships.

Our clinic practises in the area of poverty law. Poverty law encompasses legal problems which include housing, income support, disability-related issues, issues affecting our elder population, Indigenous issues, employment, criminal injuries, consumer debt and immigration, so it's a big area of law.

Our clinic staff is comprised of six staff lawyers, two paralegals, a community legal worker, a social worker, an Indigenous justice worker and two support staff.

Today, I would like to briefly address three main areas of concern, which are the changes to the criminal injuries compensation framework, the proposed changes to the Ontario Disability Support Program, and legal aid funding.

The criminal injuries compensation framework was eliminated on October 1, 2019, and replaced with enhancements to the Victim Quick Response Program. While the VQR program provides assistance with certain expenses for victims of crime—for example, counselling services and medical expenses—there are a number of aspects of compensation that have been eliminated. These include compensation for loss of employment income, which results when a victim of crime is unable to work due to physical or mental injuries, and overall compensation for victims of crime beyond the payment of direct expenses for issues such as pain and suffering. We have concerns about compensation for victims of historic childhood sexual abuse and how that will work under the VQR program.

Our clients who are living in poverty are disproportionately affected by violent crime. The after-effects are often devastating and can be long-lasting. The compensation which was provided through the criminal injuries compensation scheme helped to mitigate some of these effects, and it helped to provide a measure of closure for our clients who were victims of violent crimes. While the idea of providing immediate support for things like medical expenses and counselling, which is available under the VQR, is laudable, I would submit that the loss of compensation for lost wages and pain and suffering means that people who are living on low incomes will suffer more deeply as a result of being a victim of violent crime. They may never recover from the effects of their injuries.

We know that childhood physical and sexual abuse causes long-term trauma that often lasts a lifetime and often leads to chronic mental health issues and substance dependence. The victims of these crimes are no longer eligible to receive compensation for pain and suffering under the new VQR program. We would submit to the government that it should consider restoring some of the forms of compensation that were formerly available under the criminal injuries compensation framework, either under the VQR or restoring the criminal injuries compensation framework to act in tandem with the VQR program to provide those types of compensation that aren't available under the VQR program.

With respect to the Ontario Disability Support Program, the proposed changes include changing the definition of “disability” to align it more with the federal definition. This would mean that many people who are currently on the Ontario Disability Support Program and people who are now applying for the Ontario Disability Support Program would not be eligible for assistance. The federal definition for Canada Pension Plan disability is for a disability that is both severe and prolonged. The current definition for disability under ODSP allows for a great deal of flexibility.

Many people experience forms of disability where they cannot work for a period of time, but may go in and out of

the workforce depending on the severity of their disability at any given time. ODSP has flexibility. It recognizes the need for some financial support for people who can only work part-time or who may have periods of better health where they can work and they don't need any income assistance. You can be on ODSP, and if you are able to go back to work and you're no longer financially eligible, the program allows you to do that. If your disability returns or your illness returns, there's the opportunity for what is called rapid reinstatement, and you're again eligible for assistance if you're not able to work for a period of time. We have a lot of clients where we see that happen throughout their lifetime.

The Canada Pension Plan definition doesn't really permit for that, because it is for people who have severe and prolonged disability. It wouldn't catch the people who might float in and out of periods of disability. Just as an example, if you have someone who suffers from something like deep-vein thrombosis and works in a physical job where they have to stand during the day—

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

Ms. Shannon Down: One minute? Okay. I'm going to flip to just talking quickly about legal aid funding, specifically the cuts to clinic budgets. Legal aid's budget was cut by over 30%, and this in turn led to a cut in the clinic budget system of \$15 million, or 16%. This has had some severe consequences. Clinics such as our own have lost funding. We lost approximately \$9,000 in funding, as well as budgets for training. Budgets for interpretation have been reduced. Budgets for things like medical disbursements have been reduced. It means that we're having to do more with less money. Our clinic is an important piece of the access-to-justice puzzle for the people in our community who are the most vulnerable. So cutting the clinics budget means that it's directly hurting front-line service to low-income people who need the help the most.

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

Mr. Kaleed Rasheed: Thank you so much for your presentation this morning, and thank you for the work that you are doing in our community. I really appreciate that.

As part of this consultation, I just wanted to know the dollar amount or the funding you're looking for as part of this 2020 budget consultation. Also, how are you planning to use that funding for this year?

Ms. Shannon Down: The budget for clinics was cut from \$93 million to \$78 million in the previous budget. The Attorney General has announced that there will be no new cuts. However, that existing cut is going to be felt more deeply this year, because a portion of that cut was mitigated by prior-year surpluses that legal aid was able to apply against the cut. Most clinics won't have those surpluses this year, so legal aid won't be able to mitigate that cut to the same extent that they were able to last year.

What we would be asking is for the government to restore that \$15 million in the clinic budget system—either to restore it to put us back to our previous funding level,

or at least to restore it to the extent that deeper cuts won't happen this year.

Mr. Kaleed Rasheed: So your ask is \$15 million, as part of the previous—

Ms. Shannon Down: Yes. That would put the clinics back to where we were, prior to the previous year's budget.

Mr. Kaleed Rasheed: Okay.

Ms. Shannon Down: In terms of what we would do with that, one of the things that the Ministry of the Attorney General has asked of clinics, and that we're very willing and interested in doing, is to try and modernize our services. For instance, we're interested in looking at how we can better serve our rural population, the rural constituents that you represent, by using things like Skype consultations. For people who don't have transportation to make it into the city to our office, we could Skype with them, say, at a public library or something like that, to have a consult. We're interested in doing a modernization, but we can't do it with no funds.

Mr. Kaleed Rasheed: That would have been my next question, about modernization. As you know, we are heavily working on the use of technology, so I appreciate that you are leaning more toward the technology and making sure that the individuals who come to look for services can also use technology. It's basically all part of the efficiency, right?

Ms. Shannon Down: Exactly. We're interested in trying to use whatever technology we can to leverage our services so we reach more people.

Mr. Kaleed Rasheed: Absolutely. Thank you so much.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): One minute. Any further questions? Okay. We'll move to the opposition side. MPP Lindo.

Ms. Laura Mae Lindo: Thank you for your presentation. I want to take a bit of a step back. When you were asked about the dollar amount—I wanted to make sure I heard clearly that that would just bring you back to where you were. And, as a consequence, with the type of work that you folks are doing—and serving the population that you're serving, who are feeling the impacts of a number of different cuts and changes that have happened, not just under the current government, but also with the lack of investment from the previous government—getting you back to where you were doesn't seem like that's actually the investment that you should be asking for.

The reason I'm saying that to you is because I saw them write down that amount. I just want you to have an opportunity to speak about what you would actually need, to provide the support and expertise that you need to provide, to the folks that are here.

Ms. Shannon Down: That's a great question. We recognize that the province is under some financial pressure, so we're making a realistic ask, I think, under the circumstances.

In an ideal world, we would really like to see our funding increase. The reality is, the number of clients who use our service increases year over year. The depth of the problems that we see when people walk through our door

has increased, so that we often end up spending more time with the clients who do come in because their problems are layers of problems. It's not just a quick fix, so we need to spend time with them.

To be clear, when I said "\$15 million," that's only the clinics' budget. That's not the overall budget for legal aid. I'm just speaking to the issue with the clinics. Legal aid's overall budget has been cut, but that's more their purview, and I know they've made submissions.

The other reality is that our clinic—a staff of 13—is responsible for providing legal aid services throughout the entire region. That means that for the most part, most people who come through our door get summary advice. We give them some legal information and some advice about how they have to go out and solve their own legal problems. Not everyone who comes through the door gets representation. We know that we could never represent everybody, but, ideally, we would be able to represent all of the most vulnerable people—people who don't speak English as a first language; people with mental health issues; people who are living on the street etc. We would like to be able to provide more representation and greater services to the most vulnerable people, and in order to do that, we would need further funding so that we could hire more staff.

When the government invests in clinics, most of those dollars are going to front-line service.

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

Ms. Shannon Down: We have very little overhead in terms of how we run the clinics. The vast majority of our budget goes to staff who are working in front-line services.

Ms. Laura Mae Lindo: And that's really important for us to note because that's the return on investment. So if we start talking about investing in the services that people need, as opposed to finding efficiencies so that people can work just at a rate that doesn't even meet their actual needs, we have an opportunity to be more efficient and effective with our budget, right?

Ms. Shannon Down: Absolutely.

Ms. Laura Mae Lindo: I think that's really important. Thank you very much for all of the work that you do.

Ms. Shannon Down: Thank you. I would like to thank the members of the committee for providing us with this opportunity to speak to you.

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

ONTARIO SOCIETY OF PROFESSIONAL ENGINEERS

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Moving along to our next presenter, from the Ontario Society of Professional Engineers: Please come forward. Please state your name for the record. You will have seven minutes for your presentation.

Mr. Sandro Perruzza: Sure. My name is Sandro Perruzza.

Thank you for the opportunity to share the policy priorities of Ontario's engineering community in advance

of the next provincial budget. My name is Sandro Perruzza. I am the CEO of the Ontario Society of Professional Engineers. That's quite a mouthful, so we simply go by OSPE. We are the voice of the entire engineering community, which represents over 300,000 professional engineers, university engineering graduates, internationally trained engineers and engineering students who work in virtually every single strategic sector of Ontario's economy.

My message here today is simple and clear: Engineers create wealth. Engineers do so through the development and commercialization of new technologies that are exported to global markets and attract foreign direct investment, which benefits all Ontarians.

Ontario is experiencing a fundamental technological and economic shift. This creates demand for a highly skilled, specialized workforce that engineers can fulfill. Engineers will lead these industries into the future. Engineers understand innovation and the reality of Ontario's financial and fiscal future. Engineers believe that leading through investment to develop sectors will provide high returns on investment and contribute broadly to the well-being of Ontario.

Engineers are inventive thinkers who develop comprehensive solutions that consider costs, benefits, sustainability and public safety—the complete life cycle and integration of projects. Our recommendations are in line with this thinking: We can drive the economy while protecting the environment and the public interest.

Ontario's engineering community wants in. Although the government relies heavily on us to design and build Ontario's infrastructure, we have so much more to offer. Ontario's engineers are redefining their role as visionary leaders, capable of innovating to find holistic, top-to-bottom solutions that consider all aspects of a project.

As technology becomes increasingly complex, we must consider the interactions between the transportation, energy, environmental, health care and wealth management sectors. However, we are becoming frustrated with not being consulted up front when it comes to public policy discussions and by the lack of engineers being appointed on advisory panels such as the Ministry of Environment, Conservation and Parks's Advisory Panel on Climate Change, where we have engineers on the front lines of protecting our air, water, land and climate.

1130

We are grateful for the opportunity to share our collective knowledge on Ontario's budget priorities this morning. We have 17 recommendations, all with supporting sub-recommendations. However, in the time allotted, I can't review them all, but what I will show is how they're all connected and coalesce along four main themes:

- (1) Engineers make life more affordable;
- (2) Engineers preserve and protect the environment;
- (3) Engineers connect people to places; and
- (4) Engineers make Ontario more competitive.

In my time, let me tell you the story of Ivan and Mae, who met in engineering school this year. Little do they know that in about 10 years from now, they will have both

graduated, gotten married and will be working as engineers in two different industries. Mae is a senior engineer working for a major infrastructure company and she's managing various transportation projects. Ivan works for an energy producer, developing new, carbon-free, sustainable energy initiatives.

They recently purchased their second autonomous electric vehicle—a smart choice. Not only is it a low-emissions vehicle, but by plugging it in at night in their EV in-home fast-charging station, they're taking advantage of the new rates being introduced through electricity price reforms, and are helping the province and the environment use surplus energy. Today, right now, this surplus costs the government almost half a billion dollars due to the cost of curtailing all the excess energy that we have and cannot put to use, and because we sell this energy at a loss to neighbouring jurisdictions. In essence, we are subsidizing our competitors to the east and the south with low-cost, made-in-Ontario energy.

By purchasing this vehicle from their local dealer, Mae is also supporting Ontario's growing advanced manufacturing sector, which was able to retool and reskill to meet the growing demands of Ontario's autonomous, connected and electric vehicle strategy. New jobs were created in this new mobility sector, and international companies like Volvo, Honda and Tesla have built new plants and facilities right here in Ontario.

Mae will use this vehicle to go to work, where she is putting the finishing touches on a new GO line and their new hydrogen-powered trains. Thank goodness the government finally trusted the skills, knowledge and expertise of the engineers at Metrolinx, who were able to effectively complete an environmental assessment, design, procure and build the line within 10 years with no outside political interference.

As part of this project, Mae focused on ensuring that the new infrastructure was built and has met the new requirements in place to mitigate flooding, ensure watershed management, and maximize excess soil reuse.

Due to the government addressing the underrepresentation of women and other equity-seeking groups within engineering, she feels comfortable and positioned to succeed in what was once a male-dominated workplace and is contributing to the furious growth in Ontario's economy.

Ivan now takes one of those new trains to his office. He is working on developing energy control systems, which monitor, prioritize and distribute energy to where it's needed most based on consumer demands. Fortunately, the data governance rules in place ensure that Ivan's company only collects the high-level information he needs to secure efficient and reliable energy.

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

Mr. Sandro Perruzza: He's also excited to be working on a new small modular reactor that is being installed in Marten Falls First Nation. This new energy source will be used to power the new mining development site, as well as ensuring that the new waste and storm water plant will provide continuous, safe drinking water to the residents and workers in that new community.

The best part is that Ivan is working with Indigenous STEM professionals from the local community, who are able to ensure they have the new technical skills required to protect their environment and create great-paying jobs for generations to come.

Is this story fiction? Well, yes, it is, but we believe that with our budget submission, we've provided a blueprint on how to make this a reality, but only if this government and future ones use the knowledge, skills and experience of Ontario's engineering communities. Engineers are here, ready to engage and provide solutions; the rest is up to you.

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

Mr. Ian Arthur: Good morning, and thank you so much for your presentation. It's fantastic to have you before the committee. I had a fantastic meeting with the OSPE eastern chapter in Kingston very recently, and the work you do is absolutely tremendous.

I have several questions, but maybe I'll start with a piece of advice in terms of getting more engineers on panels and on policy committees: Maybe more of them should play lacrosse in Ontario. They might be able to get on there a bit faster.

But on a more serious note, you paint a tantalizing framework of what could be done in the future if we apply technology in the right way. I am an environmentalist, but I have always come at it from a perspective of utilizing the tremendous technological capacity we have in Ontario and Canada to achieve those environmental goals.

All this stuff has been around for a long time. This is where I get really, really frustrated, because you're not talking about anything that's, frankly, very new. How long has it been since we've seen the government will to implement some of these policies?

Mr. Sandro Perruzza: The problem is, there aren't a lot of engineers within the policy framework system of government. They're in the implementation side, but not on the development side of policy. Respectfully, I think there's only one engineer in government, and it's Jim McDonnell. So they don't understand the technology, and because they don't understand the technology and what the technology can do, and the future technologies coming down the pipe, they're not well positioned to design a system to include this new technology.

The other very, very frustrating part is, on one side, you have governments of all stripes who are funnelling money into the entrepreneurial framework, with all of their regional innovation centres, and developing this new technology or providing funds for engineers to develop this new technology.

So now you've developed a new water/wastewater management system, a new filter to be used or a new system to be implemented, and it will save energy, save costs, save replacement time. Then you go, "Okay, great, I've developed it," and you go to the municipalities to sell it. The municipalities say, "This looks great. Where have you implemented it?" "Nowhere. This is a brand new technology, and I want to implement it here."

Ontarians are risk-averse, and governments are risk-averse, so they will say, "We want you to go sell it elsewhere first. Go sell it outside Ontario. Go sell it outside Canada. Once you've sold it elsewhere, then you can come back, and then we'll buy it." Well, if I'm an entrepreneur, I'm going to set up my shop outside Ontario and grow my business there.

Mr. Ian Arthur: I want to talk about the lag time between technological development and implementation on a large scale. Frankly, if we wanted to be manufacturing electric vehicles in Ontario, we should have begun that process 20 or 25 years ago—

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

Mr. Ian Arthur: —if we really wanted it at capacity right now. How do we convince governments to be braver, to pick that point in the future and say, "Let's get there"? How do we leave behind this administrative leadership that, frankly, is positioning us to be uncompetitive constantly?

Mr. Sandro Perruzza: I'm going to take some responsibility for that. In the past, engineers have quietly served. It's like, "We'll go and design what you ask us to design." They don't get involved in public policy. I've been at the helm of OSPE for five years now, and that's starting to change. We're getting engineers who are being more politically active, getting more involved in sharing what the future can be. The schools are starting to develop those engineers as well, and telling them that in developing something, the first question they should be asking is, "Should I develop it?" The second question they should be asking is, "How can I improve it for future"—

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

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

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): We have to move to the government side now. MPP Smith.

Mr. Dave Smith: Looking at a couple of things that you've put in here, I want to make a couple of anecdotal notes. You made reference to getting on a hydrogen-powered GO train, to take it there. I just want to point out that Steve Gilchrist introduced a plan in the early 2000s, and if the Liberals had implemented it after the 2003 election, we would have our entire fleet operating emissions-free on hydrogen right now. But it was killed by the Liberal party, not by us. I think that was a great way that we could have had Ontario in a much better green position, had a good policy been implemented. Just because it was something that came up by another party doesn't mean that it wasn't something they should have done.

Secondly, to your point of not having enough engineers on it, I will concur with you absolutely on that. I have an engineer on my board; he works with BWXT. Some of the challenges that he faces, trying to articulate how green our nuclear industry is, with the pushback on it—it really is unfortunate that we have that miss.

1140

Where I'm going with it then is—you didn't talk about it, but it was in your written submission, about the building

code changes and how we need to modernize the building code. Can you talk a little bit for me then, please, about the delay that there is from when a great new technology comes until the regulations allow us to implement that in the building code? Are there things that we can do at the regulatory level to reduce that burden, so we can speed up that process?

Mr. Sandro Perruzza: I'm also the chair of the Construction and Design Alliance of Ontario, and it was great to see one of our members, a home-building association, up before.

Yes. We've been recommending to governments of all stripes for a while now on how to speed up the procurement process. Again, trust the industry to provide some solutions. You need to trust the professionals to do their job, but there's a proviso to that. You can trust a professional to do their job, but you still need a very strong regulatory framework so that when you do have the odd professional stepping outside the box, there are consequences.

One of the things that we've also been advocating on—is not in here—is that the regulator for engineering practice in Ontario is probably one of the worst regulators in the country. So there aren't a lot of—

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

Mr. Sandro Perruzza: Pardon?

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

Mr. Sandro Perruzza: Okay, one minute. There aren't a lot of consequences—or the consequences are there, but there's not a lot of enforcement because of that. They often say, "We don't have enough money to enforce all these things that go wrong." They have 30 committees, and out of the 30 committees that they have, only about seven or eight are regulatory. So get rid of all of the other things that you're doing and focus on regulating the practice.

It's not just the engineers. There are other regulators that can be doing a better job of ensuring that they're protecting the public interest instead of looking out for the interests of their members.

Mr. Dave Smith: I want to touch on something very specific on it. I'm coming back to the building code side of it, and it's because of the experience I had doing a renovation. It's an older home. It had a single smoke detector in it. What I wanted to do is I wanted to use the Nest product that was networked wirelessly and put it in all of the rooms. The building inspector said to me, "If you do this part of the renovation, I can't"—

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

Thank you so much for your presentation.

ELEMENTARY TEACHERS' FEDERATION OF ONTARIO

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Our next presenter is from the Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario. Please come forward. Please state your name for the record. You will have seven minutes for your presentation.

Ms. Karen Campbell: My name is Karen Campbell. Good morning, everyone. I'd like to start by thanking the committee for the opportunity to speak to you on behalf of Ontario's 83,000 public elementary school teachers, education professionals whom I have the privilege to represent.

I came here today after spending some time with our members at the picket line in the Halton region. As you all know, educators across this province have been engaged in job action in order to defend our public education system. Our members would rather be in the classroom teaching their students, but they know what is at stake is the future of public education, and they're willing to stand up for it. Our submission covers several priority areas that our members are concerned about. However, due to the time limitations, I will focus on a subset of those. I invite the committee to look at our full submission, and I would be happy to answer any questions at the end of the presentation.

Over the past year, Ontario students, parents, teachers and other educators have experienced the chaos created by cuts to public education enacted by the current government. In fact, we can draw a direct line between today's labour disputes and the cuts to public education contained in last year's budget: increases to class size, inadequate funding for special education programs, funding cuts to programs that support at-risk students, threats of changes to Ontario's world-class kindergarten program and a reduction in the overall per-pupil student funding, not only damaging the quality of our public education system today, but for generations to come. The government has relied on a narrative of inflated deficits to justify deep cuts to public spending. The reality is that Ontario spends less per capita on public programs than any other province or territory in Canada. Ontario also is last in the country when it comes to revenue generation.

It is clear that Ontario has a revenue problem and not a spending one. Despite this, the government has cut revenue-generating sources while at the same time significantly reducing spending on public services that Ontario relies on. It is time for the government to look at the revenue side of its budget and reverse the damaging cuts to public education and public services.

Instead of working collaboratively with ETFO and other education unions, the government has chosen to demonize educators and the organizations that represent them, and trample on their right to free and fair collective bargaining, guaranteed under the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. The unilateral imposition of limits to compensation introduced outside of the collective bargaining process by the adoption of Bill 124 has shown Ontarians that the government does not respect the rights of workers. It is not interested in good-faith negotiations. This legislation, which is unconstitutional, also disproportionately impacts workers earning lower incomes, including early childhood educators, occasional teachers, educational support professionals and professional support personnel.

Ontario's kindergarten program was designed by education experts, and it has proven to be a great success—a

model for other jurisdictions to follow and a fundamental piece of our world-class education system. The full-time certified teacher and the ECE team has been central to the success of the kindergarten program. Instead of threatening Ontario's internationally renowned kindergarten program, the government should make a firm commitment to maintain the current model and make the necessary investments to improve upon it.

Currently, special education grants are based on a statistical model that eliminates supports based on outdated demographic data rather than students' individual needs. Special education funding must reflect the actual needs of students in Ontario's classrooms.

Integrating students with unique learning needs into Ontario's classrooms requires more resources to support both the students and the classroom teacher in terms of training, staffing and material resources. The provincial government must increase its funding for educational assistants, psychologists, behavioural therapists, school support counsellors, child and youth workers, and speech and language pathologists.

Violence in our schools is a symptom of a broader issue facing the education system, including larger class sizes, a lack of resources and student supports, and fewer staff to meet the varied needs of students. Almost 80% of public elementary teachers report that violent incidents in schools are increasing.

Recent cuts to public education will only increase incidents of violence. The only way to ensure that our schools are safe and healthy learning environments is to invest in the resources and supports that students and educators need. Schools need more guidance counsellors, social workers, child and youth workers, mental health supports and timely assessments for students who need them.

Smaller classes improve student behaviour and peer relations, and increase student engagement and the achievement in the early grades. Smaller classes mean educators have more opportunity to give students more individual attention.

Grades 4 to 8 currently have the highest regulated class sizes in the kindergarten to grade 12 system. When the government made their recent changes to the class size regulation, they removed the grandparenting that was in place for boards who previously had junior, intermediate and senior class sizes below 24.5. This had a negative impact on remote boards that have very small schools or specialized programs in place. This exemption must be returned to the regulation. The government should reinstate the exemptions for boards that had junior and intermediate class size averages below 24.5.

Budget 2020 provides an opportunity for the government to undo the damage it has done to our public education system. Educators, parents, students and the public at large are looking for a change in direction, away from the devastating cuts and towards investing in our public education system and the public services Ontario families rely on.

1150

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Jeremy Roberts): Thank you. We'll turn to the government side for questioning. MPP Piccini.

Mr. David Piccini: Thank you very much for coming to speak to us at committee today, and for the work you do to represent your 83,000 members. As I overheard you in the hall, you're no doubt expecting a question from me. Again, thank you for that, and for the work that you do.

My question is, on November 26, 2019, in a Global News interview, ETFO was on record as saying, "We have been very careful, in terms of implementing this work-to-rule phase 1, that it will not affect student learning." By not providing instructive comments on report cards, and parent-teacher meetings, would you now concede that union-led strike action is indeed impacting student learning?

Ms. Karen Campbell: Thank you, David. As you know, collective bargaining is a process that involves two parties. ETFO is engaged in the collective bargaining process, and we have, throughout this process, made a commitment to working with the government to get a resolution to our contract. We have gone through the necessary process and the necessary stages to engage and have the government come back to the table. The government has refused to do that.

We have escalated our job action. We said in our first phase that we do not want to, and we currently do not want to, impact students. We would hope that the government would do the same—that their actions are also impacting students, and that they would return to the table.

So, in regard to what you were mentioning about the effects on schools, teachers are there, supporting students and supporting learning. They have provided the necessary information for administration.

The government was told earlier by OPSBA in regard to some of the issues around reporting and other things, and the government chose not to give its negotiating team a new mandate and to look for a resolution. Instead, the government felt that appeasing families—bribing parents—with \$60 would solve the labour dispute.

We say that is not how you address the concerns, the issues, that are currently at the negotiating table. Funding and investment for students with special needs, smaller class sizes—

Mr. David Piccini: If I may—I appreciate that answer, and I just wanted to go on to the support for parents, because you just brought it up. I'm sorry that the time, four minutes, doesn't give us adequate time to get in-depth.

The Support for Parents Initiative, which now has over 200,000 parents enrolled as of this morning—I just read an interesting article on mixed reviews from parents this morning. Nancy Augusto, in the Toronto Star—she is one of the parents who have enrolled in that. We look to rural Ontario and a mom in my riding who wrote to me on Instagram. They don't have a generous leave benefits package. They don't have traditional work hours.

So what do you have to say to them? Do you think that the government should not be supporting them during this difficult time?

Ms. Karen Campbell: What I would say to these parents—

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Jeremy Roberts): One minute.

Ms. Karen Campbell:—I know they want their children in classrooms, and that the government needs to be investing in special education, investing in smaller class sizes, so there could be more attention given to their children. The government should be investing in looking at issues of violence in the classroom, providing the necessary supports, so that their children can get the best learning possible.

Mr. David Piccini: I just want a clear answer to that question, if I may.

Ms. Karen Campbell: That is my clear answer. Parents want children in the classroom, and they want the government to address the issues that they have not addressed at the table in regard to smaller classes. Parents want their children in a classroom.

Mr. David Piccini: Sorry, just quickly, in a short answer: Do you think, yes or no, we should be supporting those parents?

Ms. Karen Campbell: Parents want their children in the classroom, and teachers want to be there teaching.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Jeremy Roberts): Please, if we can speak one at a time instead of speaking over each other.

Mr. David Piccini: Thank you. Just yes or no: Do you think we should be supporting them during this difficult time? Yes or no?

Ms. Karen Campbell: Parents want their children in the classroom, and teachers want to be back in the classroom, teaching.

Mr. David Piccini: Okay, thanks. We hope to reach a deal, definitely.

Ms. Karen Campbell: Support parents by having their children in the classroom.

Mr. David Piccini: Agreed. We want teachers in the classroom, and I hope for a resolution soon.

Ms. Karen Campbell: Thank you.

Mr. David Piccini: So thank you very much.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Jeremy Roberts): Okay. We'll now move to the opposition for questioning. MPP Fife?

Ms. Catherine Fife: Thank you, Karen, Jerry and Federico, for being here today. As you can tell, this issue gets people's tempers up really high.

How does it feel to be on the front line, dealing with a government that sort of put you there by choice, I would say?

And when an education minister says that larger class sizes build resilience—talk to us about the disconnect that is happening right now between the reality in our classrooms and the reality that the government is trying to construct.

Ms. Karen Campbell: Thank you for that question. The minister does not have the experience of going to a publicly funded public school so is not understanding the realities that are taking place in the classroom, not understanding some of the key issues that are at the bargaining table in regard to caps on class size from grades 4 to 8, and the importance of that in regard to the attention that

students need to support them through issues of mental health, the guidance counsellors, the additional resources which are very important. Those issues aren't being shared in the media, and they need to be. It's the reality of what is happening. Those are some of the things, the key factors, that help to support Ontario students.

Our world-class kindergarten program—we hear that the minister continues in the media to say they're committed to that, yet we have not seen the commitment at the table and we need to see that. We need to see investments in kindergarten to know that program will continue. We know that a good early start for our students is important. This government needs to actually make some visits to classrooms. They've visited Beer Stores and other places. I need to see them in the classrooms to see the realities of what is taking place within our classes.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Mr. Chair, I just heard MPP Rasheed say, "They're babies. Let them cry." This is not a constructive dialogue to be having at budget committee: "They're crybabies. Let them cry."

Interjection.

Ms. Catherine Fife: I heard you, and that is not respectful to the people who are before us.

Mr. Kaled Rasheed: Chair, point of order.

Interjections.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Jeremy Roberts): Please hold for one moment. We're going to speak one at a time. I have a point of order raised. Yes, MPP Rasheed?

Mr. Kaled Rasheed: I was speaking with my colleague on something different. It's nothing to do with the teachers. She cannot just say something. I respect teachers—

Ms. Karen Campbell: Chair, with all respect, this is my time. It has been very disrespectful making comments while I'm talking.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Jeremy Roberts): We've paused your time.

Ms. Karen Campbell: Thank you.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Jeremy Roberts): You will receive your time.

Sorry, if you could just repeat your point of order briefly.

Mr. Kaled Rasheed: Mr. Chair, the member opposite said I'm calling them crybabies or something. It has nothing to do with the teachers. I'm not calling them crybabies. That's the wrong thing that they're saying. I was just talking to my colleague on a different topic—nothing to do with the teachers.

Ms. Karen Campbell: I'm going to speak to the point of order, Chair. As far as—

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Jeremy Roberts): No, I'm sorry. We're currently dealing with the point of order. We'll return to your testimony in a moment.

That isn't a point of order, but we appreciate the comment. We'll remind the member opposite here not to impugn motives of other members. Thank you.

I'd like to return to the testimony that is being given. I will resume the clock where we were before this began. You may continue responding to the question.

Is there a point of order, MPP Arthur?

Mr. Ian Arthur: No. I thought you were going—

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Jeremy Roberts): Okay, then I will resume now. Thank you.

Did you have any final comment on the question from MPP Fife?

Ms. Karen Campbell: No, thank you.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Jeremy Roberts): Excellent. MPP Arthur?

Mr. Ian Arthur: Thank you so much for coming in today. I know we were trying, those of us permanently stuck on the finance committee, to find picket lines that we could go out to and participate in during our travels.

Just quickly, I think the issues at the table are very well documented in the public realm right now and the support for teachers who are out there, particularly that poll—you know, parents by a 2 to 1 ratio.

But I want to talk a little bit about how we got here. At this point, we are talking about something that could almost be labelled as generational underfunding of our education system. The problems that were in the classroom were there before the last election. The violence in the classroom and the size of the classes were already in question. How did we get to a place where it is this bad?

We should have a world-class education system, and we have teachers who are patching it together right now. How do we get back to that place where we truly are proud of what is there? And we are proud of teachers, let me be very clear about that.

Ms. Karen Campbell: And teachers are proud to be part of Ontario's education system and to continue to do the good work that they're doing every day to meet the needs of our students. How do we get there? We get there by investing in the system, in publicly funded public education. We put in the necessary resources; we put in the necessary supports that are needed for students with autism.

Having been a teacher who started my career working with children with autism and along the spectrum, it's important that when we are looking at class size, we look at the composition so that we can meet the variety of needs. Those are things that are not happening. What we are doing is that we are increasing class sizes, expecting the same outcomes, but not providing the necessary resources. This government needs to not be looking at reductions to the system.

Mr. Ian Arthur: You touched briefly on the outdated funding formula and how it doesn't actually function. How long have you been asking for that funding formula to be changed?

Ms. Karen Campbell: I'll defer to my colleague Jerry.

Mr. Jerry DeQuetteville: We've been calling for a review of the funding formula—in particular, the special education funding formula—for 15 years.

Mr. Ian Arthur: Fifteen years. That's a long time for governments not to listen to the people who know best about how to educate our youth.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Jeremy Roberts): Thank you, and that concludes our time. Thank you. We will now move to a recess. We will resume at 1 p.m.

The committee recessed from 1201 to 1302.

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

As a reminder, each witness will receive up to seven minutes for his or her presentation, followed by eight minutes of questioning from the committee, divided equally amongst the recognized parties. Are there any questions before we begin?

LARGE URBAN MAYORS' CAUCUS OF ONTARIO

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): I would like to call our next witness, from the Large Urban Mayors' Caucus of Ontario. Please come forward. Please state your name for the record. You will have seven minutes for your presentation.

Mr. Cam Guthrie: My name is Cam Guthrie. I'm the mayor of the city of Guelph, and I'm also the chair for the Large Urban Mayors' Caucus of Ontario. Thank you very much for letting me come and speak with you today. I am not wearing the mayor-of-Guelph hat, just to be very clear. I have taken that hat off on the way in. I am wearing the Large Urban Mayors' Caucus of Ontario hat as I speak to you today. As I said, I'm very pleased to be here.

Before I begin, I'd like to acknowledge some of the members from the region who may not be in the room, and those are Mayor Kathryn McGarry from Cambridge, Mayor Vrbancovic from Kitchener and Mayor Jaworsky from Waterloo. I'd also like to just recognize the municipal leaders who worked very closely with us to bring the issues that I'm about to highlight to you today: Karen Redman, Waterloo regional chair and chair of the Mayors and Regional Chairs of Ontario; and Jamie McGarvey, AMO president.

As you know, LUMCO is dedicated to advancing the interests of Ontario's big cities. These cities represent an incredible, geographically diverse area from Ottawa all the way to Windsor; from Thunder Bay to Toronto; and to our newest member that we just had join us, Clarington. These cities represent 69% of the Ontario population, and they are centres for employment, innovation and services that impact every Ontarian.

Our first message is this: We are your partners in delivering efficient government. We understand balanced budgets and we must deliver them every year. So let's commit to working together as partners, and let's solve problems together through better and more efficient government and not through downloading. Let's also work to advance Ontario's red tape reduction initiatives, with special focus on overlap and duplication in any provincial and municipal processes.

We are pleased with a number of actions that the government has taken, including Minister Clark's renewed commitment that he made in October to treat municipalities as a mature, autonomous order of government; working to align municipal and provincial fiscal years to

enhance co-operation and planning; and also the creating of the Audit and Accountability Fund to empower municipalities to improve service delivery and to reduce costs. LUMCO is actually advocating for this fund to be maintained and enhanced to include implementation, which would be in line with the municipal modernization fund that is available to the small and rural municipalities already.

We also want to thank the government for efforts that they're making in investments in roads and transit projects, and to increase the housing supply. I want to thank Premier Ford and his team, and Minister Clark and Minister Phillips, for listening to LUMCO's concerns.

LUMCO members are working hard to build a collective agenda that puts forward positive ideas for the quality of life of the residents of Ontario. In our submission, we have outlined the issues that we hope can guide the Ontario government as you look to craft the budget for 2020. I'd like to give you a brief summary here.

The first one—and number one; it should be no surprise—is addictions and mental health. As front-line service providers, we see the daily tragedy caused by illnesses associated with mental health and addictions. Whether it be opioids, meth, other drugs or alcohol, the problem is continuing to grow and, in many instances, at a rate that is outpacing our ability to serve those in need in our communities. This is a human tragedy. It is sapping community vitality and putting pressure on our municipal budgets.

As that challenge continues to grow, it is vital that our collective response keep pace. So we are calling on the province to ensure that Public Health Ontario is equipped to help municipalities with these challenges, and that other provincial initiatives, like mandated and funded community safety and well-being plans and continued increases to mental health funding, are in and continue to be in place.

The second is addressing gridlock. Too many communities are experiencing gridlock. It strangles our economy and is reducing our quality of life. We acknowledge the leadership of the Ontario government in advancing historic investments in transit in some of the LUMCO communities. We know that there are promises of more to come.

We support continued investment in transit to reflect the diversity of the needs of the various communities in the province through the following: please, please, please, the expansion of GO services; investment in local service appropriate to the communities; and active transportation that we cannot forget about, such as bicycle or separated bicycle infrastructure. We look forward to further progress on this in 2020.

Our third is access to affordable housing, and ensuring that growth pays for growth. LUMCO municipalities share Ontario's concern about the increasingly constrained housing market that motivated the Housing Supply Action Plan. The ability to afford and maintain adequate housing is a key determination of the health of the community.

That's why we're calling for the government to invest in supportive housing, to focus on those who are most in need; to remove barriers to market housing that slow down

and block the creation of new housing supply; and to ensure that growth pays for growth, by addressing concerns many of us have raised through their relation to Bill 108, the More Homes, More Choices Act.

LUMCO affirms its support for the following guiding principles for Bill 108-related changes which were articulated by the Municipal Finance Officers Association and have been echoed by AMO.

First of all, growth should pay for growth. Complete, vibrant communities are good for everyone. Provincial legislation related to municipal governance should also be enabling and permissive, and—

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

Mr. Cam Guthrie: Okay. Provincial red tape costs municipalities time and money.

Second to last is overall competitive growth. Benefits are shared disproportionately. We need targeted plans that address regional realities and support the strength of the local workforces. LUMCO encourages Ontario to continue to address the high cost of doing business in Ontario by continuing to reduce electricity rates as best as possible, and continuing to work with municipalities to reduce red tape.

If you could take away these points on climate change: There is a need to develop an open green infrastructure fund for municipalities over 100,000. LUMCO members have shovel-ready projects already that will make our communities more sustainable and reduce costs for our residents.

The last is gun violence. Premier Ford has been a leader in prioritizing this, and LUMCO supports continued and better coordination with—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you. I apologize to cut you off. We're going to have to move to the opposition—

Mr. Cam Guthrie: In conclusion, I'm done. Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

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

Ms. Catherine Fife: Thanks, Cam, for coming in from Guelph. We have a very close working relationship with Guelph, between KW and your city.

On Monday, it was reported that Metrolinx and Infrastructure Ontario are going to have to rethink stage 3 of the GO expansion because of the P3 procurement process. It puts the Kitchener line, in particular that last stage, two-way, all-day GO, at risk for the 2025 deadline. Can you give us some sense as to how important it is for us to ensure that commuters have viable options to get between Toronto, Guelph and KW?

Mr. Cam Guthrie: I'm going to answer this, Mr. Chair, through you, by putting my mayor of Guelph hat on now. Is that okay?

Ms. Catherine Fife: Yes.

Mr. Cam Guthrie: Okay. I think we made the case—and when I say the word “we,” it would be regional. We regionally made the case several years ago about the

economic actual vitality and impact that it could have in a positive way, not just to the region but to the Ontario government as a whole, if we can have connectivity between the regions. Obviously, this has been on the radar for the previous government, and I know it's on the radar for this one as well. But the quicker this could happen, obviously, the better it is for everyone. We, in Guelph, have been waiting a very, very long time for this.

We are thankful that the government has given some extra trains and extra times. That has been a really good uptake in our community locally. But until we get to the final stage of all-day, two-way GO—really, we're begging for that. It's not just a Guelph issue; it's a regional issue for all of us.

Ms. Catherine Fife: I'm sure you heard last Friday when the Minister of Transportation made an announcement to review the draft plan again on the highway infrastructure. This government has moved away from five-year capital plans, where municipalities could actually track when they could align their municipal projects with the provincial. Highway 7 got bumped down the line again on this after we've already spent \$120 million on expropriation, design and building bridges. Can you give us some sense as to how important Highway 7 is to the economy and to the health of the commuters who travel between Guelph and KW?

Mr. Cam Guthrie: From a Guelph perspective, we were, again, very disappointed to hear of the delays, or potential delays. This has been, again, on the radar for 15 or 20 years now. You've hit the right boxes there in your question, which are safety, economic growth for the area and commuters' options in the area. Specifically, we have some heavy manufacturing with Linamar, Skyjack and Hitachi, that are on demand—transportation for them. So to not have this highway come to fruition as soon as possible is difficult.

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

Ms. Laura Mae Lindo: Just a very quick question—thank you for bringing up the need to address gun violence. I'm wondering if you can speak about the need for preventative measures. I know that the police have called for us to invest in preventative measures. If you could just speak to that, it would be great.

Mr. Cam Guthrie: Locally, provincially and even federally, I think any type of programs that have to deal with criminal activity can't always be just enforcement. We have to have prevention alongside that as well. Anything that can help with that on the prevention side, the stats bear out that it also helps—

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

Ms. Donna Skelly: Thank you for your presentation this afternoon. As you know, or you may not be aware, our government is very focused on the elimination of duplicative red tape.

Mr. Cam Guthrie: Yes.

Ms. Donna Skelly: In fact, the Canadian Federation of Independent Business, which represents over 40,000 small

businesses in Ontario, just gave us an A-, up from a C+ under the former Liberal government, in our efforts to create an environment to see businesses flourish.

I'm a former city councillor in the city of Hamilton. It was extremely frustrating trying as a city councillor to get anything done within our own bureaucracy, let alone as a person coming in from the outside. Are there specific areas that you think we can address to help municipalities expedite—whether it's an application for an attainable housing project or whatever—a small business application?

Mr. Cam Guthrie: Through you, Mr. Chair: Thank you for the question. The only one that comes to mind right off the bat could probably be an umbrella answer for all of the LUMCO members. I have heard that around the EA process—there's a lot of duplication around environmental assessments. It's not about skirting it or undercutting the environment; it's about keeping that in line. But in regard to EA processes, it's becoming a long time, sometimes, when the provincial government gets involved. It can also include EA processes that then tap on to the Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry. They get involved, so there can be some duplication there. However, to the credit of the government, I have heard that they are working on that particular one. That's the only example I can give off the top of my head.

Ms. Donna Skelly: Any time you can identify anything, regardless of the municipality, please be aware that we are looking for examples, concrete examples, where we can eliminate duplicative red tape.

Mr. Cam Guthrie: Yes. Absolutely.

Ms. Donna Skelly: In my community, in Flam-borough—Glanbrook, we have a real issue with excess soil from construction sites, especially in the GTA, being dumped on agricultural properties. Are you aware of any other municipalities that are struggling with that? It's becoming an issue that is involving criminal activity and violence.

Mr. Cam Guthrie: Through you, Mr. Chair: No, I actually haven't heard of that. But I do have a LUMCO meeting with all the members in Toronto in February, so I'll put that on the agenda to bring it up to them and get some feedback.

Ms. Donna Skelly: Please do. We're trying to work with our own local municipality to provide some form of enforcement. It's becoming a very difficult situation, obviously, with local farmers who are quite irate about what is happening to their agricultural sector.

Mr. Cam Guthrie: For sure. Understandable.

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

Mr. David Piccini: Thank you very much for presenting today. I appreciate the work you do. I know you can appreciate that the old model of runaway deficits didn't leave us with double the transit and double the hospitals; it just left us with double the debt.

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

Mr. David Piccini: I know the 50 new two-way GO and extending the 15 trips here was welcome news.

You spoke a bit about the P3 partnerships. I think that that is a new model that our government has brought

forward that will identify growth around transit stations, hubs and not always go solely to the taxpayer to fund expansions. Speak to me a bit about that approach.

Mr. Cam Guthrie: There is more of a consensus around making sure the private sector is involved. I don't think government has to do everything.

Mr. David Piccini: Thank you.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Any further questions? Thank you so much for your presentation.

Mr. Cam Guthrie: Thank you so much, everybody. I appreciate it.

WATERLOO UNDERGRADUATE STUDENT ASSOCIATION

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Moving along to our next presenter, from the Federation of Students, University of Waterloo: Please state your name for the record. You will have seven minutes for your presentation.

Mr. Matthew Gerrits: My name is Matthew Gerrits.

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

Mr. Matthew Gerrits: Good afternoon. I would like to thank all the members of the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs for the opportunity to appear before you today and represent the over 30,000 undergraduate students at the University of Waterloo. My organization, the Waterloo Undergraduate Student Association, along with our colleagues at the Ontario Undergraduate Student Alliance, wants to improve the quality of students' education, make their lives better and more affordable, and improve our province, our country and our world as a result. I am grateful for the opportunity to share a cross-section of the many recommendations my organization has for post-secondary education.

I would first like to share the context in which I make these recommendations. We are in an age where per-student basic operating grants are lower in real terms than in 2001, yet society expects more of our institutions. I would also be remiss if I did not preface my comments with the fact that student affordability has been dramatically impacted by the rollbacks to the OSAP transformation.

I would like to highlight our first priority and one of the most consistent concerns that we hear, not only from our students but from governmental and non-governmental stakeholders: student mental health and accessibility to counselling. This is a true opportunity for multi-partisan collaboration, with all four elected party platforms containing a commitment to increase mental health spending. This year has marked an investment by the Ministry of Education in mental health for secondary students. University and college students could benefit from similarly targeted spending at a time of their lives where they are in a period of transition from home to independent living and with the stress of a high-stakes academic environment.

The Mental Health Services Grant, expiring this year from a pilot stage, expanded specialized funding to post-secondary institutions by \$6 million a year compared to the old \$9-million baseline. The University of Waterloo

used its annual portion to expand annual service to almost 6,000 student intakes, provide mental health training to over 400 staff and faculty, and deliver over 750 walk-in and crisis counselling sessions. Not extending and building upon this funding will mean longer wait times and could lead to worse mental health outcomes, ranging from increased stress to loss of life. Student mental health is a key challenge of our time, and I am optimistic that we can face it together.

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I would also like to speak to the quality of education. We as a society agree that there should be public funding of post-secondary education, because a well-educated populace is good for the economy and for society.

The economy requires all forms of skilled labour, from heavy equipment operators and pipefitters, nurses and engineers, to business people and entrepreneurs and everything in between. We need redoubled efforts to educate the workforce of the future, and we need to appeal to young people with a wide variety of interests to take the path that is right for them.

I hope all parliamentarians commit to work to simultaneously build up support for the trades and colleges but also our universities, to be able to provide the education that young people need for success.

We also need to make sure there is support for learning skills not only in the trades and colleges but continuing and growing the existing skills focus in universities as well.

For universities, high graduate earnings are often a result of developing skills that are in demand, as well as partnering with industry, and that is a relationship students would like to see continue. As work evolves, so must our education.

The expansion of programs like the Career Ready Fund is one way the government can spur new partnerships between universities and employers in both existing and emerging industries. It is programs like the Career Ready Fund that have led the University of Waterloo to commit, in its strategic plan, to provide every student with experiential learning options, a move that my organization supports. Waterloo's co-op program alone has contributed \$410 million to Ontario's GDP in the 2018-19 year. With investments, universities such as Waterloo can more quickly unlock and expand other ways of developing skills for the workforce, such as expanding opportunities for early entrepreneurs, simulated workplaces and community-based learning.

We also ask that the government consider adding new funding streams within the Career Ready Fund to support universities in building new structured international experiences, and to support entrepreneurial programs and student research partnerships with industry.

Finally, I would like to promote bringing quality to online learning and affordability to textbook costs.

A recent report from the Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario has recommended the development of an Ontario digital-learning plan and strategy for post-secondary education. This includes establishing measures

and funding in the form of special-purpose grants to motivate the expansion and development of digital learning. My organization supports investment in high-quality digital learning, and would look forward to collaboration on developing such a strategy.

I would ask that the government consider following the lead of the province of British Columbia, which invested over \$2 million between 2012 and 2014 in open educational resources, which are substantially free textbooks. This investment has led to over \$12 million in student savings between 2012 to 2019. Similar savings are possible in Ontario, cost-effectively tackling one of the largest costs after tuition, rent and food for students, putting more money in students' pockets to pay for school, pay off debt, save toward goals, or spend in their local economy.

These three priorities represent investments in Ontario by contributing to the mental health of its students, the career-ready skills of its students, and to affordability and the financial well-being of its students.

Our written submission includes more detail about these programs, and four additional initiatives under the similar themes of quality, affordability and well-being.

I appreciate the time you have given me, and for listening to how we can better invest in Ontario's students and Ontario's future. Thank you, and I look forward to your questions.

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

Mr. David Piccini: Matthew, thank you very much for being here today, for your thoughtful letters you've written to our ministry, and for being a constant partner in bettering post-secondary education.

Just off the top, I'd echo your sentiment on online learning, not for the cost reasons you echoed, but for the fact that it's embracing technology in the workforce, and the fact that that is an increasing reality.

When I've been on your campus and on campuses all across Ontario, seeing the online components and embracing that—it is a disruptive force in our workforce, and we can do one of two things: bury our head in the sand and pretend it's not happening, or work on embracing it. This is an excellent idea you've brought to us today, so I appreciate that.

In addition to the letters—as I said, I've spoken to the Minister of Health about your recommendations on OHIP structure for students, so I appreciate that.

I would like to ask you a bit about experiential learning. I know the University of Waterloo has been a leader. Quickly, if you could touch on two things: experiential learning, and the importance of it—obviously, our government has put immense focus on that, with our new funding formulas under SMA3—but also mental health. I've connected OUSA with the Minister of Mental Health on the stepped approach. I know it was one of your recommendations when you advocated at Queen's Park. Just speak to us about where you'd like to see those mental health investments on campus.

Mr. Matthew Gerrits: I would like to thank the member.

I'll start with experiential learning. I think it is important that we have a broad conception of what experiential learning is. There are a lot of ways that we can engage in it. I think laying out that there are new opportunities for entrepreneurial support—one thing I'd like to highlight is that, just recently, the University of Waterloo has seen over a billion dollars of investment in start-ups through its Velocity centre. I think that is an amazing opportunity that the government should consider supporting across this province, as students are a well of ideas for innovation and for improving the economy in that form.

With regard to mental health, I think that investment directly in supports on campus is definitely one of our biggest priorities. We hear complaints about long wait times, especially from some of our other partner institutions. I know the University of Waterloo has done a lot to try to expand its capacity there, and the mental health services grant was a big part of it.

I would say the second part is looking at the In It Together report that I referenced in my written submission. That also points towards the importance of making sure that community health providers are adequately supported to be able to support unique student needs in those communities where students reside.

Mr. David Piccini: That's an important point, as we follow the patient and look to Ontario health teams. I've spoken with OUSA about embracing existing local infrastructure and making that connection, because students are such important players in the local economy and in the local footprint of communities like this.

I'll turn it over to my colleague.

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

Mr. Jeremy Roberts: Matthew, it's great to see you again. It was great to meet back in November, when you were part of the delegation from WUSA.

One of the topics that you brought up when we met back in November was about reducing sexual violence. Specifically, you talked about the Women's Campus Safety Grant and how a lot of that money is being spent on capital projects by the universities. If I recall correctly, WUSA was recommending better terms of reference to make sure that those dollars were being effectively spent. I'm just wondering if you could elaborate a bit on that for the committee, because I think it's a really important issue.

Mr. Matthew Gerrits: I will first point out for the committee that this is something that is within the written submission; there is a section on it.

I would simply point out that there has been a massive recognition, especially by the former Minister of Colleges and Universities, Merrilee Fullerton, that sexual violence is something that we need to tackle. It continues from the work of the previous government—

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

Ms. Laura Mae Lindo: I just wanted to begin by saying thank you not only to your student association, but to all of the student associations that keep bringing these important issues to the table. Congratulations on winning

the lawsuit against the government. That's the kind of advocacy that we actually need.

When it comes to the mental health services grant that you were speaking to—and also, you were going to speak to the sexual violence prevention work on campuses. When I used to work at Laurier, I was overseeing the sexual violence prevention portfolio. One of the ways that we had to address the commitment, which was in words from the Liberal government but lacked actual financial investment to address sexual violence, was to partner with sexual assault support centres in the community.

With this current government, we're seeing cuts to those services. I'm wondering if you can speak about that broader need to invest in sexual assault support centres and mental health support in our community in order to achieve these amazing outcomes that you're asking for.

Mr. Matthew Gerrits: While I won't comment on the lawsuit, I will just clarify that my organization was not party to that lawsuit, specifically.

With regard to your comments on sexual assault support centres and mental health support, I think the principle that we align ourselves behind is what we call a whole-of-community approach. We recognize that students are not divorced from the communities they reside in, and we see many examples of that. That's why communities want student retention after students graduate. I think that really does mean that when we're looking at any kind of health, whether that be mental health, whether it be physical health or whether it be providing support to students who have trauma or who are victims of sexual assault—looking at those options within the community is definitely something that is important and that my organization would welcome.

Ms. Laura Mae Lindo: Fantastic. I'd like to follow up, going back to your first recommendation—investing in the Career Ready Fund. When we look at the cuts to OSAP—I know that a lot of people have come to my office and said they've had to leave their degrees partway through because the OSAP hasn't come through or they've had to reconsider or delay going in. The career readiness and experiential learning opportunities that are available on university campuses are no longer, then, available to all of the different groups. Could you speak a little bit to the importance of gaining equitable access to university?

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Mr. Matthew Gerrits: I think equitable access is something that we definitely stand behind. Speaking specifically to that point, I think one of the things that we value OSAP for is the ability to make sure that anybody, no matter who, so long as they are qualified, can come to university and access the university sector.

When it comes to those specific experiential learning opportunities, that's great at the University of Waterloo, where students can use that to reduce their debt upon graduation, but as you mentioned, that isn't an option available to them if they aren't even able to pay the costs for their first couple of terms.

Ms. Laura Mae Lindo: Beautiful. Thank you.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Any further questions? Thank you so much for your presentation.

WATERLOO REGION ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT CORP.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Our next presenter is from Waterloo Region Economic Development Corp. Please come forward. Please state your name for the record. You will have seven minutes for your presentation.

Mr. Tony LaMantia: Tony LaMantia.

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

Mr. Tony LaMantia: All right. Good afternoon. I want to thank the standing committee for today's opportunity. My name, again, is Tony LaMantia. I'm the president and CEO of the Waterloo Region Economic Development Corp., operating as Waterloo EDC. I actually consider myself a 56-year-old co-op student at heart at the University of Waterloo.

A little bit of my background is laid out in the submission. I was an ADM with the province for about six years. Half of my career was in the private sector in tech jobs and in mining, and the other half with the public sector.

We're an independent not-for-profit. We receive \$2 million in support from our eight municipal funding partners, including the region of Waterloo, Kitchener, Cambridge, Waterloo and four townships.

Ontario's Ministry of Economic Development, Trade and Employment has supported Waterloo EDC with modest but very-much-needed one-time grants over the last couple of years: \$400,000 in 2018-19 and \$250,000 in 2019-20. Last year, I guess recognizing the contribution that we make to foreign direct investment and actually helping local anchor companies scale, FedDev Ontario became a formal, multi-year funding partner, committing \$600,000 to our organization annually for five years through to 2023-24. That's a \$3-million level of support.

We have a private sector board and a governance model that is widely recognized as a best practice in Canada. Organizations like Toronto Global, Edmonton and many others have modelled their own governance and MOU after our own, emphasizing the importance of city regions.

I'm not going to use this time to focus on those things and on metrics as a sales organization. Again, I want to talk about two things: first, collaborating smartly with municipalities to bring open for business to life, and then I'm also going to talk about the funding imbalance on the west end of the Toronto-Waterloo corridor.

I can tell you that, sitting in the ADM's chair after a career in the private sector, the province's role in economic development is critically important. Competition from neighbouring Canadian and US jurisdictions for capital investment, new product mandates, new engineering and corporate headquarters, relocation decisions and R&D dollars is really fierce. I like to say that decision-makers don't worship flags or geography as much as they seek the best in ROI. They look for great talent, regulatory and labour market stability and a great quality of life. This competitive lens, and keeping a keen eye on where we stand relative to our peers, has got to continue to inform the government's tax policy, regulatory reform and direct business support.

I want to make a comment because I heard a few people talking about regulations. Look, eliminating regulatory barriers to investment, harmonizing with the feds, and, I'd say even more these days, modernization is something that we can help with here in Waterloo region. Certainly innovations in sensor technology and advanced manufacturing processes are rendering many of the regulations ineffective and counterproductive, and I have bagfuls of examples if this committee wants them.

But I also want to say that red tape reduction alone is not a magic bullet. I said that to this committee last year. Incentives do matter. They're actually table stakes for large projects in North America and globally. I would challenge the committee to show me one deal in auto or aerospace in the last 20 years that didn't include some kind of grant, loan, tax abatement, training subsidy or whatever. I understand that we're at a point where almost 10 cents of every provincial budget dollar is debt service, but that's an even more important reason to focus on the headquarters of multinational companies to help anchor our base. There should be an ability, when we do this, to offer quick, preliminary, indicative terms, demonstrated ROI and payback for taxpayers.

Greater transparency is one of the things I was advocating for for the Wynne government. Show us the ROI and make it public—and program flexibility. I say, let's use a disciplined investor's lens and change the tired narrative from "corporate welfare" to "investment partnership."

I think joint company call programs with the province are really important. It's helpful to say, "Thank you for your investment in our community. How can we grow?" Minister Fedeli actually did that with his recent visit to Japan, following up a visit I did last year. That's where our largest manufacturing employer is headquartered. That was very important and very much appreciated. When a company invests billions into your community and province, you don't just send an email of thanks.

Secondly: Fix the funding imbalance on the west end of the Toronto-Waterloo corridor. Economist Michael Porter talks about the strength of city-regions. That's something that was endorsed by the Ontario Chamber of Commerce last fall. When we position our region, we talk about the Toronto-Waterloo corridor, which is now a globally significant "brain belt" by a number of measures. There are other examples of organizations modelled after our own, and that helps the province deal not with 66 or 80 different little municipal EcDevs tripping over each other in markets, but maybe six to eight.

Why should these city-region organizations matter to the province? I think they matter because an international company, especially if they're thinking about Waterloo region, doesn't pick Galt or doesn't look at uptown Waterloo; they come and want to take advantage of the entire ecosystem: from the breadth of the academic institutions to the quality of life. They want to be part of the corridor. I don't think we should build walls or white picket fences around our community.

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

Mr. Tony LaMantia: Just talk to companies like Google, Manulife, Open Text, Toyota, Vidyard, Faire: Our region as a whole is clearly better than the sum of our municipal parts.

I stated before that we have \$2.2-million base budget. That's the same base budget that Toronto Global receives from its own partners. While we've been seeking provincial support for about three years—basically, last year, we received \$250,000, which is one tenth of the support provided to Toronto Global. There's a stark inequity here, with no reasonable justification. We're going to demonstrate really strong ROI for money, as we have done in years past with the deals closed and the expansions that are qualified and audited.

We hope that the province, through the ministry, will continue to be a funding partner, alongside our existing aid core funders and FedDev. More importantly, we would welcome an opportunity just to sit down and forge the same kind of multi-year partnership that Toronto has. I think it's really important that we recognize the province's leadership and ongoing support to our ecosystem. My board, local mayors—

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

Mr. Ian Arthur: Thank you so much for coming in today and speaking. I just want to pick up on one of the things you were talking about quickly, before passing it on.

I don't know if you're familiar with the work of the economist Mariana Mazzucato—

Mr. Tony LaMantia: Mazzucato, yes.

Mr. Ian Arthur: —on the role that government investment plays in kick-starting innovation. She points to the Google search algorithm being funded by a research grant, Tesla being started by—actually, it was government money that made their innovations possible.

Would you speak to the need for that continued, stable government investment to make sure that those companies get to thrive in Ontario as well?

Mr. Tony LaMantia: Sure. Actually, you can look at Waterloo region as an example of a region that has had really good civic leadership and has had governments place a very large bet on the ecosystem. Even the creation of Communitech involved municipal governments and the private sector. Through that kind of support, they built an ecosystem that's very vibrant and includes large multinationals, but more importantly, a local start-up and a group of scaling companies that are really vibrant.

Our newest unicorn is a company called Faire in downtown Kitchener. Their CEO spent time at Google and at Square—he developed the cash up there—and quite a bit of time at Communitech. We want discerning foreign direct investment, but we also want—and this is actually even more important—ROI for the investments made by taxpayers in technology, so I think that's really important.

Mr. Ian Arthur: Absolutely. Thank you so much.

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

Ms. Catherine Fife: Thank you very much, Tony. I think the strongest point of your delegation is trying to make the case for funding equity for the west-end side. We have 2,000 unfilled jobs here in Waterloo region. It may be higher—

Mr. Tony LaMantia: It's higher.

Ms. Catherine Fife: It's higher now?

Mr. Tony LaMantia: Oh, yes.

Ms. Catherine Fife: We need people to be able to get into Waterloo region, right? This region wants to be part of the solution, and yet we still can't get a train leaving from Toronto into the region.

Can you speak to that connectivity piece? Because we're trying to make the case right here and right now for that funding.

Mr. Tony LaMantia: Scale matters, and the ability of our community to continue to attract talent is really important.

We were the second-fastest-growing census metropolitan area in the country. Actually, number one was Peterborough. As much as I love Peterborough, they kind of don't count because their population doubles every summer, right? So there has been a demographic shift.

It's important to say that I want to give kudos to all the parties here for advocating for fast, two-way, all-day GO service. I would urge the province to make the necessary investment in the 2020 budget to deliver the Metrolinx-approved plan by 2025, because that kind of connectivity would be more impactful than anything that I could do—

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

Mr. Tony LaMantia:—or that Toronto Global can do, or Invest in Hamilton or Guelph. That kind of connectivity and the mobility of talent will be a game-changer. Lots of communities around the world are a testimony to that.

Ms. Catherine Fife: I think the point also that my colleague made around government partnering with the private sector on businesses—we saw Communitech get a 30% reduction in their funding. Honestly, the return on investment for that government funding was twofold with job creation. It may look easy on the surface just to cut, but really, it's about where you're cutting that impacts job creation. Would you agree?

Mr. Tony LaMantia: I think the government has a tough job. We also experienced an almost 40% cut year-to-year, from \$400,000 to \$250,000. But in the scheme of things, they've got a lot of tough decisions to make across the board. So I understand that.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Yes, but making smart decisions around—

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

Ms. Donna Skelly: Thank you for your presentation. I wanted to talk about taxes. We have been travelling across the province and meeting with various stakeholders from a number of different sectors and industries. The tally—we've been asking, "How much money are you asking for in terms of an increase to your particular sector?" It's now sitting north of about \$8 billion to our annual budget.

When we raise this, my colleagues, my friends across the hall, will point to an increase of taxes. Tax corporations, tax the wealthiest, as a way of covering these costs, the argument—

Ms. Sandy Shaw: Point of order, Chair.

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

Ms. Sandy Shaw: I would just like to challenge that. If you check the Hansard and the record of Hansard, we, the colleagues on this side, have never said those words. So I'd just like to make sure that the record is corrected. Thank you.

Ms. Donna Skelly: Okay, that's fine. I would like to hold the NDP to that.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): I would remind the members to utilize your time asking the questions to the witness.

Ms. Donna Skelly: Thank you. One of the last presenters raised that again. They say that the problem with government isn't a spending problem; it's a revenue problem.

The point is, consistently, these stakeholders believe that corporations, small businesses and average Canadians can cover the costs of these billions of dollars in asks.

If we increased taxes to cover this—we're talking probably, again, north of 6%—how would that impact business in Ontario?

Mr. Tony LaMantia: One of the things I always look at is the competitive environment. Certainly, the Great Lakes states, and New York state in particular, have 0% corporate tax for manufacturing. So you can't look at tax increases in isolation from the cost structure.

We're a community where talent drives decisions. But market opportunity, talent and cost structure are really important, especially when it comes to, let's say, a company like Toyota, our largest employer, that has to compete with Kentucky for new mandates from Nagoya, Japan, right?

I think we have to have a keen eye on the impact of corporate—I'm assuming you're talking corporate and not personal taxes, although I would say that it's probably a good time to look at both.

Ms. Donna Skelly: We did look at both, and we did introduce a reduction in the small business corporate income tax. How has that impacted small businesses?

Mr. Tony LaMantia: More profitable small businesses are more likely to scale, more likely to invest in plants and equipment and more likely to be global exporters, and so I think that the focus on supporting small and medium-size enterprises is welcome.

Ms. Donna Skelly: Again, I'm trying to drive home this point, because there is a perception that corporations don't pay enough taxes and that they will stay in Ontario—

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

Ms. Donna Skelly:—regardless of how much more we are asking them to pay in taxes. Having met with many stakeholders across Ontario, they reassure me and remind me that there are lucrative offers south of the border that they would embrace, and that any attempt to take away from their profit would be a factor in where they locate their business.

Mr. Tony LaMantia: Yes, I said and I'll reiterate that, increasingly, C-level executives look at cost structure and overall profitability, and all of our anchor companies, even the small, growing ones in our townships like Woolwich and Wilmot, get weekly pitches from New York state and Ohio: "Move your company. Jobs are higher. We'll allow you to build your plant. You'll have tax abatement for 10 years." That's just the nature of the environment, and we just have to be balanced because, again, it's not just about that one piece, but cost structure does matter in industries where capital—

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

Mr. Tony LaMantia: You're welcome. Thanks.

REGISTERED PRACTICAL NURSES ASSOCIATION OF ONTARIO

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Moving along to our next presenter, from the Registered Practical Nurses Association of Ontario: Please state your name for the record. You will have seven minutes for your presentation.

Ms. Dianne Martin: Thank you very much for the opportunity to speak with you today. My name is Dianne Martin, and I am the chief executive officer of the Registered Practical Nurses Association of Ontario, or WeRPN. In past years, prior to our name change, you will have known us as RPNAO. We are the professional association that raises the profile and gives voice to the concerns of Ontario's 45,000 registered practical nurses, or RPNs, who provide excellent care across every corner of this province.

As a nurse myself, I can tell you that Ontario's RPNs are knowledge-based health professionals who combine skill, judgment, passion and compassion. Whether working in hospitals, long-term care, mental health services or home and community care, Ontario's RPNs are on the front lines, consistently demonstrating our commitment to providing the best care to their patients, residents and clients.

With over 95% of RPNs working in direct practice, we bring a unique and valuable perspective to Ontario health care. Our association has been pleased to see the government taking steps to build a more patient-centred and integrated system. We believe the plan to build 15,000 new long-term-care beds, the creation of Ontario health teams and the commitment to expand scope of practice for several health care providers, including RPNs, will all contribute to achieving this goal. WeRPN is committed to working in partnership with the government to move these plans forward.

I'm here today to share some practical, low-cost ideas that we believe will support the government goal of ending hallway health care. In the years ahead, we know the pressures on our health system will only continue to grow. With an aging population and increasingly complex patient needs, we must make sure that we have the right

mix of health professionals to tackle the challenges of today and to prepare for tomorrow.

Right now, impending shortages of certain categories of nurses and other health professionals pose a significant threat to the future of health care in Ontario. While the number of RPNs in Ontario continues to grow each year, our province is currently experiencing a shortage of registered nurses, or RNs, and personal support workers, or PSWs. Without enough health professionals, hallway health care is bound to get even worse, but we believe that RPNs can be part of the solution.

Ontario's healthy and steady supply of RPNs provides the government with a ready opportunity to address the looming shortage of RNs by supporting RPNs to career-ladder to RN. As highly educated health professionals with clinical experience and much younger on average than RNs, RPNs who wish to do so are well placed to transition into the RN role with the right supports. RPNs only require one bridge year and two regular academic years of education to transition to the RN role, as compared to the four years required for a high school graduate to complete a nursing degree.

1350

In 2018, roughly 430 RPNs graduated from bridging programs in Ontario. This number is far below what is required to address the RN shortage and fails to take advantage of the potential that exists in our RPN workforce. Why aren't more RPNs choosing this path? Because several barriers exist, including having to take several years off of work, giving up a salary and paying expensive tuition to go back to school. But with the right supports, we are confident that many more RPNs will choose this direction.

For over a decade, we have been a trusted government partner in administering the Nursing Education Initiative, a granting program to support nurses in gaining new and updated skills that reflect the latest advances and best practices. We believe there is a ready opportunity to leverage this investment to support more front-line RPNs to career ladder into RN roles. This would be an efficient and cost-effective way to grow Ontario's RN supply and help retain more nurses in the system.

We also propose a similar program to help address PSW retention in our health system by creating new opportunities for them to eventually ladder into becoming nurses, starting with RPNs.

We're also aware than certain small towns and rural areas are facing the nursing shortage more acutely. That is why we are also recommending steps to remove barriers to access nursing education closer to home.

Right now, colleges play an essential role in educating Ontario's RPNs, but they could play an even more integral role in sustaining and renewing the nursing workforce, especially in smaller communities. While colleges are currently authorized to grant nursing diplomas, those wanting to complete a bachelor of science in nursing can only do so at universities. For some prospective students in rural and remote communities, this often means making a choice to leave their homes to pursue an education and

perhaps choosing not to return. For others, it can mean choosing an alternate career path outside of health that is offered locally. Allowing colleges to grant these degrees will not only expand options for nursing education but will also help recruit a more diverse pool of applicants.

Providing better access to education and career advancement closer to home is one way to increase the chances that nurses will remain in the communities that need them most.

Finally, we are calling on the government to develop a health human resources strategy. Currently, we don't have a comprehensive, system-wide understanding of the people power needed to care for patients, or a plan to keep our system running efficiently while delivering excellent care. This needs to change.

Working in partnership with health care organizations we believe that the government can develop a robust long-term vision and strategy for health human resources to ensure that we have enough and the right kind of professionals at the front lines of care. WeRPN shares the government's priority to ensure that patients across the province receive the best possible care.

We believe that the ideas we've submitted today, and others contained in our pre-budget submission, will move us closer to achieving that goal. We look forward to continuing to work together to strengthen Ontario's health care system.

Thank you for the opportunity to present to you today. I look forward to your questions.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you—right on time. We'll go to the government side this time. MPP Roberts.

Mr. Jeremy Roberts: Thank you so much, Dianne, for the presentation. As the proud son of an RPN, I couldn't agree more on your comments about how hard-working and how essential RPNs are to our health care system. I see that every day, when my mum heads off to work as a labour and delivery nurse.

One of the things that my mother often comments on is scope of practice and how RPNs could probably be doing far more than they already are doing, and often do anyway. I'm wondering if you can just comment a bit on that. I know our Ministry of Health is—this is something they're actively engaged in looking into. But does WeRPN have any thoughts on potentially expanding the scope of practice for RPNs?

Ms. Dianne Martin: Absolutely. It's two-pronged: There's what we're already legislatively allowed to do, and then we work closely with organizations to make sure that we get to do it. That's one part.

But the part that you would be most concerned about is the proposal that we have submitted to make changes to some of the regulations tied to the legislation governing nursing practice. These regulations that we've proposed don't really impact care in hospitals so much because we certainly have all the supports in place that we need there to do our practice well.

In situations at home in particular, in home care, RPNs are regularly facing challenges that they need to address

with patients, but there are regulations in place that have been there since long before our education was what it is today. If they can't provide the care to the patient that day until they get approval from another care professional, then the three days go by. By the time they come back, that patient's wound, for example, will be significantly more problematic than it was at the time that they could have easily resolved it.

We have very thoughtfully made these suggestions, consulting a wide variety of people, and we believe they will really improve the care of patients, and that RPNs already have the knowledge to do this.

Mr. Jeremy Roberts: Great. Thank you so much. I know that a couple of my colleagues have questions.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Further questions? MPP Smith.

Mr. Dave Smith: Thank you very much for that. My sister started off as an RPN and transitioned; she's now an RN. But I do want to touch, actually, on the PSW to RN.

At present, my understanding is that the only thing we can take from the PSW to the RPN is some of the clinical hours. How would you envision, then, that career path transition so that those who enter as a PSW have an actual career path to go to and could possibly end up as a nurse practitioner?

Ms. Dianne Martin: Absolutely. Certainly, I started as an RPN; I did a lot of that pathway myself.

But the problem with PSWs—the work is incredibly hard, and not as respected as it should be, and not necessarily that rewarding. People get in there and they see that they don't have a ready future and they—

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

Ms. Dianne Martin: Sorry?

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

Ms. Dianne Martin: One minute. Okay.

They sometimes choose to leave health care and move on to another profession. Our biggest problem in PSWs is retention.

What we're proposing is that we look at the programs and make sure that they're getting the right acknowledgement for their skills, but also look at financially supporting them in some way so that their pathway is so clear that they choose to stay being a PSW until they're ready to move on, rather than becoming a PSW and leaving one year later. Then we have to educate all the PSWs again, at a fairly significant expense, so that they can go forward. We're looking for a bright future for them, to make it a rewarding step in the right direction.

Mr. Dave Smith: Thank you.

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

Ms. Catherine Fife: Thank you so much, Dianne, for coming in and giving us some high-level ideas as to where we can be going as a province.

The crisis in long-term care right now really is at a tipping point. I don't know if you would agree with that.

Ms. Dianne Martin: Absolutely.

Ms. Catherine Fife: There are 35,000 people waiting. In Waterloo region alone, there have been no new beds since 2017.

We clearly have to somehow accelerate that investment into creating the beds. We're told that it takes three years to build a bed. That seems like a very long time; I'm sure you would agree.

Having the front-line staff to work in long-term care is the key piece. I really want to get a better sense as to the laddering from RPN to RN, or PSW to RPN. Can you give us some sense of where those barriers are, or where the resistance is, so that we can peel back the layers and try to get to some solutions?

Ms. Dianne Martin: Wow. I could talk about that for a couple of hours, but I know that this gentleman over here is not going to let me.

There are many barriers, and you're right that staffing is going to be a big one. The beds need to get built, but if I could address staffing—working in long-term care is not glamorous or rewarding, and it is much harder to recruit. We don't have trouble getting RPNs in there like we do for RNs and PSWs, because there are so many RPNs.

First of all, there's a law that requires an RN 24/7. I would suggest that there are better ways to ensure that the patients in long-term care have access to the knowledge base of an RN around the clock than having to have one hired and in the building. Rather, have them have access in other ways. I've got lots of good ideas if you'd like to talk about that sometime.

I also think that we have to work to make long-term care the more rewarding and well-funded job that nurses want to provide care for. I had a nurse call me recently, crying. Her problem was that she was so busy providing care in long-term care that there was a very, very lonely man with no family, and she no longer had time to stop and hug him during the day.

1400

It is a morally distressing time for nurses in that environment. We have to address that, because nurses feel moral distress when their patients aren't well cared for.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Yes, that's an excellent point. I don't know if you've heard, but my bill, Till Death Do Us Part, is trying to keep seniors together.

Ms. Dianne Martin: Yes, I have.

Ms. Catherine Fife: But the only way that that will happen—really, the bill just shines a light on how broken the system is. The only way that can happen is if we have options, right? So that's why those 2,700 people waiting in Waterloo or the 980 waiting in Hamilton matter. These wait-lists matter.

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

Ms. Catherine Fife: But the laddering piece from profession to profession, to have a clear pathway, I think, is the key piece. There are RPNs who can scale up to be an RN in an accelerated manner, and we should be facilitating that.

Ms. Dianne Martin: For sure. There are lots of PSWs who love their job and RPNs who love their job. This isn't meant for everyone. But for those who want to move ahead, especially in the communities that are the hardest-hit by shortages, we have to figure out what the supports are that we can provide them to make it much more accessible for them to do so.

Ms. Catherine Fife: A local home, Sunnyside, has just adopted the Butterfly project, which addresses exactly what you're talking about: having that work experience be more holistic, where these long-term-care homes are homes; they are not just workplaces.

Ms. Dianne Martin: Right.

Ms. Catherine Fife: I think that there's some good research out there. We just need to have the political will to make it happen.

Ms. Dianne Martin: Yes, absolutely.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Thank you.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): That concludes our time as well. We appreciate your presentation. Thank you.

Ms. Dianne Martin: Thanks very much.

CITY OF KITCHENER

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Moving along, our next presenter is from the city of Kitchener. Please come forward. Please state your name for the record. You will have seven minutes for your presentation.

Mr. Berry Vrbanovic: I'm Berry Vrbanovic, the mayor of the city of Kitchener.

Chair, and members of the committee, let me begin by welcoming all members of the committee and staff to our community, and thanking you for inviting us to participate in your 2020 pre-budget consultation process.

Kitchener is a great place to live and a home for people from all walks of life. Our city is known for its innovation, its support for educational institutions and its robust and diverse business community.

As our population becomes more diverse, we must become more equitable and inclusive. We want Kitchener to be a place where everyone feels like they belong and they can fully share in our city's prosperity.

To help realize the full potential of our dynamic city, we have developed our new strategic plan with a focus on five key areas: people-friendly transportation, a caring community, a vibrant economy, environmental leadership and great customer service. These five areas are in line with the needs of our community. My focus today will be on our plan to create people-friendly transportation, a caring community and a vibrant economy.

On the transportation end, I'd first like to touch on two-way, all-day GO train service.

The Toronto-Waterloo region innovation corridor is a top-20 global technology cluster, home to 15,000 tech companies and 205,000 technology workers, and is responsible for generating 17% of Canada's GDP. Kitchener, along with the Toronto-Waterloo innovation corridor's top business leaders and innovators, is committed to connecting people to good jobs and pushing our economy forward through reliable, fast and frequent rapid transit across the corridor.

To that end, I am requesting the province to allocate \$1 billion in funding in the 2020 budget towards GO rail expansion on the Kitchener line, as detailed and approved in Metrolinx's board of directors' initial business case on November 22, 2019.

On the issue of the expansion of Highway 7 between Kitchener and Guelph, we're pleased to learn that the province intends to construct a new Highway 7 between Kitchener and Guelph, through the newly released southwestern Ontario transportation plan. We know that a new Highway 7 between Kitchener and Guelph, with 160,000 daily commuters, would experience similar benefits to your recently proposed Highway 3 expansion but on a significantly larger scale.

To unlock these benefits, I am requesting the province to provide funding commitments for the new Highway 7 expansion between Kitchener and Guelph in the 2020 budget, and formalize the initiative in official planning documents, with clear deadlines to completion, and allocate ministry staff resources to support this initiative.

On funding for cycling and trails, the city of Kitchener supports the provincial goals of implementing new or expanded commuter cycling infrastructure. In 2018, we received \$800,000 from the Ontario Municipal Commuter Cycling Program and provided 20% matching funding to create a new fund of \$1 million. However, that funding has since been eliminated from the provincial budget, and we're requesting that the province reinstate funding for the program in your 2020 budget so that we can continue to build commuter cycling infrastructure, which will help meet a growing demand for cycling, reduce traffic congestion, and aid in the province's efforts with respect to reducing GHG emissions to assist with climate change.

On the issue of a caring community: Housing affordability has become one of the main priorities of our municipal council. As part of our municipal efforts to assist with providing affordable housing, we have removed building permit fees for non-profit organizations and created an affordable housing task force. We are also working on inclusionary zoning alongside the city of Waterloo and on many initiatives together with the region of Waterloo.

We recently completed our city's first housing needs assessment, which is also attached in the presentation you received today. I am requesting that the province urgently add funding in the 2020 budget to assist with homelessness, with additional emergency shelter dollars for those with complex needs and supportive housing for at least 250 units, with needed supports for those requiring significant mental health and addiction supports.

On the issue of Bill 108: Bill 108 introduced the community benefits charge. However, we believe there's room for improvement concerning the new CBC. The province should ensure that the transition from soft services and parkland dedication to CBCs is cost-neutral for municipalities in order to maintain municipal revenues. More time is also needed for municipalities to transition to the new CBC, with a transition date being set at least two years after the regulations are finalized.

We're requesting the province consider efforts be made to balance CBC charges to consider the fluctuation in land values between municipalities and address how municipalities with higher land values will not de-incentivize development due to potentially higher CBCs. Further, the

province should consider the cost of delivering municipal services rather than land appraisal value in the calculation of the formula.

In the area of a vibrant economy: We're very interested in seeing multi-year funding be put in place for the Waterloo Region Economic Development Corp., which you heard from earlier. The Waterloo EDC brings "open for business" to life on the west end of the Toronto-Waterloo region innovation corridor by actively assisting companies looking to locate, relocate or expand in Waterloo region. In 2019-20, the province provided Waterloo EDC with \$250,000, or one tenth of the operating support provided to Toronto Global.

We join the Waterloo EDC in calling to fix the funding imbalance on the west end of the corridor through the 2020 budget and forge the same type of multi-year partnership with the Waterloo EDC as the province maintains with the Toronto region via its support for Toronto Global.

On the issue of Communitech and its ongoing funding: Communitech has been a pillar of Waterloo region's innovation ecosystem, having supported the creation of more than 3,000 new companies that have generated 19,000 jobs and attracted \$2.4 billion in private investment. Last year, the province renewed its financial support for Communitech, sending a positive signal to local entrepreneurs that the tech sector is recognized as an important engine of Ontario's current and future prosperity.

I thank the province for its commitment to business and request the province to follow up on significant new funding for the Skills Catalyst Fund, with additional support for training and skills development. This will be important for organizations like Communitech.

Once again, I'd like to thank the standing committee members and staff for coming to Kitchener for this important meeting. Coming to our area means meeting the people in our community who contribute to making Kitchener, the communities of Waterloo region and our province a great place to start a business, raise a family and call home. Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

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

Ms. Laura Mae Lindo: Thank you for coming and speaking to the committee. I agree: It's wonderful to have the committee right here in Kitchener.

One of the pieces of the deputation that speaks to me in particular is the ask around poverty reduction strategies and investment in poverty reduction. We had a recent report that came out and said that there are about 200 people, on average, every day who are sleeping on the streets in Kitchener. I know that, as the mayor, you have been doing as much as you can to try to ensure that those investments are there for folks, but I'd like you to speak a little bit more, just for those who may not be aware of what's happening here, about why some of those preventive measures are so important and why you're calling for both supportive housing and affordable housing.

1410

Mr. Berry Vrbanovic: Thank you very much, MPP Lindo, for the question. We recently completed a housing

needs assessment, which is found in your packages today. It was actually quite enlightening, even for us who are involved in this work on a regular basis. Through that study, we discovered that 13.5% of Kitchener residents, in fact, are households in core housing need—in other words, those who are spending more than 30% of their gross income on housing.

Those numbers, as you start breaking them down, actually become even more alarming because you start seeing that you have anywhere between 250 to 750 units that are needed in terms of supportive housing. We need about 8,000 units of affordable housing for those with low-to-moderate incomes, and about 4,500 units are needed in terms of those who need social housing or highly subsidized housing for various reasons.

We know that the most important thing for residents to be able to tackle any of the challenges, whether it's mental health and addictions issues, whether it's looking for a job, whether it's supporting their families and making sure that they get good educational foundations, starts by having a roof over their heads.

We also recognize that tackling this issue is not going to sit with one order of government on its own. In our case, in this region, the region is the housing provider, but the reality is, only when all orders of government—I'm talking local, in terms of municipal, regional, provincial and federal—work together will we be able to tackle the extent of the need that's there and really deliver for Canadians what I believe we want to see in terms of making sure that everyone in our communities and in our country has the basic right to housing that we know is so key for going forward.

Ms. Laura Mae Lindo: Thank you very much.

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

Ms. Laura Mae Lindo: In the small time that we have left, I also wanted to commend you for including the economic case for investments in arts and culture in our area, especially when you think about the investments in the tech hubs and places like Communitech. They have often said to me, when I've met with them, that having a vibrant arts sector is what brings more of the folks here to actually live and work. It would be great for you to speak a little bit more about the importance of that investment in the arts as a way of growing the economy.

Mr. Berry Vrbanovic: One of the things that we recently did is we conducted a report by Angela Birdsell and, through it, identified that our key cultural institutions in this area are not receiving their fair share on a per capita basis of provincial funding in terms of funding for those key cultural institutions. In fact, they're short by about \$350,000 in total. Our hope—

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

Mrs. Amy Fee: Thank you, Mayor Vrbanovic, for being here today. I want to actually bring it back to MPP Lindo's question on housing and focus back on the complex needs piece and looking at individuals in the community. When I met with House of Friendship recently,

that was one of the areas that I really tried to focus in on with them: trying to figure out where we're at with those complex needs and the future and going forward and what we can expect in our community. Already we're struggling to support people who have mental health struggles or developmental disabilities with supportive housing. What is that going to look like and what can we expect in our community going forward? I'm just wondering if you have any insight into that.

Mr. Berry Vrbanovic: Thanks, MPP Fee. I certainly appreciate the question. What I would say to you is, we have seen in Kitchener and throughout this region—you'll be hearing later on from Chair Redman—a marked increase in terms of the complexity of need that exists, particularly when it comes to supportive housing and the number of people who need it. We've seen that the demand at our emergency shelter system has gone up significantly, and the region has invested additional dollars into that. The city and the region have also, just as of the last two days, designated additional dollars in our budget for daytime programming for those who are street-involved.

We recognize that we really need to see investment in this area as a critical element. I recently had a conversation with a federal cabinet minister who was asking, "What are some of your needs in the next while?" I said, "If you can, together with the provincial partners"—because supportive housing is going to need to involve both orders of government—"build 350 supportive housing units in our community, that would be transformational." Not only would it allow us to start dealing with some of those particular individuals and getting them a better quality of life, but it would start impacting on perceptions of community safety and on the availability of resources to tackle some of the other areas in the whole housing spectrum, starting from high-need, highly supportive, going all the way through to first-time home ownership.

Mrs. Amy Fee: Would you say that that is your biggest ask at this point—looking at that piece for the housing to spread out around all different sectors, whether it's building economic development and that sort of thing, in the community?

Mr. Berry Vrbanovic: When it comes to social issues and the caring community, I would say that that is our most significant ask. Obviously, when it comes to infrastructure, things like two-way, all-day GO and so on are very important as part of that equation as well.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Any further questions? Seeing none, thank you so much for your presentation.

Mr. Berry Vrbanovic: Thank you.

WATERLOO REGION DISTRICT SCHOOL BOARD

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Our next presenter is from Waterloo Region District School Board. Please come forward. Please state your names for the record. You will have seven minutes for your presentation.

Ms. Jayne Herring: Jayne Herring.

Ms. Kathleen Woodcock: Kathleen Woodcock.

Ms. Joanne Weston: Joanne Weston.

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

Ms. Jayne Herring: Good afternoon. My name is Jayne Herring. I'm a public school board trustee with the Waterloo Region District School Board and chair of the board. Joining me is Joanne Weston, vice-chair, along with past chair Kathleen Woodcock, who is also on the board of directors of the Ontario Public School Boards' Association. We thank you for this opportunity to address the committee today.

School boards have a responsibility to promote student achievement and well-being. As trustees, we hear first-hand about the needs of our students, their families and school communities. That's why we wanted to be here today to talk about the importance of sustainable and equitable education funding. Public school board trustees are committed and dedicated to public education. We care about our students, staff and community.

The Waterloo Region District School Board, or WRDSB, serves more than 64,000 students in more than 121 schools as well as alternative and continuing education sites. With an annual operating budget of more than \$750 million, our board is one of the largest in the province of Ontario. Situated in Waterloo region, we encompass seven municipalities and one upper-tier municipality. Immigration to our region has led to an enrolment increase of more than 500 pupils per annum for each of the last three years.

I'll now turn it over to Trustee Weston.

Ms. Joanne Weston: Thank you, Jayne.

The WRDSB is in the fourth year of implementation of our strategic plan. Gains in graduation rates and EQAO scores demonstrate that our investments in engagement, learning and well-being are having positive effects on our graduation rates.

Our funding is largely driven by enrolment and flows from the Ministry of Education. In reviewing our board's funding pressures, the following themes have emerged:

The capital priorities process is the primary funding source for new facilities and additions. Annually, this process has struggled to keep up with our needs due to significant increases in enrolment. Over the past five years, our board has added, on average, one new elementary school annually as well as multiple additions. Recent delays to capital funding, however, will require some catch-up to ensure that our students are supported with adequate permanent and sustainable facilities. Furthermore, current levels of funding have become outdated and do not adequately support school boards as they build modern learning environments to meet the needs of our current student population. Trade labour shortages and increasing building material costs cause school boards to scale back facilities, which increases overall operating costs.

As we await capital funding approval and the lengthy approval process for permanent space, our board will continue to rely on temporary accommodations to support

our students. Although portables and porta-packs provide adequate learning spaces for our students, they are not adequate for specialized classroom space, especially in senior elementary and secondary school. As our portables age, our reliance on temporary accommodation funding will increase. Moving forward, a capital priorities process that provides sufficient and timely funding is extremely important.

For the 2019-20 school year, the ministry changed secondary class sizes to a ratio of 28 to 1 from 22 to 1.

Attrition protection funding was provided to support a gradual increase to the new ratio as staff retire or leave the board. This change caused a misalignment of provincial regulations and local collective agreements which bind the board to a 22-to-1 staffing level. This misalignment saw a reduction of approximately \$6.5 million in this fiscal year for the WRDSB, and will only grow in future years as staff retire or resign.

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The 2019-20 funding gap was addressed through significant cuts to central support staff, and at best can be viewed as a temporary and one-time stopgap measure. Also, the benchmark salary and benefit funding provided by the ministry are not reflective of the actual costs borne by school boards. Special education, supports for mental health and well-being, and student transportation are other funding pressures experienced by our board.

I will now turn it over to Trustee Woodcock.

Ms. Kathleen Woodcock: Thank you, Joanne. The WRDSB is a member of OPSBA. OPSBA represents English public district school boards and public school authorities across Ontario, which together serve more than 1.3 million public elementary and secondary students. The association advocates on behalf of the best interests and needs of the public school system and is routinely called upon by the provincial government for input and advice on legislation and the impact of government policy decisions.

One of OPSBA's multi-year priorities is advocating for sustainable and equitable education funding. We know that education is the second-largest funding line in the Ontario budget, as it should be. Appropriate funding should provide students with a range of program options that allow them to pursue a pathway that supports their interests and goals for the future.

While OPSBA understands the government's current fiscal environment, students, schools and school boards have real needs and concerns. Education funding must reflect the actual costs to school boards. This includes using current-date census data and authentic benchmarks for funding calculations. School boards are accountable for the stewardship of resources and must receive financial information from the ministry in reasonable timelines to make responsible decisions, ensuring the continuity of programs, supports and services that reflect local community needs.

Recent polling done in partnership with Nanos Research found that a majority of Ontarians agree that spending on public education is indeed an investment in the future. Other results include that 83% of Ontarians support or somewhat support school boards having—

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

Ms. Kathleen Woodcock:—more autonomy to ensure that budgets reflect local needs. Two thirds of Ontarians think education funding needs to keep up with enrolment growth. For more information regarding these polling results, a link has been provided in the written submission.

The committee is reminded that our association, OPSBA, has a good working relationship with the Ministry of Education, and will be providing a separate submission with specific requests and recommendations for consideration during the development of the Grants for Student Needs.

I'll turn it back to Trustee Herring.

Ms. Jayne Herring: In summation, changes to the 2019-20 Grants for Student Needs created funding challenges for our board as it relates to capital funding, temporary accommodation and secondary class sizes. The Ministry of Education has a great opportunity to improve the sector's ability to support higher levels of student achievement and well-being by releasing timely and complete funding information to the sector. Additionally, increased and reliable funding for local initiatives will help us serve the needs of our community and sustain programs that contribute to the success of our students.

The Waterloo Region District School Board appreciates—

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

Mr. David Piccini: Thank you for the work that you do in advocating and for your presentation today. You hit on two themes that we have heard consistently, on spec ed and transportation. I know it's an area important to my community and an area that saw increased investments this past year.

I'm just looking at the allocation this year, and I see a 1.5% increase to special education of \$1.3 million and an 8.6% increase on transportation of approximately \$1.4 million. I'm just wondering what your thoughts are on those increases, and, if more, do you have a figure amount of what you would like to see in response to that?

Ms. Jayne Herring: In terms of a dollar figure, I certainly don't have anything in mind; we always like more. We can always do with more. That's the answer I'm going to say over and over again. I think that our board is very equitable, and we're very cautious with how we spend our dollars. Especially in the special education line, we can always do with more. I think I'm going to leave it at that.

Mr. David Piccini: But you acknowledge the increase this year, correct?

Ms. Jayne Herring: I believe there was an increase, yes. I'm not sure that it was enough but, yes, I think there was an increase.

Mr. David Piccini: On the renewal allocation: I know that the Auditor General, in her report, spoke to a 2.5% commitment for capital investments, which the government has maintained and has committed to.

Talk about some of the guidance and direction. I know you've spoken about the renewal, which we will be

certainly taking back. I know that something the minister is committed to is reviewing that. I know that in rural Ontario as well, we have pressures. The previous government dealt with that by school closures. But if you could elaborate a little more on that renewal process.

Ms. Kathleen Woodcock: Luckily for the Waterloo Region District School Board, we're an expanding board. Our enrolment is increasing, and so we haven't had to face the challenges that some of our rural colleagues have, in having to close schools.

At the same time, the funding for capital projects etc. does not keep up with boards like ours that increasingly have pressures. We have facilities that we need to either enlarge or we need to build new, and we're restricted by the fact that we don't get enough funding for that.

Mr. David Piccini: I note this year that the renewal allocation was, I think, approximately \$7 million. But the increased pressure is certainly something we're hearing across Ontario, and something that I know the minister and ministry are committed to. Thank you very much for your presentation.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Any further questions? Seeing none, we'll move to the opposition side. MPP Fife?

Ms. Catherine Fife: Thank you for coming here today and sharing your concerns. On the spec ed issue: I know that we're the fourth-largest draw for new immigrants and refugees in Ontario. The resource funding, and particularly the spec ed funding, has never kept pace with that acknowledgement. I think an important thing for the government to understand is that there's a huge disconnect between the assessments that we do on spec ed, and then the funding that flows, right? Because we don't get a lot of money to do the assessments. And when I say "we," I mean you.

I do want to say that I really feel for trustees right now, and I appreciate the work that you're doing. I feel like you really are on the front lines of trying to hold the line on cuts to public education. I think most people run for trustee because they want to make public education stronger. I know that all three of you are in that regard.

How are you coping locally, though, with provincial directives that run counter to that, like larger class sizes? They don't necessarily build resilience, as we've been told. I know one of the ways you try to deal with these issues, these pressures that you face both locally and provincially, is with the local priorities grant.

Can you give us some sense as to what resources you have at your disposal to try to run interference, if you will?

Interjections.

Ms. Jayne Herring: Our most experienced, as I'm sure you can imagine, is Trustee Woodcock, so I was looking for her for some guidance.

We came here today to talk about sustainable educational funding. But I do think that one of the things that I would like to highlight while we're here is one of the things that we're proudest of, and that's our increase in grad rates. We have been able to, this year—it was one of our operational goals—graduate 85% of the students that started in 2012-13. That's a huge accomplishment. I think that's something that we should shout from the rooftops.

We've done it in a number of ways. We've done that by the use of reengagement teachers, by our strategic plan and by just focusing in on each and every student.

Of course, I think I can say that we won't be satisfied until we can graduate every single student, and we're not sure how our political climate right now is going to assist us in reaching that goal. So, personally, that would be a concern that I might have.

Ms. Kathleen Woodcock: I just want to add that as far as implementing strategies to improve our grad rates, it starts in kindergarten. That's a huge investment in children and in our future, because it takes 14 years for kids to get through school. So if we start investing and recognizing the help that they need when they're in kindergarten and in the early grades, then we can help make them more successful and graduate and go on to great and wonderful things. So it's an important—

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

Ms. Catherine Fife: I think that's a really good point. If you're looking at the return on investment—and sometimes you don't want to talk in those terms about education—in this particular region, with the moves that your board faces, those early years really matter. You were one of the only boards that have done this seamless day, the before and the after—and that was a painful process. I commend you on your leadership on that.

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Ms. Jayne Herring: Some of us know that.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Those kindergarten ratios are important and those staffing resources matter, so I hope that the government is hearing that. I think we're in for the long haul because there doesn't seem to be an exit strategy out of this current mess that we are in on education. Thank you so much for coming in today.

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

ONTARIO HISTORICAL SOCIETY

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Our next presenter is from the Ontario Historical Society. Please come forward. Please state your name for the record. You will have seven minutes for your presentation.

Mr. Robert Leverty: My name is Robert Leverty. Thank you to the committee and to the Clerk and her staff for all the hard work you've been doing and the wicked pace you've been keeping.

In the next seven minutes if you happen to close your eyes that's okay, but please think of something from when you were young, or even more recently: a special landmark in this province. It could be a lighthouse, a train station, a cemetery, a burial ground or a grain elevator—something that stirred you and your family. That's the business that we're in at the Ontario Historical Society.

We were established in 1888 as a not-for-profit, non-government registered charity. We've also, since 1888—the last 132 years—received patronage from all the Lieutenant Governors of the province of Ontario. I think it

speaks to a tradition of non-partisanship as we try to preserve and promote Ontario's history.

In 1899, 11 years after we were founded, this legislation passed at Queen's Park: An Act to incorporate the Ontario Historical Society. All of my remarks are in your kit. This is unique in North America and probably in the world. It gives the Ontario Historical Society the power to establish not-for-profit organizations that are interested in preserving some aspect of Ontario's history.

Immediately in 1899, for example, we incorporated the York Pioneer and Historical Society. They're still a member of ours, and they're going to have their annual meeting at our headquarters in Willowdale on Saturday. We incorporated, in 1908, the Lennox and Addington Historical Society; that is still a member of ours; in 1912, the Waterloo Historical Society, and the tremendous work they've done. I'm going to fast-forward—we've incorporated over 350 organizations—to 2008, and since then.

The financial crisis is still playing out across the province. It's like a tsunami in every part, in every community. The federal government, the provincial government, municipalities, conservation authorities, religious institutions and others have been downloading and off-loading our heritage assets—those landmarks I asked you to think about—as fast as possible.

I have worked for the society for over 30 years. If you had said to me in 2008 that we would be incorporating almost one group every month and a half—and in here I've given you a list of just the groups we've incorporated since 2015—36. One of them is the Ontario Barn Preservation organization, and I gave you their little booklet. We've just published that book to help because of the vanishing landscape in Niagara cultural communities.

What we've done is establish groups as fast as possible as legal entities who now own for the first time, or lease long-term, these assets. It could be a lighthouse—the federal government has been getting rid of lighthouses as fast as possible; grain elevators; train stations; yes, even cemeteries are being off-loaded, divested, to volunteer groups—all volunteer groups. As soon as we incorporate them, they have to get insurance. Remember, they're now responsible for not just all the annual operating costs but the long-term maintenance, capital costs. They've got to fundraise all of those in your communities.

I want to take you on a special, quick tour across the province. Let's go to Manitouwadge. We established an archival and historical society there, in a community of 2,000. They established a great museum in an abandoned Anglican church—all volunteer. They've restored it. For 10 years, they never paid property taxes, but in 2017 they were reclassified and have been assessed property taxes of almost—you're sitting down—\$20,000 a year. We couldn't even pay those kinds of taxes. The Municipal Property Assessment Corp. has ruled that their museum is not exempt from property taxes—these are our levels, in your kit. The township, at this time, has said that the bill remains unpaid and the property will be offered for sale through a public tendering process. Of course, this is

deeply concerning to the Ontario Historical Society and to our volunteer groups.

Let's go to Huntsville. I was there in the summer of 2017 with the Huntsville historical society, and they said—

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

Mr. Robert Leverty: —“There's a beautiful, historic church that's going to be demolished.” We incorporated them, and they now own and operate it.

My summary to you is: Please read all of these letters, on your left-hand side.

In 1899, there were visionaries who established our act. Therefore, we respectfully request that the government of Ontario, in its upcoming budget—that not-for-profit organizations incorporated through the Ontario Historical Society are exempt from property taxes, and that that exemption remains as long as their members remain in good standing with the Ontario Historical Society.

Across the province, for the last 12 years, where we have seen liabilities, these volunteer groups have seen opportunities to save the history of this province.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you. I apologize to cut you off. We have to go to the opposition side for questioning. MPP Shaw.

Ms. Sandy Shaw: We'd be happy to share our time with you, if you have some more to tell us. It was quite a fascinating way of presenting to us.

Mr. Robert Leverty: Thank you very much. Let me go to South Glengarry. In 2010, we incorporated the Glengarry Fencibles Trust. It's part of a national historic site. After the community meeting where we incorporated the group, the mayor came to me and said, “Let's have a cup of coffee tomorrow.” We toured the site. The mayor asked me what he could do—because he realized that this magnificent 1808 bishop's house would be an incredible tourist attraction for people from Ottawa, Kingston and Montreal. I said, “Designate the building if you've got the votes.” He is one of your colleagues, former mayor Jim McDonell. Jim did designate it. Four years later, the diocese went to de-designate and demolish—and if Jim had not passed that motion. So our group had worked for six years, as volunteers. In 2016, they finally owned this national historic site. But they've now been hit with property taxes, and of course, with all of the improvements they make to make this an authentic place, their taxes are going to go up.

So this is a crisis, and we really wish—we're coming back to you, 121 years later, to ask for help to make our volunteer groups a success story. That's for the people of Ontario.

Mr. Piccini is not here, but we could go over to Northumberland and south Peterborough. It's in here—a magnificent, water-powered logging mill. In 2017, I was told that the conservation authority was going to divest it as fast as possible. We had to incorporate the Friends of Hope Mill within two months. They now own and operate it. It's almost like, community to community, these assets are suddenly going unless the volunteer sector takes it.

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The reality is, the property tax system has not reflected this dramatic shift of downloading onto the volunteer sector the long-term stewardship and responsibility for owning and leasing our landmarks and the history of this province.

Ms. Sandy Shaw: Thank you for that compelling story. I feel that that was a story. I would like to believe that in many cases, this is just someone who has really not shown the leadership to understand what it is you're doing as volunteers and what it is you're protecting. I was hoping that you might talk a little bit about Hamilton. In Hamilton, we have the Head-of-the-Lake Historical Society. When these buildings are gone, they're gone. Honestly, I don't think we realize until they are rubble what we have lost—

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

Ms. Sandy Shaw: Oh, so quickly.

Mr. Robert Leverty: We have many groups in Hamilton. We incorporated the Friends of Auchmar. The Beach Canal Lighthouse Group is still working to try to take ownership of this lighthouse, and then they're going to be responsible. The Halton Black History Awareness Society is close by in Burlington.

Thank you very much for your time. Please read the letters on the left-hand side—

Interjections.

Ms. Sandy Shaw: You have four more minutes.

Mr. Robert Leverty: I've got four more minutes. Okay. Where would you like me to go now?

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you. We'll move to the government side now. MPP Roberts.

Mr. Jeremy Roberts: Rob, first of all, thank you for that wonderful presentation and for really painting a beautiful picture for all of us here and for all those watching at home of the importance of our historical sites.

When you asked me to picture a site, one came to mind for me in my community of Nepean back in Ottawa. It's a wonderful historical heritage home called Kilmorie house in City View. I grew up right around the corner, and I'd ride my bike past it every day. One day, I remember asking my grandmother, “What is that place?” She helped teach me the history, and we did research and all of that. I buy in completely. You've got me sold on the value of maintaining these historical sites.

Where my challenge becomes is: How are we going to sustain this in the future and get young people interested in these sites to make sure that there's a sustainable path forward with visitors coming and with communities centred around these sites? I'm just wondering if your organization is doing anything on that forward-looking front, on how we bring in that next generation of visitors to some of these things. Folks of my generation might not be eagerly wanting to go and visit Kilmorie house.

Mr. Robert Leverty: Absolutely. Our groups are doing whatever they can to attract young people. One of the things, in terms of the boards of directors, which is crucial is the need to get officers' and directors' liability. Young people will not go onto the board of directors. You need leadership at this local level. There's a cost that these

groups are having to take on, and now for them to be suddenly hit with property taxes—

Mr. Jeremy Roberts: Sure.

Mr. Robert Leverty: The key thing is, we can never, when our members lose—if it's gone, it's gone forever.

Mr. Jeremy Roberts: For sure.

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

Ms. Donna Skelly: Thank you for your presentation. I live in Hamilton as well. You mentioned Friends of Auchmar, and that is an ongoing battle to try and find the funding. They have a very active, deep-pocketed organization, and it's tough just to keep it—and of course, they're looking at partnerships with the private sector.

Are you asking for a tax exemption at the municipal level for these corporations? Is that your bottom-line ask?

Mr. Robert Leverty: A complete property tax exemption, and one of the problems—

Ms. Donna Skelly: And you've approached municipalities, and they're saying—

Mr. Robert Leverty: Yes. In your letters there are many mayors—there's a mayor from Latchford and many mayors who support history and realize these are crucial to their communities and if they're lost, they're lost—

Ms. Donna Skelly: And they're not being successful, though, in getting this exemption?

Mr. Robert Leverty: No. In fact, we have a number of cases whereby the group will pay the property taxes and the mayor will pay them at the end of the year. But that's not a solution because the mayor could change in the next election. That's not a solution.

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

Mr. Dave Smith: It would be remiss of me, from Peterborough, not to throw in a reference to one of Canada's heritage sites and the world's largest hydraulic lift lock, Lock 21. It is an absolute engineering marvel that doesn't get the attention and the love it deserves. This gives me an opportunity on record of saying that it is an engineering marvel that should get the love it deserves, because it is a heritage site and you're here on behalf of the heritage society.

Mr. Robert Leverty: Very good. Congratulations. Well, we're all in this together.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you for your presentation.

CO-OPERATIVE HOUSING FEDERATION OF CANADA

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): I would now like to call on the next presenter, from the Co-operative Housing Federation of Canada. Please come forward. Please state your names for the record. You will have seven minutes for your presentation.

Mr. David McFarlane: I'm Dave McFarlane.

Mr. Scott Parry: I'm Scott Parry. Hi, everyone.

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

Mr. David McFarlane: Okay. Hello and thank you, everyone, for giving us a time to come and speak. As

mentioned, I'm David McFarlane, president of the Ontario council of the Co-operative Housing Federation of Canada. I'm joined here by Scott Parry, who is our manager of government relations, and also with us is Dillon Waldron, coordinator of government relations at CHF Canada.

I wanted to start by acknowledging the fact that we are the traditional territory of the Neutral, Anishinabeg—I apologize if I mispronounce the names—Haudenosaunee and Métis peoples.

I'm pleased to be here today to present CHF Canada's recommendations for the 2020 provincial budget. We're here to work together with the Ontario government to build up Ontario's housing stock.

I am a housing co-op member. I grew up in a housing co-op in Mississauga, actually, and I currently work as a general manager of a very large co-op in the Toronto area. Co-op housing has been, or is, a big part of who I am, and I'm a strong believer in the fact that housing co-operatives provide a very positive effect on people's lives. I know that co-ops provide safe, affordable, inclusive, democratically run homes for people in Ontario.

The problem that we want to talk about, and I'm sure everyone is familiar, is that now, more than ever, families in Ontario are really feeling the pressure to find somewhere affordable to live. Ontario's housing market is starving young workers of cash and opportunity. It will now take a person approximately 15 years, or three times as long as it used to, to save for a down payment on a home. At the same time, over 20% of all renters in Ontario spend more than half of their income on rent.

Our housing market is also having a negative effect on our economic competitiveness and the health of Ontario businesses. The Toronto Region Board of Trade has listed a lack of affordable housing as a problem and as a barrier to attracting business and keeping employees.

From Wawa to Windsor and Cornwall to Kenora, this housing crisis is not just a crisis in our urban centres, but it's a crisis in the rural areas as well. Whether it's homes for the workers who develop rural Ontario or keeping seniors in the communities that they've created and contributed to for much of their lives, more building is needed across Ontario. More importantly, we need the right type of supply.

Co-op housing is a proven successful model, and it should be considered in any solution to the housing crisis along with renting and buying. But we need the government of Ontario, other affordable housing partners and the private sector to come together to offer a comprehensive range of housing options.

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We believe that by adopting our three low-cost proposals, we can ensure that the existing housing stock operates efficiently and is preserved as a long-term public asset while also building up increased affordable supply.

First, the best way to increase the supply of permanent affordable housing, at the lowest cost to government, is through leveraging government surplus land. Ontario needs to get the maximum public value out of government

surplus lands. This can be accomplished by viewing the land not as a one-time revenue generator, but as an asset that can be leveraged over long periods of time for public good. The province and crown corporations should work with each other and with the non-profit housing sector to identify and create an inventory of surplus government lands that can be unlocked and contributed to the supply. Appropriate sites for residential development can then be leased to the non-profit and co-op sector.

We should also look to increase the supply of affordable housing by harnessing unused air rights over transit corridors like the Ontario Line, Eglinton Crosstown, and GO stations.

Secondly, Ontario must maintain existing affordable housing stock. Ontario's co-ops provide homes for more than 21,000 households—

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

Mr. David McFarlane:—thank you—in 261 buildings across the province.

The majority of these buildings are approximately 30 years old and are coming to the end of their mortgages. As co-ops reach the end of their mortgages, this presents a unique opportunity for the sector to leverage savings for needed capital repairs without provincial funding. The problem with this is the fact that at the end of their mortgage, they are struggling with the possibility of having to pay back to their service manager what we recognize as a negative subsidy. Simply put, after the mortgage matures, co-ops go from receiving an operating subsidy to paying a negative operating subsidy.

Just like many of your own homes, after 30 years, co-ops need new roofs and other parts—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you. I apologize to cut you off. Your time is up. We need to move to the government side. MPP Rasheed?

Mr. Kaleed Rasheed: Thank you so much for your presentation this afternoon. Just help understand: Are there any significant differences in the needs across the population that you serve, in terms of co-op housing? Any significant differences that you can point out?

Mr. Scott Parry: I can jump in there, Dave.

Mr. David McFarlane: Sure.

Mr. Scott Parry: Like Dave kind of said in the presentation, the need for affordable housing across the province is very dramatic.

In terms of what a co-op is, it's a mixed-in community. That means you can have a young couple saving up for a down payment in the house being neighbours with a low-income senior. It's that sense of community, that mixed-in community, that really sets us apart, if that kind of answers your question.

Mr. Kaleed Rasheed: I'm from Peel region. From Peel region to where we are today in Kitchener-Waterloo, what sort of differences are we looking at in terms of co-op housing?

Mr. Scott Parry: In terms of differences, I don't really know how to answer that question. There's really just the cost of rent. In downtown Toronto, there's a Tamil community—

Mr. Kaleed Rasheed: Let's talk about it in terms of demand of co-op housing.

Mr. Scott Parry: Yes.

Mr. Kaleed Rasheed: If you compare the two regions—

Mr. David McFarlane: I think if you compare the two regions in terms of the demand for affordable housing, I think the demand for affordable housing is very high everywhere in Ontario. Whether it's in the form of you having more housing co-ops or non-profits, again, the demand is the same. There is a big need for affordable housing, and we are saying that we want to be a part of that solution and we're here and willing to work and provide ideas on how we can address that issue.

Mr. Scott Parry: To give you another better sense, we have co-ops in, I think, 121 ridings across the province. So it really isn't just a downtown city model; it can be replicated in the suburbs as well. With these three solutions on surplus land, protecting the current stock and ultimately refinancing through government programs of all levels, we could get there.

Mr. Kaleed Rasheed: I know. The reason I was asking is because in my riding of Mississauga East-Cooksville, I have a few housing co-ops. I just wanted to get an idea as to what I have seen or experienced when I'm speaking with a lot of my residents—it's the same thing that other ridings or other community members are facing. I just wanted to get that idea based on that.

Mr. David McFarlane: In this context, the issue that any housing co-op that's dealing with the Housing Services Act—all of the issues are the same. Chiefly, one of the big issues that we're dealing with is the negative subsidy. At the end of their mortgage, the service manager has the ability to, in a sense, force the co-op to provide its own subsidy, because the formula is such that it will eat into the rent-geared-to-income subsidy that it currently receives from the service manager. What we're asking is that they set it out in such a way that that does not happen.

Mr. Scott Parry: If I could just add to that, too: This is provincial legislation that lives in the Housing Services Act. We could talk for hours about that. It doesn't work, it's outdated—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you; sorry to cut you off. We have to move to the opposition side now. MPP Fife.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Thank you very much. I'm going to give you chance to finish that thought, because it's sort of along my line of questioning. But thank you, David and Scott, for coming in today and for giving us some tangible avenues that the government can take.

We have Beaver Creek co-op here in Waterloo. They're mortgage-free. After 28 years, they're mortgage-free and then they would be investing future funds, which they're still collecting, for new development. They have the land and they want to be part of the solution.

I think that if every MPP gets a chance to visit a co-op, you learn that it isn't just about housing and shelter; it's actually about community. I think that that is such an important part of where we need to go for seniors, for those

who are differently abled. These are part of the solution. They've also started to take in climate change. I see this co-operative housing movement as the future. I just wanted to put that on the record.

When I talk about Beaver Creek now being mortgage-free—we've got a fiscally responsible model truly, right? You mentioned here that CHF Canada recommends that the province amend the Housing Services Act funding to allow co-ops to keep their savings once they reach the end of the mortgage. Are there many co-ops who have their savings clawed back by the provincial government? Is this everybody? Is it across the board?

Mr. Scott Parry: Yes, we've seen the canary in the coal mine out in Durham. One co-op has come out of its mortgage. It has tarps on its roof. It badly needs capital repairs. The municipality was—for lack of better words—clawing back some of those mortgage savings that the co-op should be putting towards its capital reserves.

Actually, in Peel region, they are doing a pilot with our recommendations. It's just getting all of the municipalities—we're a small organization. To try to get that across the province is very difficult with only a small GR team. But essentially, this is impacting 260 co-ops across the province. Like we said, it's 30 years old. This error in the HSA funding formula allows the service managers to take those mortgage savings and not allow the co-op to be more business-like, more independent, and leverage those mortgage savings in the long run.

We've had this conversation with a number of MPPs and the ministry. The historic intent of this funding formula was never designed to subsidize municipal housing. Co-ops should not be seen in that light, and we really need to fix this funding formula and protect the stock for future generations.

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Ms. Catherine Fife: So when you talk to Steve Clark about co-operative housing being part of the solution and the sharing of public lands—

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

Ms. Catherine Fife:—what do you hear back? Do they understand?

We fought the Liberals for years to try to get them to understand how important co-operative housing is to the overall housing crisis.

Mr. Scott Parry: I think Minister Clark understands this.

Just last week, I was at a housing task force with AMO, and the president, Jamie McGarvey, said to a ministry official, "We've been talking about surplus land for years." And we asked the officials, "Are you guys talking to Metrolinx about this?" They're just initial conversations. We should be a lot further along on that front.

Ms. Catherine Fife: It really shouldn't be up to Metrolinx; I'm sorry. They're a government agency. If the government wants to invest in housing and the co-operative movement has come to them—it's not their land. It's the citizens' land. We have a housing crisis in the province of Ontario. Let's get it built.

Thank you so much for coming in.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Jeremy Roberts): That concludes your testimony. Thank you so much.

JOSSLIN INSURANCE

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Jeremy Roberts): I'll now invite our next presenters to come forward: Josslin Insurance. I'll get you to begin by stating your name for the record. You'll have seven minutes, and we'll give you a one-minute warning.

Mr. Steven Wagler: My name is Steven Wagler. For the past 29 years, I've been a part of and eventually a partner in my family's business, which is Josslin Insurance Brokers. We are celebrating two significant milestones in 2020, the first one being that the business has been in our family for 45 years, and it's also our 140th anniversary.

Josslin Insurance was founded in the town of New Hamburg, just west of here, in 1880 by Louis Peine, who represented both Economical Mutual and Gore Mutual at that time. Today we have six offices located in and around the region of Waterloo, and we currently serve just over 21,000 policyholders and employ 70 professional brokers and support staff who also live in the local community.

As brokers, we work for the best interests of our clients, and we provide choice and individualized guidance. At Josslin Insurance, we have access to over 24 different insurance companies, which allows us to offer choice and unique solutions for each of our clients. We advocate on behalf of our clients when they buy their insurance and when they need to use it in the event of a claim. As brokers, we are not tied to any one company.

Why am I here? I had the opportunity to present to this committee a year ago, at the pre-budget hearings, and I spoke about a number of issues that I believed were challenging Ontario consumers at the time: auto insurance reform, auto insurance premium increases, flood prevention, consumer protection, and innovation. I know there has been a lot of work done in these areas over the past year, but from a consumer's perspective, they've really seen two things: They've seen their prices go up; and they've seen digital pink slips, which we do appreciate, in the last budget, but we need more work. So today I'm here to focus on one thing, and that is auto insurance and auto insurance reform.

I'm going to start by looking at trends over the past year.

I should back up and just say that there's a unique relationship between brokers and consumers, and I can assure you that the topic of auto insurance is on the minds of our brokers and our clients.

I'm sure you're hearing in your constituency offices that prices have increased, so I'm going to focus on auto insurance pricing. When I review the price increases across all of our companies during the past 12 to 18 months—because it takes time for pricing to enter our market space—we see an overall average rate increase between 15% and 20%. On the surface, this may look like a great thing for a brokerage owner, but as I mentioned earlier, there's a unique relationship between consumers

and brokers, and the challenging market conditions mean challenges for us as brokers. Let's look at the challenges that we're both facing. Premium increases of 15% to 20% on average mean some individuals are seeing a slight increase—maybe 5%—and other riskier profiles will see more than 20%, perhaps in the neighbourhood of 30%. That's a significant concern.

Non-payment cancellations: Our brokerage has seen a 10% increase in cancellations for non-payment of premiums this past year—a sign that people can't afford the product they're buying.

Cancellations based on price: We've also seen a 10% increase in cancellations because of price increases. I mentioned that these are most likely higher-risk profile customers or consumers, which may result, in my mind, in a higher propensity for uninsured motorists on Ontario roads.

I want to talk a little bit about unwritten rules. A very concerning trend is that even with price increases that I've mentioned, our insurance companies are still experiencing unprofitable results. In situations like this, companies start to put pressure on brokers and restrict access to some or all of the products that they sell. This is just a defensive strategy. So restricting the market is bad for brokers and bad for consumers, because it limits our ability to serve our clients in the end.

I want to share with you a list of restrictions that we just received last week from one of our insurance companies to illustrate this. We have seen similar restrictions in place with at least 80% of our companies that we do business with, which is a big concern. This is a list of things, "Don't send us this business," and it's not published:

—"We're not accepting new business where the principal operator of a vehicle is under the age of 25, unless supported by parents with the same company or residing in the same household." So it's really limiting the access to new drivers.

—"Don't send us business where drivers have no previous insurance experience." Again, if you've never had prior insurance, you can't buy a product that you need to buy.

—No driver's licence less than five years: This really is telling us that companies aren't interested in running a business where there are new drivers or newcomers to Canada.

—No cancellations for non-payment in the past three years: We already talked about that. This is on the rise. If you can't afford your insurance and you get cancelled, you may not be able to buy it.

—New drivers with an accident benefit claim in the past six years, so somebody who has had an actual claim and needed the product: That might just point to somebody, an underwriter, concerned with somebody gaming the system in a system that's broken.

—New drivers with an at-fault loss in the past six years: Somebody who has had to use their product or their insurance policy now is limited to be able to buy it again.

All of these market trend: increased pricing, increased cancellations for non-payment—

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Jeremy Roberts): One minute.

Mr. Steven Wagler:—and increased cancellations for price and market restrictions are signs that point to the need for real and meaningful reform. To add further context to this, these signs are happening in a geographical area that's not the GTA. I know that's what you people have heard many, many times again, but we're a regional broker.

Next steps: Obviously, we need to take action. I would encourage you to continue to work closely with our provincial association. I know that the Insurance Brokers Association of Ontario has a great working relationship with FSRA and also with the Ministry of Finance. But my message here today is just to let you know that we're close to crisis, in our opinion, and we need to act. We need to make some real change. I'll leave it at that and take the questions.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Jeremy Roberts): Perfect. Thank you so much. We'll start with the opposition for questioning. MPP Fife.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Thank you very much, Chair. Steve, thanks again for coming to committee. You literally are on the front lines. You sharing these market trends actually has a great impact on us, I have to say, because we're not hearing that from the larger advocacy lobby groups—especially those ones that are anecdotal, but they're real. I'd like to actually get a copy of your delegation, if you wouldn't mind.

I'm in the process right now of writing a letter to FSCO and to the finance minister on behalf of three constituents in Waterloo, who happen to be new immigrants and who are definitely seeing higher auto insurance rates. There's no doubt about it. One is paying \$8,000 a year—never been in a car accident, driving a new car. There is definitely a discrepancy on how these rates are being determined. Let's be clear: These folks need to drive. In many cases, it's very much tied to them earning their living.

I want to give you a chance to tell the outside-Toronto issue, because we know that Brampton has higher rates than anywhere else in Ontario. But let's tell the rest of the story about Waterloo.

Mr. Steven Wagler: Do you want me to respond to some of that?

Ms. Catherine Fife: Yes, I do.

Mr. Steven Wagler: I think it's a social policy issue, for sure. It's moving in that direction. I think that's what we need to understand.

1510

I want to be very clear on this: There's a balance to this. We support the reforms to actually move to file-and-use rates. Anything that streamlines cost out of our system is a good thing, so we support what has gone on with FSRA and that move, but there needs to be some accountability in that change. I don't know—I'm not an authority on that. I have some ideas behind that. This is a product that's required by law, so we have to find a way to deliver it effectively.

All these symptoms that I just shared with you are pointing in the direction of there are challenges with the

product, so let's deal with them. We've dealt with band-aid solutions for, I don't know, 20 years. It's time we actually reformed the product.

I think there needs to be a willingness to do that. It's a political challenge. I will tell everybody around the table that it's not easy, what you're going to have to do, but we need to lift it.

Ms. Catherine Fife: I think your statement that accessing auto insurance is quickly becoming social policy is dead-on. I think it's exactly where we are right now, having been the former finance critic and worked through some of that process with FSRA and the needed incremental changes that happened.

Meanwhile, let's be honest: The large auto insurance companies—not the brokers—their profit margins are outrageous. What is a reasonable amount of money for a large auto insurance company to have? This is the insurance company capital of Ontario.

There is a consumer protection piece that is being dropped here, on auto insurance, and I think your testimony today is very valuable. I just want to let you know that.

Mr. Steven Wagler: Can I respond to that?

Ms. Catherine Fife: Yes.

Mr. Steven Wagler: I just want to be clear, because one of the challenges—

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Jeremy Roberts): Twenty seconds.

Mr. Steven Wagler: Yes. One of the challenges is that profitability on the auto insurance side is not there, so it speaks to a product challenge; it really does.

I'm not saying there's always—there's costs in the system. But, yes, we really need to reform the product. I think we have to look at the benefit that claimants are receiving. If the expense of that delivery—

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Jeremy Roberts): I'll have to cut you off there, I'm afraid. We'll move now to the government side. MPP Smith.

Mr. Dave Smith: In going through the list of things that you said that the insurance company wouldn't accept people on—I can understand any business, any industry, coming forward and saying, if someone has a history of not paying their bills, "We would prefer not to deal with them." I can understand them saying, if somebody has a history of poor driving records, and they've had a number of accidents, "They're much higher risk, and we don't want them." I'm having a lot of trouble, though, with the under 25, no previous insurance, and not having five years' driving experience, to summarize those.

You made the comment that we need to revamp the system, and that right now, most insurance companies are losing money on auto insurance. How would you suggest, then, that that change? How do you suggest that we revamp the system?

You're correct: There have been a number of band-aids that were put on. There were things like deductibles that were thrown in there for injuries and so on, as an attempt to lower it. If we have to revamp the whole system, how do you do it in a way that keeps the rates low and allows

for the insurance, but still allows for enough payment to cover the loss of the insurance company, and not limit the benefit that someone is going to get if they are injured in a vehicle accident?

Mr. Steven Wagler: I think the product is complicated, to say the least. So I'm not going to suggest here, in the time I have to answer, that I'm going to give you a great—there's no silver bullet. And I know that the challenge is that when this file gets opened up, there's a lot of interest around it.

But I would say to you that sometimes you've got to look at the product itself. If it's too rich—I mean, we need choice, so I would say to you that we would always advocate for choice, because we can customize a solution. If you need something different, then, Catherine, we can deliver that.

But I think we have to look at, on balance, what is a first-party benefit, and what is my ability to go and recover through the court system. I think you need to make some choices around that that are not easy, so I would start there.

I think anybody in the room would probably say that a first-party benefit is probably the way I would like to go because I control that, and I control costs in that. And the other side could be a challenge, so there I'm kind of influencing where I suggest you start.

Mr. Dave Smith: There was a time when \$200,000 for PLPD was acceptable. Realistically, now, you need \$2 million because of things. I don't see those costs ever coming down. I'm curious, then, how do you find a way to make a premium that is acceptable—

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Jeremy Roberts): One minute.

Mr. Steven Wagler: So I think in different jurisdictions, if you look, there will be a choice of its rich first-party benefit or the ability to take legal action. I think that's part of the solution.

The answer to your other question, about going from \$200,000 as a standard to now we should be at \$2 million, is correct. I don't think you can turn on a TV or look at your phone without seeing a personal injury lawyer ad pop up. Maybe those are connected things as well.

Mr. Dave Smith: Thank you very much.

Mr. Steven Wagler: You're welcome.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Jeremy Roberts): Thank you so much for your testimony.

Mr. Steven Wagler: Thank you.

CHILD WITNESS CENTRE

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Jeremy Roberts): We'll now welcome our next witness forward, the Child Witness Centre. Good afternoon. I'll ask you to begin by stating your names for the record, and you'll then have seven minutes for your presentation, with a one-minute warning.

Ms. Laura Muirhead: Perfect. My name is Laura Muirhead.

Mr. David Morneau: I'm David Morneau.

Ms. Laura Muirhead: Can I start?

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Jeremy Roberts): You may begin.

Ms. Laura Muirhead: I am actually in the process of retiring as the executive director of the Child Witness Centre, and David is here as the new executive director. He has been here for about a week, so I'm going to do most of the talking for this particular part of the presentation.

We're here today to discuss the need for provincial funding supporting children and youth who experience abuse and crime. The criminal justice system is complex and difficult to understand and navigate. It's overwhelming for adults and even more overwhelming for families when children and youth are victims or witnesses of abuse or crime.

Imagine your son or daughter learning that someone they loved was doing something to them that was wrong. Imagine that charges were laid and now they have to wait possibly two to three years before the case comes to court. Imagine a youth who has suffered abuse and doesn't really have a supportive family to help them. Imagine trying to cope with your own fears and anxieties as a parent, and those of your son or daughter. Now, imagine that there's someone there to walk with you and your child or youth through the criminal justice system, making sure that you and your son or daughter have the information they need supporting all of you through the process, and helping you to have a voice and feel included in the process. This is our work at the Child Witness Centre.

Why is this so important? When a child or youth who experiences abuse is not supported, they are 30% less likely to finish high school and four times as likely to report self-harm or suicidal ideation. Did you know that 70% of homeless youth have suffered some form of physical, sexual or emotional abuse? Boys who are abused by family members are 45 times more likely to perpetrate dating violence as adolescents.

In addition to the significant risk of mental, physical and emotional health issues that happen when children and youth suffer abuse, authors of *The Economic Costs and Consequences of Child Abuse in Canada* report \$15 billion in economic costs of abuse in Canadian society.

Child and youth advocacy centres, or CYACs, are an innovative, collaborative hub that support young people who experience abuse in our province and their families through a criminal investigation and help them connect to services to help them begin to heal. CYACs require annualized funding from the province of Ontario—I was here last year pitching this as well—to ensure that young people receive the support they need through the criminal justice process, helping them move beyond the abuse and crime that they've experienced, seizing the opportunities they have ahead of them.

In Waterloo region, almost three times every day of the year, children and youth find the courage to tell someone that they're experiencing abuse. These investigations happen through Waterloo Region CYAC, a collaborative, best-practice hub designed to investigate allegations of abuse in a child- and youth-friendly way.

In the CYAC, our advocates support young people and their families through the investigative process and connect to services in the community, helping them begin

to heal, regardless of whether charges are laid. This year, we will handle more than 550 investigations of abuse involving more than 900 young people, and our advocates will support more than 500 of those people.

1520

There are eight CYACs open in Ontario and a number of others that are in the development stage. A commitment by the province at this time will significantly enable the development of those best-practice models. The Department of Justice federally provided seed funding but was very clear that ongoing funding from a sustainability perspective is a provincial responsibility.

Ontario CYACs require approximately \$3 million, beginning with this next fiscal year, to provide victim-centred, child-and-youth-friendly support during a criminal investigation and beyond. Without this funding, these innovative victim-centred hubs providing evidence-informed services are at risk, and our children and youth will be left unsupported.

In addition, more than 10 children and youth each week in Waterloo region and Guelph and Wellington county become a victim of or a witness to a crime. This year, we will support more than 900 young people and their families through their criminal court process, and we're not that special here; I know that this happens across the province.

When a young person becomes a victim of a crime and charges are laid either through the CYAC or through other police units, we ensure that their families are informed, supported and included in the criminal court process, fostering healing, hope and well-being.

The demand for these services has more than tripled in the past seven years. Provincial funding for this work began in 2006, with a commitment from the Ministry of the Attorney General—committing \$165,000 annually. But to meet the increase in demand, we require a further investment of \$450,000.

Why invest in victim-centred support for young people now?

It's cost-effective and it makes economic sense.

It's an innovative, evidence-informed approach recognized internationally, in more than 40 countries, and there are more than 40 CYACs open or developing in Canada.

It reduces the risk of revictimization by the system, which can exacerbate or induce mental health symptoms.

It supports and enhances the work of police and child protection. In fact, in June 2019, the Ontario Association of Chiefs of Police passed a resolution formally requesting the province to provide funding to CYACs in Ontario. A copy of that resolution is in the package that has been distributed to you.

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

Ms. Laura Muirhead: Fifth, it reduces the risk of mental, emotional and physical health issues now and in the future. More than a third of Canadians have experienced abuse as a child. While child abuse is associated with an increased risk of mental health disorders, it is statistically significant that there is a risk of many serious physical health conditions in adulthood, including stroke, cancer and lung disease.

It also supports initiatives you already started. Through the health curriculum, you've given kids the language to talk about what's happening to them. We need to make sure that we can support them when they use that language.

Every day in Ontario, there are many, many young people who are victimized by abuse and crime, and dealing with the aftermath. You need to invest in them and their future, showing them that they are valued and deserve the chance to feel safe, heard and supported.

This is a complex topic to cover in seven minutes. I invite you to take the first step and meet with the directors of these innovative centres as soon as possible.

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

Mrs. Amy Fee: Thank you, Laura, for being here, and David, it's great to see you.

Laura, when I saw a few weeks ago that you were retiring, I was kind of hit by that, because I know you're a strong advocate for this, and my child, as you know, has gone through the services that the child witness centre provides. The wraparound support that he received there was just amazing. It wasn't just the support for him but for the family as a whole. Thankfully, we didn't have to have you involved for very long, but that short glimpse into what you do every day certainly opened my eyes to how important it is to have those wraparound supports.

I'm just wondering if you can describe for the committee what a child experiences when they need the services.

Ms. Laura Muirhead: Thank you, Amy, and thank you for sharing and talking from your perspective.

When a child experiences abuse—and sometimes when it comes out, they didn't actually intend for it to come out. Sometimes they might have told their friend, who told their mother, and their mother decided they should do something about it, and so the child would be invited to come in for an interview at the Child and Youth Advocacy Centre, but it wasn't really what they had hoped was going to happen. They really just needed to tell their friend. So we come at it from that perspective. They are met by an advocate who talks about what the process is going to be—they and whatever caregiver or adult they have brought with them. In addition to that, the advocate will introduce them to the police officers, who are specialized in these kinds of investigations, and the family and children service worker, who is also specialized in interviewing kids.

The Child and Youth Advocacy Centre is a child- and youth-friendly place, so it's not like walking into a police station. The officers are not dressed in uniform; they're dressed in suits like David, or other casual clothes. They go in and they have the opportunity to talk in what I call a child- and youth-friendly trauma-informed kind of place with the officer or the family and children services worker about what happened to them.

From that point, if they have brought their caregiver in, their caregiver may in fact also be interviewed. When that happens, then the advocate will sit with whoever is not being interviewed and they'll talk to them about how

they're feeling and if they're expressing concerns, if they're anxious, if they're struggling with what to do. If a mum says, "I don't know what to say to my daughter when I take her home," they will talk that through. They also will check in with them a couple of days later to say, "How are you doing?" because the process can be incredibly overwhelming.

And then, if charges are laid, our child witness program kicks into gear and works with the family so that they are well informed about what's happening in the criminal justice process. As people are struggling with the time it takes or some of the judgments that have been made, they will help explain that and mostly help them cope.

Mrs. Amy Fee: Thank you, and congratulations on your retirement.

Ms. Laura Muirhead: Thanks.

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

Mr. Dave Smith: We have a very short period of time. You are downstream, and by that I mean that you have to be reactive because something has happened to the child at that point. What can we do preventatively to stop what was occurring that created the situation where the child now has to come see you? Do you have any ideas on what we can do so that your services aren't needed because we're not putting children in those positions where—

Ms. Laura Muirhead: That's my dream. But what I would tell you is that we're actually a secondary prevention, because if we do the job with those young people at the time when they come through the door, then the chance that they're going to have mental health issues down the road, the chance that they're going to be homeless, the chance that they're going to be a perpetrator, the chance that they'll be revictimized as an adult—all of those chances go down significantly. The evidence—

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

Ms. Laura Mae Lindo: Thank you for that response because I actually was going to ask you some things so you'd be able to finish that thought. I also would argue that you are providing preventative services if we consider the whole child and everything that happens when somebody is experiencing that trauma.

I wanted to also thank you for including the resolution from the Ontario Association of Chiefs of Police. Two parts that are particularly important: The child advocacy centre model is internationally recognized as best practice in child abuse investigation; and their final resolution, "the Ontario Association of Chiefs of Police calls on the government of Ontario to endorse and support the multidisciplinary approach of child advocacy centres and to assist in providing adequate funding to support the development and sustainability of child advocacy centres across Ontario."

With that in mind, I'm wondering if you can speak to where you see the financial investment sitting in government, given that the work that you do crosses over different ministries. I know that this investment shows that we actually care for the child with real action.

Ms. Laura Muirhead: Absolutely. Thank you for that. That has been one of the struggles. I think that's one of the reasons why we haven't been able to secure funding up to this point. We've been at this since 2014, trying to find ways to have the province support this. We've been bounced around. Nobody seems to think that they own this. We were originally involved with MCYS, but they suggested we should be involved with health, and then they suggested we should be involved with MAG, and then they suggested we should be involved with the Solicitor General because of the link to the police. That's the piece that has been really difficult.

What I look for the government to do is to understand the model, figure out where we fit and then work with us to figure out a funding formula.

Ms. Laura Mae Lindo: Thank you for that. Just as a quick follow-up, given that you have been bounced around for so long—so under consecutive governments this bouncing has arisen. The current government speaks often of an interministerial approach. I would hope that this is the moment where they would take that leadership, pick a place and get the funding going.

1530

If you could speak a little bit about what victim-centred support means when they back it with finances as opposed to just words—like, we'll say, "Every child matters," and then not necessarily put the funding behind it—that would be fantastic.

Ms. Laura Muirhead: Just clarify a bit?

Ms. Laura Mae Lindo: Yes. Oftentimes we hear the government support initiatives but not necessarily put the financial investment behind it to make it real. If you could speak about what this would mean for you now, that would be great.

Ms. Laura Muirhead: Right now, we receive less than 20% of our funding from government sources. Our budget is \$1.3 million.

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

Ms. Laura Muirhead: So that means that we have to raise close to \$1 million every year in our community to deliver uniquely tailored services to each of the young people who come through our door. They're not customers; they're here because they were victims. That's the first point.

The second thing is, every single person that comes through the door is unique. We need the flexibility to provide uniquely tailored services to each and every one of them. Otherwise, there's the high potential for mismatch. I don't know if that helps to answer your question.

We use the terminology that says—it costs us, on average, \$1,000 to support a young person either through a criminal investigation or through criminal court. Some might be \$200 and some might be \$5,000, but on average it's \$1,000.

Ms. Laura Mae Lindo: Beautiful. That's an important investment for us to make. Thank you.

Ms. Laura Muirhead: Absolutely.

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

Ms. Laura Muirhead: Thank you.

REGIONAL MUNICIPALITY OF WATERLOO

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Moving along to our next presenter, from the Regional Municipality of Waterloo: Please come forward. Please state your name for the record. You will have seven minutes for your presentation.

Hon. Karen Redman: Karen Redman, Chair of Waterloo region.

Good afternoon and welcome to the entire committee. Some of you know this area very well. If there ever was a place in Ontario to invest, the Waterloo region is the place, and now is the time. This is our message to investors, entrepreneurs and families seeking vibrant, safe and thriving communities to live in. This is our message to the government of Ontario as well.

The region of Waterloo is a proud and innovative service delivery partner for provincial programs and services. The effectiveness of this partnership relies on sufficient and stable funding, as well as clear and efficient guidelines and operating models, to maintain those programs and services. We cannot do it without the support of the provincial government.

We are very proud of our strong regional economy and our continued Aaa credit rating from Moody's, and we—both elected officials and residents in our communities—work very hard for our successes.

The region of Waterloo has significantly more priorities and more demands for services and programs than available funding.

We're pleased to see the provincial and federal governments working together to provide much-needed funding for infrastructure through the various streams of the joint Investing in Canada Infrastructure Program.

With respect to the public transit stream, to date, the province has approved funding for 16 projects, totalling \$60.7 million. The federal government has approved five of those projects, including the construction of a significant new bus storage and maintenance facility, as well as the purchase of additional buses. We are pursuing the federal government to approve these remaining projects as soon as possible so that we don't lose the 2020 construction season.

The region has a number of additional transit projects that we believe are eligible for ICIP funding. We would encourage you to roll out the next intake phase for this stream as soon as possible.

We would also encourage you to consider a more streamlined and efficient way to deliver transit infrastructure funding. The model that has been developed to flow federal gas-tax funding to municipalities is worth considering. Under this approach, the allocation for each municipality is identified, criteria for eligible projects are established, and municipalities can proceed quickly to deliver the highest-priority projects that meet these eligibility criteria. A streamlined process would reduce red tape and would be much more effective for all parties concerned.

The regional municipality seeks your support and endorsement of the funding applications made under the community, culture and recreation stream:

- a curatorial centre expansion at the Ken Seiling Waterloo Region Museum;

- the Guelph to Goderich railway crossings, which, in light of the participation of multiple municipalities, has far-reaching potential for the greater good;

- the West Montrose covered bridge, which is a significant heritage facility;

- Schneider's Creek multi-use trail; and

- Transit Hub multi-use trail.

Lastly, for the Green Stream, the regional municipality of Waterloo understands that the province will be launching phase 2 of this stream at some point in 2020. This funding stream is potentially a crucial source of funding for our water and waste water capital program. Nearly 40% of all \$1 billion of water and waste water capital programming is required to support the growth in our community. Please open application eligibility to all municipalities, regardless of size, for the second intake under this program.

Improved GO Transit is very important to this community. Provincial approval of Metrolinx's initial business case in December 2019 was great news for the people and businesses along the innovation corridor, including Waterloo region. Delivering two-way, all-day GO by 2025 will bring communities and job creators together and help to unlock the full economic potential of this vital employment zone. Government funding approval for the initial business case is the next step, and it is a crucial step—whatever work will bring faster, more frequent GO service to Waterloo region as quickly as possible, especially on the inbound morning trains.

There are proposed changes under the Development Charges Act with regard to soft services. These are a concern. The region encourages the province to reconsider the implementation of a new and cumbersome CBC process, as it adds red tape and potentially slows down the housing development processes.

Ontario is the only province in Canada where housing is a municipal responsibility. The demand for social housing in Waterloo region is rising to record levels, while housing is aging and maintenance costs are increasing. The release of the National Housing Strategy funding for affordable housing has been slow. Pairing this fast-tracked process with the provincial Ontario Priorities Housing Initiative could leverage programs from all three levels of government to create additional affordable housing across the province.

While the Waterloo region received a notional allocation of \$12.3 million from the new funding streams introduced by the National Housing Strategy, this allocation is less than the funding received by the region from previous similar programs. In a recent RFP for affordable housing, responses were received requesting capital investments in excess of \$22 million from proponents, but the region's total available allocation is \$5.5 million. We request that the province advocate with the federal government to create streamlined processes—

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

Hon. Karen Redman: —for the National Housing Strategy.

My last intervention—and you can read the other ones as printed—would be that we are very grateful for the operational funding that the province has afforded for our temporary consumption and treatment services site. It has had 1,000 visits and has saved numerous overdoses since it opened. However, we are anxiously awaiting our allocation for the capital funding for the permanent site, and to date, we have not heard from the ministry. Our contractor has agreed to delay the RFP until the end of the month, but after that we will be back to square one.

Dedicated gas tax and funding for public transportation is a huge issue. The province has sought input, and we suggested that the dedicated public transit fund should be flexible in supporting the needs of both urban and—

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

Hon. Karen Redman: I heard that you really kept us in line.

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

Ms. Catherine Fife: Thank you very much, Chair Redman, for coming and sharing the priorities for your region. Earlier we did hear from Mayor Urbanovic, and housing was also one of the key themes, as it is in Waterloo.

I have to say, item number 5 around the consumption and treatment services site: This is obviously a huge issue. I heard it at ROMA as well, in our rural communities, where municipalities are really grappling with dealing with addiction and dealing with mental health. But we have very high rates of death here in Waterloo region compared to other sectors, and I just wanted to give you an opportunity to really highlight how important it is that we do receive the capital funding for a permanent location.

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Hon. Karen Redman: There have been over 1,100 visits to the temporary treatment site at 150 Duke. The reality is, as a regional government and the provider of social services and housing—as well as partnering with public health—it's really important that we look at a pan-regional view. You're right that this opioid crisis is right across the province; it certainly is across our community. This is one very important piece of it; the other is partnering with community providers like Sanguen, the Kitchener downtown health organization. And we're looking in Cambridge, another hot spot where there are a lot of people who are suffering with opioid addiction.

I think one of the things that we have to keep underscoring is that we need a multi-pronged approach. We need to be able to develop trust with these people who are living on the margins, because respect and trust are two sides of the same coin. We need to have a relationship with them so that we can talk to them about primary care, so that we can offer them housing, so that we can offer them supports for mental health. All of these things are contributing factors. We certainly do need to provide those

wraparound services in a more comprehensive way at 150 Duke, and that can't happen until we get the capital funding to make the renovations.

Ms. Catherine Fife: I think we've all tried to make the case to the government that this is actually an investment in keeping people out of hospital as well. There are smart places to invest funding for—I think we heard it at Sanguen: You meet people where they need their health care, in the community. That's a message that we definitely will take back and I hope that the government side is hearing.

The other piece around housing: The region has a Housing First policy, I know—

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

Ms. Catherine Fife: —and has tried to take leadership. Can you speak to the importance of—because we can't build affordable housing on the property tax base. Can you please just give us an overall summary of where we need to go on that one?

Hon. Karen Redman: I would reiterate that social housing is a municipal responsibility only in the province of Ontario. We just passed our budget last night, and the reality is that there are so many competing needs. There is one taxpayer. So we need to partner with the provincial government, especially. There are so many impacts, whether we look at paramedical services, whether we look at wait times in hospitals—all of these things are impacted by not being able to meet the people where they are and to provide the services they need. We have so many effective, dedicated community partners who are happy to partner with us. But we need to have the funds. That is just something—

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

Mr. David Piccini: Thank you very much for your deposition today. I really appreciate it—well-lined-up priorities.

Certainly, predictable funding is something we've been working closely with AMO on. We meet on a regular basis, as a government. And I know it's something that's certainly echoed across the province—OCIF as well, the formula for more rural, at least in our areas.

Have you made a submission on red tape reduction to Minister Sarkaria?

Hon. Karen Redman: Yes, we have.

Mr. David Piccini: Wonderful.

My comments are solely around the ICIP program. I'd like to go on record with the opposition members opposite: I think this is something we can find some real common ground on in advocating to the federal government—with the over \$60 million invested, only five projects of which have been approved. We're suffering, certainly, in my region as well, and really trying to advocate. I think we can all go together to the province to advocate for these projects. I think that's a non-partisan issue that we can advocate for together. It's good to see you advocating strongly for these projects, and it's something we'll take back to Minister Scott.

Hon. Karen Redman: Thank you. If I can just make an observation: One of the things that this community is uniquely good at is collaboration. I know that when we instituted our LRT and launched it back in the spring, that was really the cumulative efforts of all levels of government over two decades. So people in Waterloo region do take the long view, and we do look to partner with your government and the federal government because we need to recognize—and I think this is what MPP Fife was saying—that we can't do this alone. We recognize that we have to be in partnership, but would also hope that other levels of government would acknowledge that we're closest to the people, we recognize the needs and when we come forward with one voice, it's great to partner with your government and the federal government.

Mr. David Piccini: Thank you.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Further questions? MPP Fee.

Mrs. Amy Fee: I think that's actually what makes this region so great: the fact that we all do work together so well—the federal, provincial and local governments, as well. We definitely will be putting that pressure on our federal counterparts to make sure that we can get that funding here.

But one thing I just want you to do for the committee is—we've heard little bits about the two-way, all-day GO. But no matter how much our members from this region keep bringing up at Queen's Park how important it is to have those inbound trains, I'll still find members who are shocked at how many people are actually coming into Waterloo region. I'm just wondering if you can paint that picture of how important Waterloo region is to the whole economic picture for Ontario.

Hon. Karen Redman: Well, it's said that we produce about 70% of the GDP. We punch way above our weight. When we market Waterloo region—we're part of that innovation corridor. We're going around the world, looking for talent and investment that could go anywhere in the world. We're saying, "Come to Waterloo region." We have Google.

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

Hon. Karen Redman: We have amazing incubators that have start-ups going. But what people want to know is, do we have access to that talent pool?

The all-day, two-way GO: We are probably either equal with people coming as going out—or a net recipient of people coming into Waterloo region for employment, so it's very important.

Mrs. Amy Fee: Thank you.

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

Hon. Karen Redman: I'd just like to apologize to the interpreters. I've been accused of talking too fast, and I feel like a little kid running downhill, trying to get this all in seven minutes. Thank you.

Thank you so much for coming to Waterloo region.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you.

ASSOCIATION OF IROQUOIS
AND ALLIED INDIANS

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Our next presenter is from the Association of Iroquois and Allied Indians. Please come forward. Please state your name for the record, and then you can proceed with your presentation. You will have seven minutes.

Grand Chief Joel Abram: Good afternoon. My name is Joel Abram. I'm Grand Chief of the Association of Iroquois and Allied Indians. Thank you for making some time for me today.

We have a lot of priorities, as you can see from the material that we handed out. You'll find a little bit about our association, what we do. We're called a provincial-territorial organization—one of four in Ontario. We advocate for rights and different things on behalf of our seven member nations, which is around 25,000 First Nations citizens.

Our main areas are mental health and addictions; housing; support for elders, the disabled and chronically ill; water; human trafficking; corrections; and child welfare.

I also hold other responsibilities within the wider region of Ontario: I have the social portfolio at the Chiefs of Ontario coordinating body, so I deal with the province on several different issues. I co-chair the joint social services technical table with Ontario. Also, I co-chair the tripartite table on child welfare. We're looking at the implementation of decisions under the recent CHRT tribunal decision. We're looking at changes in child welfare. I sat on the national legislative working group for Bill C-92 on child welfare. There are a few more things too.

I just want to touch briefly on a few of these areas. Hopefully, I'll be able to cover most of what I want to say within the probably four minutes that I now have left, but I think a lot of the stuff has already been related by a lot of the witnesses that you've had so far.

With regard to housing, we know that it's at a crisis situation now. We saw articles about how nobody can afford to live in Toronto anymore, and so we know that it's a problem in urban areas and it's even worse in First Nation areas themselves, as well. We know that we do need a lot more social housing that's available.

1550

Also in the news, Finland has now conquered homelessness. Pretty much anyone who is homeless there now is by choice, due to mental health reasons mainly. They have sky-high taxes too.

But we do know that there is room, a lot of room, for improvement within the province as well. We're just looking for more of that affordable housing. It doesn't necessarily have to be—there's a lot of room for improvement there.

Support for elders, disabled and chronically ill: Approximately 12 years ago, I used to be chief at Oneida Nation of the Thames. We constructed a 64-bed long-term-care facility in the community. It cost maybe around \$11 million. That was the first First Nation long-term-care facility that was built in the province in 20 years. We know

that there is a huge waiting list. It's approximately 50% First Nation residents and 50% non-First Nation residents. Everybody is welcome there.

We've also recently secured some more beds for Mohawks of the Bay of Quinte; they've got 128. Batchewana Ojibways, another of our member nations, are going to be pursuing some as well.

When we had ours at Oneida, they weren't even eligible to apply for London-region bids. We had to do a lot of lobbying to even be able to apply for them. We were able to successfully get those and construct the building. We put a lot of our own source funds and revenues into that as well.

So there is a big need for long-term-care facilities, assisted care, palliative care, within First Nations.

We think it also contributes to economic development. Ours created over 70 full- and part-time jobs, good-paying jobs, that are competitive in the job market. I think we're bringing in \$20 million in contribution to our local economy. So there's a lot to be said there.

Water is also a big issue. I'll just kind of briefly go over that. Everyone knows that most of the boil-water advisories in Canada are in Ontario. My own community, Oneida, has a boil-water advisory. There was a recent Facebook post about a community 20 minutes away extending their waterpark hours, whereas we had a conserve-and-boil-water advisory.

There is no real reason for those kinds of situations to be occurring nowadays. We do know that we have potentially a lot of Walkertons happening in Ontario, but just in the First Nations. But nobody seems to really care too much about that.

Human trafficking and corrections: This is also a big concern. Everyone saw the article, probably a couple of days ago, about the overrepresentation of First Nations in our Canadian prison system.

Also, with human trafficking, we just went through a situation in my community a couple of days ago. A young lady was missing for nine or 10 days. She met an anonymous person on the Internet and ended up in Brampton somewhere. The police were able to find her and return her back to her parents, thank goodness. But more often than not, we know that a lot of times, they end up in human trafficking.

So a lot more resources need to be put towards that for education, so that we can educate these kids on pitfalls and all those sorts of things to look for. We need more resources to look for vulnerable populations and be able to work with them to prevent those things.

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

Grand Chief Joel Abram: One minute—okay. I'll just continue really quickly.

Child welfare, I think, is one of the most important areas that we have now. There is no good data. I had a conference call with the Ontario Human Rights Commission, and they were trying to get data together to prove what the overrepresentation of First Nations in the child welfare system is. Unfortunately, nobody keeps good data in the province; it was very spotty. But we do know that

where they did have data, we were very vastly overrepresented.

We're working now on doing an Ontario special study which we hope to have approved at our chiefs-in-assembly next month. Hopefully that will lay out a whole new scheme, both for funding and also for rehabilitation of programming, to focus on prevention rather than apprehension. If you can prevent there from being an issue in the first place, you can prevent a lot of the apprehensions. A lot of times, those kids don't return home, and then that feeds into human trafficking—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you. I apologize to cut you off. We have to go to the government side for four minutes of questioning. MPP Smith.

Mr. Dave Smith: Thank you very much for coming. Meegwetich. I'm kind of taking a different direction than what you were talking about. The reason for that is, yesterday I was in the procurement and economic partnership conference up in Sudbury with our mining industry and a number of First Nations. Stacey Cress from Waubetek Business Development Corp. touched on a number of things and some opportunities, and I'd like to get your take on it. That's with respect to skilled trades and having more First Nations individuals get into the skilled trades. Because of the expansion that we're planning on doing in the Ring of Fire area, we're going to be needing more skilled-trades individuals than what we currently have. We have a shortage of about 150,000 in Ontario. But as we develop the Ring of Fire area, to me, it makes a lot of sense to have First Nations members from those 28 different First Nations in that area get into the skilled trades to take advantage of that.

Do you have any ideas on how we could help promote that and help incentivize some of those First Nations members to look at the different skilled trades as a viable option for them?

Grand Chief Joel Abram: Every summer, our association runs a STEM camp—science, technology, engineering, mathematics—to interest kids in pursuing those types of fields. I think that if we can get them interested at a younger age and show them the opportunities that they may have, then I think for sure they will try to capitalize on those things—show the importance of an education and show the importance of the STEM fields.

We know that the First Nations youth population is the fastest-growing segment within Canada. So we think that it would be a good idea to invest in those areas so you don't have to rely as much on immigration to focus on filling those gaps when we have a population that's probably ready to step into a lot of trades. I know in my own family, we have a long history of ironworking and those sorts of things. I think a lot of kids are—it should be capitalized on by that population, I think.

Mr. Dave Smith: One of the other things that came up in talking to some other individuals in there was that—you touched on the water quality issues. From the different individuals I spoke to, they all seemed to believe that it was purely federal issues on it.

There was an opportunity, during the last round of ICIP funding, for a number of First Nations to put in proposals

for water treatment plants, where the province would pick up about 18.5% of the cost of the water treatment plant.

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

Mr. Dave Smith: Were you aware of that type of program, and, if not, what can we do to help First Nations like your own, the band councils, to become aware of them?

Grand Chief Joel Abram: I'd say the Chiefs of Ontario is a good resource for distributing information down to the leadership and then from the leadership down to their technical people at the administration level. So I think that's a good place to start. I was not aware of that myself. I've worked with OCWA before on different things like that. But I think, in terms of source-water protection, the province has a lot of impact. A lot of people have GUDI systems, which is groundwater under the direct influence of surface water. So the quality of the surface water directly influences the quality of the water that goes to the taps and stuff like that—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you. Sorry to cut you off. We'll move to the opposition side now. MPP Lindo.

Ms. Laura Mae Lindo: Thank you so much for providing us with so much information. I'm actually going to focus on this: Without wanting to put words in your mouth, as the anti-racism critic for the official opposition, what I see here before us is actually very clear indications of ongoing colonial systems that perpetuate racism, which have us decide that, when we are going to invest in mental health services, they will not be culturally responsive, or when we're going to address affordable housing issues, those won't be culturally responsive.

I would like to ask you to take a little bit of time to speak about why culturally responsive supports in all of the areas that you have listed are so important when we're facing an overrepresentation of First Nations and Indigenous folks in corrections and in child welfare.

Grand Chief Joel Abram: I'd say that it's a basic issue of trust. A lot of trauma associated from residential schools and a lot of those things have been carried out and institutionalized in people's minds. I mean, we just saw a 12-year-old girl get handcuffed for trying to open a bank account in Vancouver. We know that there's a lot of anti-Indigenous sentiment that is rampant, but as one of my elders used to say, "I'm Oneida; but before I'm Oneida, I'm Iroquois; but before I'm Iroquois, I'm First Nations; but before I'm First Nations, I'm a human being." I think that's the way that we all have to look at each other, not in terms of all of these layers of identity that we put upon ourselves.

1600

I think culture is a big, important part, and having that trust in something that you're familiar with will do a lot in terms of services and people actually wanting to access the services, knowing that there's something that is going to be responsive to what they need.

Ms. Laura Mae Lindo: Beautiful. Thank you so much for that.

I also wanted to take a little bit of time to speak about long-term care. We've had a lot of people who have come

and spoken about the need for affordable housing and for long-term-care supports. Again, this is from me as the MPP, saying that what I am seeing on the inside of the system is that when we do put some investments in, there are certain groups that are left out of those investments. If you could speak a little bit more about the need for affordable housing and long-term-care facilities, and the economic impact that that has to actually invest, that would be very helpful as we're making budgetary decisions.

Grand Chief Joel Abram: The reason I think it's important—again, it varies from community to community. It just may not be feasible in a lot of the various smaller communities.

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

Grand Chief Joel Abram: For larger ones, it may be. A lot of this is that when First Nations people—say they get dementia. They revert back to their original languages, so it's good to have people who are able to take care of them, who are able to understand them. Also their family may have transportation barriers. A lot of times they end up in urban areas where nobody ends up visiting them for months at a time, when they can. Wherever they're able to receive care in our own communities, then they have a much higher quality of life and maybe extend that a little bit more than what it would be otherwise.

I think those are some of the main reasons—besides just having that economic opportunity, economic development and community development, which are important for First Nations to have, and those opportunities for employment.

Ms. Laura Mae Lindo: Beautiful. Thank you so much for that. I know that the committee was able to go to Sioux Lookout; it's the first time that the pre-budgetary committee had gone over in that area, and that's definitely because of advocacy from Sol Mamakwa. That has put a different lens on—

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

Thank you so much for your presentation.

Grand Chief Joel Abram: Thank you.

ONTARIO ASSOCIATION OF OPTOMETRISTS

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Moving on to our next presenter, from the Ontario Association of Optometrists: Please come forward. Please state your names for the record. You have seven minutes for your presentation.

Dr. Joshua C. Smith: Thank you and good afternoon. My name is Dr. Joshua Smith, and I am the president of the Ontario Association of Optometrists. I'm here today with Justin Brown, our CEO. We're here for two reasons: first, to discuss an urgent challenge to the health of Ontarians, and second, to propose a structural solution that will not cost the government anything but will enable us to protect eye care for those who need it most.

The threat Ontario faces is a crisis in access to primary eye care, for seniors in particular. Many of you represent small, rural or remote communities, communities like

mine. I practise in Alexandria, a small town in eastern Ontario. In towns like ours, optometrists are the only providers of comprehensive eye care. We take the pressure off emergency rooms by seeing patients with urgent conditions on the same day, and optometrists take great pride in providing this level of access to care.

What's often overlooked is that optometrists are small business owners, just like owners of restaurants, retail stores, manufacturers and IT firms. We face the same cost pressures. We're also fundamentally different, however. Unlike a restaurant owner, we can't just raise the fee for an eye exam when the cost of equipment goes up. We can't even keep pace with inflation, and that's because eye care is still broadly covered by OHIP, and OHIP funding hasn't changed in more than 10 years.

That is costing the health system, it's costing our small businesses and, most importantly, it's costing patients. By not investing in optometric care, previous governments have hindered our ability to keep up with the standards of practice mandated by our college. It's also jeopardizing the viability of optometry practices, affecting the health of patients and the health of the system itself.

Let me share a story. In one small practice in eastern Ontario, it costs about \$80 to perform a senior's eye exam, which is very low, as this practice owns their building outright. They receive \$47 from OHIP—the lowest public funding in Canada. This means that they pay \$33 out of pocket for every senior's exam they perform.

In an urban centre, the problem is even worse. We have a member in Brampton, where it costs \$102 to perform a senior's eye exam. He still gets the same \$47 from OHIP, making his loss even higher, at \$55 per exam.

Imagine if every time you delivered a service, it actually cost you money. How long would you stay in business? What would you do? Go bankrupt? Move to another jurisdiction? Or see fewer patients covered by OHIP because you can't afford to see them? These are painful and frustrating choices.

In Alexandria, we've been struggling for five years to attract and hire a new optometrist, despite just being 60 minutes from Ottawa or Montreal. Why? Every candidate we interview cites patient demographics. In our practice, like many rural practices, we have more than 80% OHIP-insured patients. Young optometrists know they'll struggle to pay off their student loans there. This hurts our local economy and restricts access to optometric care for the people in our communities.

What's the solution? Here's where you might expect us to be asking for more funding, but we're not. We recognize that OHIP resources are precious, that costs are rising too quickly as the population ages, and that the gap is simply too large to close. That's why we have three practical recommendations to help Ontario fix this urgent problem now.

First, we recommend that Ontario de-insure medically unnecessary services to protect care for those who need it most. This would ensure that all Ontarians who have certain vision-threatening conditions of the eye, regardless of age, are covered by OHIP. Plus, it would ensure that

vulnerable seniors who need eye care the most have access to that care. To be clear, we are not seeking additional funds from government. Instead, we are asking government to spend its resources more wisely on those who need them most. Our data show that the vast majority of seniors would still be covered either because of vision-threatening conditions covered by OHIP or private insurance.

Second, we recommend that the government move quickly to further expand optometrists' scope of practice. We appreciated the government's commitment to do this in last year's budget. The Minister of Health's move to change the current drug regulation is a positive first step, but there is much more that we can do. Just a short drive from here, the University of Waterloo's School of Optometry and Vision Science is graduating world-class optometrists every single year. It's ironic that right here in their home province, these optometrists can't perform the full scope of what they're trained to do, as they can more closely in British Columbia, Alberta and other jurisdictions. This is denying Ontarians access to the very best care. That's why we're working with optometrists and stakeholders like the university to improve access to primary care in Ontario to the level of other parts of Canada. We want to work with the government on this, as well.

Our third and final recommendation is for the government to eliminate the major eye exam referral form. This form is used by physicians and nurse practitioners to refer patients to optometrists for a perceived medical condition. Physicians receive a fee under OHIP every time they refer a patient. But did you know that patients don't need a referral to see an optometrist? This form gives patients access to taxpayer-funded, OHIP-covered optometry services for five years. Surely these funds could be better invested in access to eye care for those with truly vision-threatening conditions. The major eye exam referral form is the perfect example of medical red tape, and we need to eliminate it today.

In conclusion, it's time to modernize Ontario's eye care system—a challenge that has been neglected for far too long. For optometrists and our patients, the need is urgent, the stakes are high, and the costs of delay are even higher. You have the opportunity to fix it right here, right now, with 20/20 vision, in the 2020 budget.

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

Dr. Joshua C. Smith: It's time to see optometry through new eyes as the critical part of health care it is and to protect it today so that it's here for all Ontarians tomorrow.

Thank you for this opportunity. We look forward to answering your questions now and to working with the government and MPPs across Ontario to make these positive changes together.

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

Mr. Ian Arthur: Thank you for coming in for your testimony.

What services would you like to de-insure under OHIP? Which are the ones that you see as non-essential that

would increase the budget for other more essential services?

Dr. Joshua C. Smith: We've identified services, with a budget of about \$45 million, that could be reinvested either into optometric care or into other areas of priority care—again, focusing on areas that are medically unnecessary, rather than people who have vision-threatening eye conditions.

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Mr. Ian Arthur: Okay, and what would those be? Just some examples of what would be de-insured. Can you provide a couple?

Dr. Joshua C. Smith: Sure. Essentially—without using all the time to give you all examples—it would be essentially routine care, care for people who don't have vision-threatening conditions. The converse example would be someone with macular degeneration, cataracts, glaucoma, or anyone with diabetes: Those people should be and would remain insured under what we're proposing. There are many more in addition to that. But outside of what's vision-threatening, those are the services we're proposing would be de-insured.

Mr. Ian Arthur: And just to be careful, say, children experiencing vision loss—would they no longer be covered if it was just standard vision loss, astigmatism or near-sightedness in school? Would their families then be responsible to cover the costs of their exams and glasses?

Dr. Joshua C. Smith: Thanks for the question. Again, it's people with diseases, with vision-threatening conditions that result in vision loss.

You mentioned astigmatism. That's a type of prescription and a refractive error, and that's already not insured for adults 20 to 64, for example.

Our proposition actually doesn't talk about de-insuring all children. Certainly for children, especially when they are young, there's a critical period where we feel that universal access is still important.

Mr. Ian Arthur: Just in context, I have keratoconus. The contacts that I wear are \$1,500 each. The surgery to prevent it from progressing is not covered by OHIP.

Dr. Joshua C. Smith: Correct.

Mr. Ian Arthur: So I certainly understand some of the challenges in terms of that. And my glasses really don't correct; I can barely see you. But that's okay; we're making do.

Dr. Joshua C. Smith: That's why they put you so far away from us.

Mr. Ian Arthur: Yes, that's exactly it.

In terms of the expansion in scope as well, I'd just like a couple of more details as to what you'd look for. I understand further changes to prescribing, but what are you specifically asking for? It's not a particularly specific presentation.

Dr. Joshua C. Smith: Sure. There's much more detail, certainly, in the proposal that you now have a copy of, that we submitted to the committee.

Just to touch on keratoconus, it is an example of a vision-threatening condition that is progressive.

Mr. Ian Arthur: Yes.

Dr. Joshua C. Smith: In terms of scope expansion, we look at provinces like British Columbia and Alberta, and something very simple, such as removing a foreign body from the eye.

I work in a rural town, a blue-collar town.

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

Dr. Joshua C. Smith: I see loads of people every day with foreign bodies in their eyes. Much of the time, even though I'm perfectly capable and trained and educated to do that, I have to send them to Cornwall, an hour away, to get that procedure done.

Another example would be being able to order tests and view test results. It's quite difficult to manage our patients with diabetes, and manage the eye care or the eye health side of it, when relying on them to bring their numbers with them. They don't know what their last blood test results were, and we have no access to that.

Mr. Ian Arthur: That's very interesting. We're basically out of time. I have so many more questions, but I don't think I have time to ask them, so thank you so much for your presentation.

Dr. Joshua C. Smith: Thank you.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you. We'll move to the government side. MPP Smith?

Mr. Dave Smith: I'm going to touch on something that MPP Arthur just talked about, and something that you mentioned as well, and that was the diabetes patients coming in and not having their numbers. As a type-2 diabetic, and having to go see the optometrist, I would suggest that we also lie about what our numbers are.

Dr. Joshua C. Smith: Sure.

Mr. Dave Smith: Getting more truthful is probably something that's going to be helpful to you.

You mentioned that doctors and nurses can do a referral to an optometrist, but you don't need a referral to come there, and there's a cost involved with it. Can you walk me through a process where a doctor would decide, "I'm going to give a referral to an optometrist," just so I have an understanding of why that form and why that process is in place right now?

Dr. Joshua C. Smith: In actual fact, the majority of the forms that we receive are for conditions that are already insured by OHIP, so the fee is paid for the referral, but it would have been insured if they had just come to us in the first place anyway. It's either that or for conditions that are not health-related in nature, like refractive conditions needing prescriptions.

The classic example we get is a patient who is 45 years old and can't read very well anymore. That's everybody, unfortunately. Sorry to say, for those who aren't quite there yet, but once you're in your 40s, that's everybody, pretty much without exception.

The form is used a lot for reasons it was probably never designed for, which is to do either procedures or investigations for medical conditions that may have an effect on the eye or vision.

Mr. Dave Smith: Kind of simplifying it, and not trying to imply that someone is doing something that they shouldn't—I walk into my doctor's and I'm having my

general exam. I say to him, "Jeez, I can't see quite as well," and doctor writes me a referral to an optometrist rather than saying, "Go see the eye doctor."

Dr. Joshua C. Smith: I think it's more just not knowing how that is supposed to work or what the function of it is. We spend a lot of time on the individual level, as an individual optometrist, communicating with family practitioners in our area to say, "This is really what it's for, and it's not for this other thing." Usually, that does help, but there are exceptions. As I say, the majority of the forms that come in are either for conditions that are already covered or for things that aren't really what it's meant for.

Mr. Dave Smith: I'm asking these questions because if we were to come back and say that we're going to take away that form in particular, there is going to be some pushback then, I'm anticipating, from another group. Knowing exactly what it is helps us a lot on that.

Dr. Joshua C. Smith: Sure.

Mr. Dave Smith: Thank you very much. I'll turn it over.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Any further questions? Seeing none, thank you so much for your presentation.

OWL CHILD CARE SERVICES OF ONTARIO

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Moving along to our next presenter, from Owl Child Care Services of Ontario: Please come forward. Please state your name for the record. You have seven minutes for your presentation.

Ms. Lori Prospero: Thank you. My name is Lori Prospero. I'm the executive director for Owl Child Care Services of Ontario. At Owl, we have a 40-year history of providing high-quality early learning and care. We currently operate eight child care centres and 11 stand-alone before- and after-school programs here in Waterloo region. We have a licensed capacity of over 1,400 spaces and support each child to realize their potential.

As an organization, in addition to providing high-quality child care, we focus on advocating for children and families, specifically in support of a high-quality, universal child care system that includes professional pay and decent work for educators. We also focus on achieving our potential, with a focus on expansion and pedagogy, the process of how learning happens.

As part of this work, Owl provides leadership to the child care sector as the lead agency for the Early Years Coalition-Waterloo Region, a decent work community of practice for the Association of Early Childhood Educators Ontario. We're also a member of the provincial council for the Ontario Coalition for Better Child Care, and a member of our senior management team sits as an elected member of council for the College of Early Childhood Educators.

As the government works to transform child care across Ontario, we want to acknowledge your support through capital funding to build more child care spaces in schools and show appreciation for the planned shift to multi-year funding. Despite this, the approach to child care is still a patchwork market that is not meeting the needs of families

or of our educators. Due to cost-sharing models, the provincial investment in child care has been cut by \$48 million in 2020. Our region has seen a funding reduction of \$1.9 million in 2020, with an estimated reduction of over \$4 million by the time the cost-sharing measures are fully implemented in 2022.

For almost 50 years, advocates have called on the government to invest in a publicly funded, universal child care system. The 1970 report of the Royal Commission on the Status of Women recommended a national universal child care system, stating that child care must be a shared responsibility between parents and society. The commission went on to state that unless that “shared responsibility is acknowledged and assumed, women cannot be accorded true equality.”

Today, research continues to support the creation of a universal child care system, one that is built on three pillars: affordability, accessibility and quality. While most agree on these pillars as the foundation of an effective early years system, there is much debate as to the best way forward.

Ontario has an affordability crisis in child care right now. As the CMSM, the region of Waterloo had implemented a fee reduction pilot project to help make child care more affordable for our families. For 2019, infant fees were reduced by \$10 a day, toddler fees by \$3 a day and preschool fees by \$2 a day. We heard from families that this reduction made a significant difference in their lives. For some, it enabled them to afford child care so someone could return to work. For others, it allowed them to finally put their child into an extracurricular activity.

As a direct result of the government’s funding cuts to licensed child care in 2020, the region was forced to cancel the fee reduction pilot, effective January 1, in order to stabilize our system locally. In addition, child care operators have seen expenses increase 4.7% over the past two years, and were forced to levy an additional increase to child care fees. The current funding system is not working. It’s not supporting families, and it’s failing our children at the most pivotal time of their lives.

Child care is affordable for only 22% of Ontario families. To achieve the goal of affordability in child care, we need a true system that funds licensed child care centres directly to lower parent fees. Several provinces have already moved in this direction, where parent fees are set by the government and there is a significant increase in public funding directly to licensed child care providers to make up the difference between those parent fees and the full cost of providing a high-quality, inclusive child care system.

The second pillar is to improve access and availability. A report issued in 2018 noted that the region of Waterloo is considered a daycare desert, a place where there are spaces for only one child in every four for licensed child care. In fact, the report suggests that 87% of children aged 0 to 4 in this region do not have access to a licensed child care space.

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We need a coordinated, planned and public approach for child care. Expanding the system to provide better

access to high-quality early childhood education and care would provide significant benefits, such as improving children’s academic outcomes and future wages; providing a platform for early identification and intervention, which reduces special education costs in the future; reducing income inequality; and increasing women’s participation in the workforce, which brings many families out of poverty.

Expansion strategies should include demand forecasting and capital funding with public and non-profit sectors, and we need to address the incongruences with how capital funding is assigned for new schools and particularly child care centres in those schools.

In January 2018, Owl opened a new child care centre co-located in a school here. The ministry provided \$2.5 million to build the child care centre and to cover the furniture and equipment costs. The cost to equip that centre was \$260,000. Despite these real costs, we were advised that only \$125,000—so less than 50%—was available to cover those costs, as there is no set budget for first-time equipping provided by the government. The budget for furniture and equipment was really dependent on if there was anything left over. After much discussion, we were able to access additional funding from the region and, in the end, had to absorb whatever was left: about \$10,000 to \$15,000. Ultimately, the families absorbed those fees.

As the government continues to support expansion, it’s important to ensure that adequate funding with set parameters for first-time equipping and increased operating funding to keep pace with the expansion are part of the mix.

Finally, the vision for early years and child care programs must focus on improving quality. The most significant contribution to quality is the workforce. We need a comprehensive workforce strategy, one that includes professional pay and decent working conditions but also addresses recruitment and retention strategies for ECEs. In Ontario, 5% of ECEs earn minimum wage, and 43% earn between \$15 and \$20 an hour. As a full-time worker, that ranges between \$29,000 and \$39,000.

The current system—or lack thereof—pits the goal of affordability against professional pay and decent work. With wages and benefits accounting for over 80% of our budget, the only way to improve working conditions is to increase parent fees.

We have an all-female workforce, one that’s undervalued and underpaid. The system is no longer working. We can’t allow them to subsidize the true cost of child care with their low wages.

We spend only 0.6% of the GDP on child care, despite a 1% benchmark. We continue to hear things from the Conference Board of Canada that every \$1 invested in child care yields up to \$6 of economic benefit. With that in mind, we must acknowledge that child care is an essential social infrastructure for economic growth.

We’re asking the government to reverse the \$48 million in funding cuts from licensed child care this year, to invest an additional \$635 million to begin the transition to base funding for operators to reduce the fees, to invest an

additional \$375 million to create a provincial wage grid starting at \$25 an hour for educators, and to ensure that expansion dollars are allocated to public and non-profit spaces.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you. We'll start with the government side this time for questioning. MPP Smith.

Mr. Dave Smith: Just so I'm clear, you're asking for about \$1 billion to be invested in child care?

Ms. Lori Prospero: Yes.

Mr. Dave Smith: Okay. And you want it for not-for-profit?

Ms. Lori Prospero: Public and not-for-profit, yes.

Mr. Dave Smith: What about the smaller, more rural areas where there isn't enough to have somebody set up as a public or not-for-profit provider, and it's basically just a couple of small providers who are doing it from their home? How do we deal with that if we limit that? What do we do with rural Ontario?

Ms. Lori Prospero: I think we need to look at how we plan for child care. We need to have a mix that's going to suit the needs of urban and rural, that looks at child care spaces for shift workers and all of those kinds of things. What we're really worried about is, the more we expand a system and we allow what we consider to be the big-box, for-profit child care centres to get into our system, that's degrading the quality of the system.

Mr. Dave Smith: I'm asking these questions because I have very strong rural component to my riding, and we don't have the big-box-store-style daycare providers that frequently get talked about on these types of things. Every time that someone comes forward with a solution, they're trying to deal with the issue with those big-box-store-style ones. That's not the issue that we have in rural Ontario, and every suggestion that has come forward and every solution that has been put forward actually create a disadvantage for us then in rural Ontario.

Part of our philosophy has been that we need to allow the parents to have the different choices on different things. We recognize that child care is very important. We recognize that there is a cost associated with it for families and that it's getting difficult for a lot of different families to do those things. I'm just hesitant to endorse any kind of a system that is going to create a negative pushback, then, on rural Ontario. I represent a riding that is predominantly rural, and I want to make sure that I'm not doing something that's going to make it that much harder for our families. If they have to travel into a larger urban centre, then it puts an undue burden on them as well. How do you think we should be dealing with that then?

Ms. Lori Prospero: We're talking about the expansion of child care in public and non-profit, so I don't think we're anticipating that anyone is suggesting we close the shops of those that are already for-profit and within our system. It's about the expansion of that system. I think, as part of the overall system planning, there will be ways to address some of those concerns, for sure.

Mr. Dave Smith: But you don't have a solution for it right now?

Ms. Lori Prospero: I think, because we're talking about grandfathering in those that already exist but looking at how we set up the expansion for the future—you talk about giving parents choice, which is fantastic. Our current system does that, but what we're missing is that child care is unaffordable for more than 20% of the families in the province. It's important that we take a different approach to planning for child care, because the approach that we're using right now and have been for the last 50 years isn't working for us.

Mr. Dave Smith: Okay. Thank you.

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

Ms. Catherine Fife: Good to see you, Lori. I feel like it's almost like Groundhog Day every time you come forward. This is the eighth year that you've made an economic case, you've made a compassionate case, you've made an equality case and you've made an educational benefit case for improved investment in child care. We're still basically fighting for just the basic level. Ontario's reputation on child care is abysmal.

You have to look at other sectors like BC, which truly invested in the subsidy program but also in the capital. The return on investment is there. I think it's almost \$1 billion on the return on investment to the economy for \$500 million invested. It's quite something.

Ms. Lori Prospero: Ontario used to be a leader, and now we're lagging behind those other provinces.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Yes. I guess in this last budget, the 2019 budget—which really just blew up, as you know—we saw the child tax credit that was embedded in education. The Financial Accountability Officer found that only 300 families in Ontario would qualify for it. They're really going through the motions.

I have to say, if it wasn't a female-dominated sector that obviously affected women so strongly, we likely wouldn't be here. Are you starting to feel, really, that it's so focused on women?

Ms. Lori Prospero: Absolutely. If we can address the gender wage gap and move forward with a universal child care system, we can get those women into the workforce, which is increasing the GDP, and it's going to increase tax revenues, to help support the program. Child care pays for itself. We already know that.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Yes. The quality piece, I think, goes to the human resources and to the quality of the staff. All of us—well, most of us understand that. But the door is very much open for the commercial operators for child care.

Really, it's the same as it is with long-term care: The only place you're going to make money is by skimping on quality. We've seen that with staff turnover, with the food that's served in some of these centres, with the quality of the instructional materials. Yet, then you get the argument, "But what about this?" It's not an either-or situation. Waterloo, as you described it, is a daycare desert. There's a real, negative impact on the ability of people to reach their potential.

The rural communities: If it's regulated and if it's licensed, then those smaller, home-based, licensed resources can—

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

Ms. Catherine Fife: It's not an either-or. Can you just speak to that? I just want you to be really clear on that.

Ms. Lori Prospero: For sure. I think there's licensed centre-based care and there's licensed home child care. You're right that as long as it's in a licensed environment, which means that there's some regulation—they're required to fall under the Child Care and Early Years Act—we can ensure the ongoing quality of those programs.

You mentioned the funding for parents and the workforce. The workforce issue that I'm sure you'd be experiencing in rural areas as well is that it's difficult to keep these staff. Only 57% of the educators in the entire province actually stay in the licensed child care sector. The rest move on to teacher's college, or they're in family support programs, or they go to the school boards, because job security is better and they have better access for compensation there. The challenge for us is, how do we keep those educators so that we can continue to offer that quality program?

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Ms. Catherine Fife: I just want to say thank you for the work that you're doing. I hope you understand that this is not a losing battle. One day, we will win. Obviously, I can't think of a more important role than—

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

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

ONTARIO FEDERATION OF SNOWMOBILE CLUBS

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Next, I would like to call on the Ontario Federation of Snowmobile Clubs. Please come forward. Please state your name for the record. You will have seven minutes for your presentation.

Mr. Andrew Walasek: My name is Andrew Walasek. I am the director of stakeholder relations at the Ontario Federation of Snowmobile Clubs. I want to thank the committee for inviting us here today.

For those members who may not be familiar with our organization, the OFSC is a volunteer-led not-for-profit association, and we provide the voice for organized snowmobiling in the province of Ontario. We deliver two programs on behalf of the province: the snowmobile permit program and the snowmobile driver training program.

Through our partnership with the Ministry of Transportation, we've achieved a number of milestones over the past 12 months since we presented to you in Peterborough last year. Among the highlights is a new online driver training program to allow better access to safety training throughout the province. We also introduced a new OFSC permit gift card, so that not only can you offer the gift of snowmobiling, but riders who have purchased a sled and have not received their VIN number do not miss out on

early-bird pricing. Finally, the minister made a commitment to predictable, multi-year funding for trail infrastructure.

I would like to take a moment to thank Minister Caroline Mulroney and her predecessor, Jeff Yurek, their teams and the terrific staff at MTO for all of the hard work they have done in support of the snowmobiling industry in Ontario.

Speaking of the industry, you should know that according to our latest economic impact study, the snowmobiling industry can deliver up to \$3.3 billion in Ontario. That figure is based on the government's own TREIM model. The study also shows that snowmobiling contributes to the creation of over 6,400 direct, indirect and induced jobs, many in small and rural communities. Finally, I want to note that the industry produces approximately \$114 million in tax revenue for the provincial government.

Moving forward, what else can be done to ensure that snowmobiling remains the largest winter contributor to Ontario's economy? The OFSC has three requests today. The first is to have the government amend the eligibility requirements of programs mandated by entities such as the Northern Ontario Heritage Fund Corp. to align with federal regional development agencies. For those who may not be familiar with the NOHFC, they manage programs such as the Strategic Economic Infrastructure Program to help create jobs and build capacity in northern communities. Not-for-profit organizations are eligible to apply for the program with projects that include major tourism infrastructure. These types of projects are crucial to attract visitors to this breathtaking part of the province. Currently, the SEIP does not allow for the funding of rolling stock or ongoing operational costs, such as trail grooming equipment. These eligibility restrictions do not exist for similar federal government programs offered through regional development agencies such as FedDev Ontario and FedNor.

Just a word for FedDev Ontario: Their staff in Peterborough and here in Waterloo have been wonderful, and I did want to mention that for the record here today.

For example, groomers, which were eligible under the Canadian Experiences Fund in last year's federal budget, marked a change. We'd like to see a similar change made here provincially. We appreciate Minister Rickford's work to improve the NOHFC and to make the program apply to a broader range of businesses. We hope that this can include groomers.

Our second request is seeking the support to continue the Go Snowmobiling Magazine; otherwise it may need to be discontinued. With the drop in print advertising revenue, costs to produce and to distribute the magazine are creating some challenges, both for the OFSC and our publisher, Supertrax. Any support to assist with the costs of design and layout, printing, production, mailing or content curation would go a long way to ensuring sustainability and keeping riders informed. We understand that print media is facing challenges across the board, and perhaps this could be looked at. I understand that the Ontario Creates Magazine Fund might be an option if it is renewed for fiscal year 2020-21.

The third request is for support to establish a new groomer training program to ensure that both our employees and volunteers of the districts are safe out on the trails. Over the past 15 months, the OFSC has committed to providing its member organizations with the tools necessary to operate groomers safely on our 30,000-kilometre network.

The OFSC developed a groomer training manual to ensure proper safety procedures are being followed. In order to maximize our efforts, we would like to create a training program which our districts could offer in person to our fleet operators. This would require some travel and accommodation costs across each of our districts, and perhaps cost in the range of \$100,000. This investment would help us achieve a knowledge-based, safety-conscious team of volunteers and paid operators to meet our legal requirements as a responsible employer.

Finally, we are currently in the middle of snowmobile safety week in the province and internationally, and I'd be remiss not to thank our partners at the OPP for their efforts to ensure a safe riding experience for all Ontarians.

I would like to thank the committee for inviting the OFSC here today. I'm hopeful our requests will be considered. I am pleased to take any questions.

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

Mr. Ian Arthur: Good afternoon and thank you so much for coming in. I have a practical question, and it's not meant to be critical, but for so many print publications, it's not feasible to print and distribute them anymore. That's happening not just in your industry, but across the board. So many of them are moving to digital-only, moving the publication online. Is that an option for your organization? Are there any barriers that you see to making that shift in order to save money?

Mr. Andrew Walasek: We have already looked at the online option, and this year we are introducing an online-only issue of the magazine. So not all the issues this year are going to be the standard type of magazine. We are trying that out on a trial basis.

What we find, though, is that with a lot of our members, a lot of them are in rural areas of Ontario and some of them do not have high-speed. Sometimes Internet access isn't always prevalent. Snowmobile clubs in rural areas still go to the store; they'd still like to see the physical magazine.

Mr. Ian Arthur: Okay. That was the only question I had.

Mr. Andrew Walasek: Sure.

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

Ms. Catherine Fife: You had mentioned that you're looking to have some sort of a subsidy or support around the production of the magazine, and then you mentioned that it might be possible for the Ontario Creates Magazine Fund—I didn't know that the province had such a fund.

Mr. Andrew Walasek: Yes. So under the heritage ministry, there was a program a number of years ago. It may have been as recent as last year. I was looking up possible sources, and if it's a possibility to bring that back, that could be a possible source.

Our request here today is to look broader at: Is there a possibility across government to have this type of support? It doesn't have to be one particular program.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Okay. Thanks, Andrew, for coming in today.

Mr. Andrew Walasek: Thank you.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): We'll go to the government side for questioning. MPP Smith.

Mr. Dave Smith: I was most interested when you were talking about the NOHFC changes and how you'd like to see it more aligned with the federal requirements. Just as a little bit of an update on it, at AMO this past fall, Minister Rickford, in a meeting with FONOM, the Federation of Northern Ontario Municipalities, floated the idea of getting feedback from them on how we would change NOHFC. Right now, the way it's designed, it seems to be skewed more towards the much larger population bases and less towards the smaller areas. It's not that they don't have good ideas in large areas, but we want to make sure that we're doing things in a more equitable way. Your request on that actually is very timely because that is something that we are looking at: How would we go about doing that?

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The only thing I would caution you on, though, is that the Northern Ontario Heritage Fund is for northern Ontario and you have a lot of snowmobile clubs that would not qualify, like in Peterborough–Kawartha or in Northumberland–Peterborough South, where we have active snowmobile clubs that wouldn't have access to that.

Do you have any concerns, then, that if we were to open this up for you in the northern part of the province—is that going to create a discrepancy and a challenge for you internally because your northern clubs would have access to funds that your southern clubs wouldn't?

Mr. Andrew Walasek: In my remarks, I used that as an example of a program that we would like to see changes made to. By all means, if there's an opportunity to open any other type of infrastructure-supported tourism-related programs province-wide, we would be happy to have those conversations.

But you are right. There is a lot of snowmobiling that happens in southern Ontario and they do deserve to have the same amount of attention. I flagged this one particular issue because it is something that I did look into and I understand some work has already been done, so perhaps in southern Ontario maybe they could get to the point that work is being done. We would certainly welcome it in both halves of the province.

Mr. Dave Smith: It's not uncommon for snowmobile clubs in my area to hop on the trail system and get up into the areas of northern Ontario in a single day, where those areas would qualify for it. I'm not opposed to it at all. Believe me, that's not what I'm suggesting. I just want to make sure that whatever we would do, however we would structure something for you, we don't create a great environment for one area of your clubs and something that might be slightly detrimental to the other areas of the

clubs. I do recognize the amount of tourism dollars that this can generate in areas of Ontario where they don't have a great deal of other sources of income. This is something that could be very beneficial for us.

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

Mr. Andrew Walasek: And what I'll add to that, if I may: Federally there is FedNor and FedDev and they have both opened the opportunity to groomers, so provincially, if we could do it in the north and south, we'd love to see that. We're familiar with this particular program in the north. That doesn't mean we're not going to encourage government to allow trail groomers to be an eligible possibility for other programs within the government.

Mr. Dave Smith: Okay. Really, the only other thing is more a comment on my part. For those who haven't taken part in snowmobiling at the club level, who haven't been involved in a lot of these tours, it really is a family affair. It's about building those memories that you have with your family. I recall the number of times that we've gone out as a family on our sleds. Those are great memories I had as a kid.

Mr. Andrew Walasek: Absolutely.

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

RECEPTION HOUSE WATERLOO REGION

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Now I would like to call on the last presenter of the day, Reception House Waterloo Region. Please come forward. Please state your names for the record. You have seven minutes for your presentation.

Mr. Carl Cadogan: Last but not least, yes. Thank you very much. My name is Carl Cadogan. I'm the chief executive of Reception House Waterloo Region.

Mr. Bashir Shahbaz: My name is Bashir Shahbaz. I'm the manager of employment services at Reception House.

Mr. Carl Cadogan: For those of you who might not know, Reception House is a community-based organization, a charitable organization. We are in our 33rd year of operation and we provide services to government-assisted refugees.

What we want to talk to you about today is that we have been involved in a pilot program to connect newly arrived refugees to employment. It's a pilot that has been supported by IRCC, and the pilot ends in March 2021.

The uniqueness of this program is that it is really responding to the manufacturing sector issues around filling entry-level positions. Many newcomers are excluded from the workforce due to language barriers as well as lack of Canadian experience. This project responds to these issues by working with employers. We're working with three employers at this point in time. Along with the employers, we're providing research on the project and the outcomes, and we're working with Conestoga College.

We provide employment and we provide language training on the work site, so people who are new to the country get help in connecting to jobs and also learn English. Most of the folks who are getting connected to

those jobs are people who have very low-level language skills.

In the program, working with the Centre for Community Based Research, we've been looking at the short-term and long-term impacts of what we're doing.

We have placed 177 people in jobs since August 2018. Bashir will speak to the financial impact of the work.

Mr. Bashir Shahbaz: As Carl mentioned, this pilot project is focused on three components: providing employment for government-assisted refugees; offering language training on the side; and providing continued settlement support to refugees and ongoing support to employers to make sure the integration of the refugees into the workplace is as seamless as possible.

We have placed 177 newcomers into jobs.

We did an average calculation of 80 refugees who have been working so far, and we based the average calculations on the monthly earnings of \$2,000—however, they are making way more than that—and the average contribution to CPP of 5%; to employment insurance, 1.5%; and the tax rate that they are paying, 12%. The basic calculation shows that, for these 80 people who have been working so far, since they have been taken off of Ontario Works, the government saved \$803,046. The amount of taxes paid is \$19,440—that is what the refugees have paid so far. The contribution that they paid towards their CPP is \$8,100. And the EI contribution is close to \$2,500. Employers also have made contributions toward this funding. Based on our calculations, we have seen that if these 80 people who have been working so far—if they were out of Ontario Works for one month, the savings for the government would be close to \$79,000. In a year, that would amount to close to \$1 million—\$946,560. In this calculation, we didn't include the amount that they would have used for their benefits—whether it is drug or dental benefits—that they might have been using.

Mr. Carl Cadogan: Employment is a key factor to many of the major settlement outcomes. As this is a pilot project, we have been looking at every aspect of the work that we're doing. The uniqueness of this is that we are providing support to the candidates who are looking for employment as well as the employers. We're helping employers to welcome and to support newcomers in the workplace. We are providing not only language training but life skills. We have had a significant impact on not only those people who are working but also the employment places. JD Sweid, Tigercat and the other employers that we're working with have been promoting the work—

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

Mr. Carl Cadogan:—because they see the outcomes.

This is an initiative that's being supported by the federal government until March 2021. We see the value of the work and the long-term gains, and we are requesting from the provincial government. We haven't asked for a particular amount of money, but we believe that if you look at the savings and if you look at the work, you would see the value of this initiative.

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Our ultimate long-term goal is the creation of refugee-focused employment services at Reception House. We

know that what we have done in the last two years is incredibly successful.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you. We'll go to the government side for four minutes of questioning. MPP Rasheed.

Mr. Kaleed Rasheed: Thank you so much for your presentation this afternoon, and thank you for the great work you are doing to help our refugees settle in this great country we call Canada.

I just wanted to know how much federal funding you have received so far, in a dollar amount.

Mr. Carl Cadogan: Including start-up funds, we have received roughly \$435,000 a year. In year 1, it was a bit more money because we had the start-up. In year 2, we have a little bit less, and year 3 is about the same. Altogether, it's a little bit over \$1 million for three years.

Mr. Kaleed Rasheed: And that's since 2018?

Mr. Carl Cadogan: Yes, we started in August 2018.

Mr. Kaleed Rasheed: Okay. I know you have left it blank about the investment from the provincial government, but do you have a rough number in mind that you're asking of the provincial government in terms of funding?

Mr. Carl Cadogan: We think we can operate the program the way we're doing with roughly around \$380,000 a year.

Mr. Kaleed Rasheed: So \$380,000?

Mr. Carl Cadogan: Yes.

Mr. Kaleed Rasheed: And that's on top of the million dollars that—

Mr. Carl Cadogan: Well, the million dollars will be done by March 2021. I think, for us, we're looking at support beyond March 2021. We have enough funds to carry the program for the next year.

Mr. Kaleed Rasheed: Okay, awesome. I know my colleague over here, MPP Fee, has a question as well, so please go ahead. Thank you.

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

Mrs. Amy Fee: I'm just looking for a little bit more insight into how the program works. I'm wondering: When someone comes to you and a participant is getting involved and looking for work, how are you actually involved in their lives? Is it something that varies from person to person? Are you involved through the language training as well and into employment?

Mr. Carl Cadogan: Reception House is the centre. We actually have a house, a physical house, that people stay in for the first three weeks of their lives in the region. As part of their stay, we provide a wide range of services, including orientation and including helping people to connect to permanent housing.

They're involved because we understand them, and we help them think about the skills that they're bringing from home, from where they've come from.

Most people want to work right away, and part of the challenge is that they don't have the language ability. So this was a way in. Most times we just refer people to language classes, and people get frustrated because they want to work and they want to do language. This is really a project that combines both language instruction and

employment. Employers hire folks; they set aside a space at their work site—

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

Mr. Carl Cadogan: —and Conestoga College provides language training, either before the shift or after the shift. People are connected and people learn language as they are working. A lot of the language is built around understanding your workplace.

Mrs. Amy Fee: If someone needs more time than somebody else, do they actually have—

Mr. Carl Cadogan: They have, yes. The flexibility is built in. We started by having language classes for three months, and we increased them to six months for some people. So they get from, say, level 0 in a language to level 4, so they can communicate with the employer.

Mrs. Amy Fee: Thank you.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Mr. Smith, you have 20 seconds.

Mr. Dave Smith: Can you give me an idea of the different types of jobs that some of these people get placed into? Because if it's successful, it might be something we want to replicate across the province.

Mr. Carl Cadogan: Right. I think that we are presenting on Monday to Cannexus. It's a national conference, and Bashir and I are presenting—

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

Mr. Ian Arthur: Go ahead and finish.

Mr. Carl Cadogan: We're presenting to folks from across the country. Actually, we were supposed to have a room of 40 people, and I think about 80 people already signed up, because part of why we're doing this is to replicate it elsewhere.

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

Mr. Ian Arthur: Thank you for the presentation; it was really interesting. I know in Kingston we have an organization called KEYS.

Mr. Carl Cadogan: Yes, we know KEYS. We've visited them and we did some work with them.

Mr. Ian Arthur: They've had tremendous success in integrating new Canadians into jobs in the Kingston community, many of them facing similar language barriers.

Mr. Carl Cadogan: Right.

Mr. Ian Arthur: They provide language services as well, but they're quite tremendous.

But in terms of the actual jobs, to follow up—because I'm curious. We have a skilled trade shortage in Ontario. Where are these people going and what jobs are they doing?

Mr. Carl Cadogan: We have about five employers, but the ones we're working with more closely is Tigercat Industries—if you know them, they build forestry machinery. The jobs: some of them are skilled and some of them are general labour work. So depending upon the skill set of the person, that depends upon where they get connected.

JD Sweid is a processing plant. There are skilled jobs, some apprenticeships, and there are some general labour jobs, depending upon the experience. Those are jobs that

people can work into as well. They start at general labour and they can move up. We've got about four people who are now lead hands at JD Sweid, and right now half of their workforce are people who have come through us.

Mr. Ian Arthur: That's very interesting.

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

Ms. Sandy Shaw: Thank you for your presentation, Carl. I want to underscore and emphasize that you've been doing this for 33 years, which is a phenomenal depth of experience. Is it 33 years?

Mr. Carl Cadogan: Yes.

Ms. Sandy Shaw: So you know what you're doing.

I would like to say that the idea of supporting refugees and newcomers is about the employer-employee relationship, but I think what needs to be said also is that what you're doing is supporting families, often.

Mr. Carl Cadogan: Yes.

Ms. Sandy Shaw: When families have employment, adults have employment and kids have stable lives. They can integrate in school as well. Can you talk a little bit about that?

Mr. Carl Cadogan: A 30-second anecdote: Janet from JD Sweid, the director of HR—we have a steering committee of employers and researchers from the university and some other folks. She had an experience in November of a person who started work about six months before and was not able to speak English, and was learning English. He was not able to connect to her. The person came into her office and wanted her to sign a letter for his bank so he

could get a mortgage. He spoke to her in English. She talked about that experience and she cried, she said, when that happened because this was a person who, in six months, went from where he was to applying now for a mortgage to get a house. I think that impact is substantial.

Ms. Sandy Shaw: I couldn't agree more.

I just want to end this by saying that you want this program to be extended, but I think also we need to understand that as the government is tallying this number they have, there should be a corresponding tally to show the cost savings that you're talking about.

Mr. Carl Cadogan: Yes.

Ms. Sandy Shaw: You're talking about, in one year, a cost savings of almost \$1 million for this government.

Mr. Carl Cadogan: Absolutely.

Ms. Sandy Shaw: I think that's something that should be noted by the government side. Thank you very much.

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

Mr. Carl Cadogan: Thank you.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): That concludes our business today. Thank you to all the committee members, the presenters and the committee staff for their work today.

As a reminder, the deadline for written submissions is 6 p.m. Eastern Standard Time on January 24. The committee is now adjourned until 9 a.m. tomorrow in Niagara Falls. Thank you.

The committee adjourned at 1659.

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