

Legislative  
Assembly  
of Ontario



Assemblée  
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**Official Report  
of Debates  
(Hansard)**

F-59

**Journal  
des débats  
(Hansard)**

F-59

**Standing Committee on  
Finance and Economic Affairs**

Protect, Support and Recover  
from COVID-19 Act (Budget  
Measures), 2020

1<sup>st</sup> Session  
42<sup>nd</sup> Parliament

Monday 30 November 2020

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

Loi de 2020 sur la protection,  
le soutien et la relance  
face à la COVID-19 (mesures  
budgétaires)

1<sup>re</sup> session  
42<sup>e</sup> législature

Lundi 30 novembre 2020

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Chair: Amarjot Sandhu  
Clerk: Julia Douglas

Président : Amarjot Sandhu  
Greffière : Julia Douglas

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

**STANDING COMMITTEE ON  
FINANCE AND ECONOMIC AFFAIRS**

Monday 30 November 2020

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

**COMITÉ PERMANENT DES FINANCES  
ET DES AFFAIRES ÉCONOMIQUES**

Lundi 30 novembre 2020

*The committee met at 0900 in committee room 2 and by video conference.*

PROTECT, SUPPORT AND RECOVER  
FROM COVID-19 ACT  
(BUDGET MEASURES), 2020  
LOI DE 2020 SUR LA PROTECTION,  
LE SOUTIEN ET LA RELANCE  
FACE À LA COVID-19  
(MESURES BUDGÉTAIRES)

Consideration of the following bill:

Bill 229, An Act to implement Budget measures and to enact, amend and repeal various statutes / Projet de loi 229, Loi visant à mettre en oeuvre les mesures budgétaires et à édicter, à modifier ou à abroger diverses lois.

**The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu):** Good morning, everyone. We're meeting today for public hearings on Bill 229, An Act to implement Budget measures and to enact, amend and repeal various statutes. We have the following members in the room: MPP Stan Cho and the Minister of Finance, Minister Rod Phillips; and the following members participating remotely: MPP Shaw, MPP Arthur, MPP Pang, MPP Smith, MPP Roberts and MPP Hunter.

As a reminder, I ask that everyone speak slowly and clearly. Please wait until I recognize you before starting to speak. Are there any questions or business before we begin?

Seeing none, I will now call on the Honourable Rod Phillips, Minister of Finance. Pursuant to the order of the House dated November 23, 2020, you will have 15 minutes for your presentation, followed by 45 minutes of questions from the members of the committee. The questions will be divided into three rounds of six minutes for the government, three rounds of six minutes for the official opposition and two rounds of four and half minutes for the independent members.

Minister, the floor is yours.

MINISTRY OF FINANCE

**Hon. Rod Phillips:** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I am pleased to have this opportunity to speak to the members of this committee about Bill 229, the Protect, Support and Recover from COVID-19 Act, 2020.

Before I begin I do want to note that the Deputy Prime Minister and federal finance minister, Chrystia Freeland, will introduce the federal fall economic statement later

today. And just as we're talking about the bill in front of us, I think the three pillars of Ontario's budget—protect, support and recover—would be a useful framework for a federal financial update as well. For example, the federal government has the opportunity to meet the urgent needs of Premiers of all provinces and territories by significantly increasing the Canada Health Transfer to 35%. They can accelerate federal approvals for important infrastructure projects and step up with \$10 billion a year for the next 10 years of shovel-ready projects—also unanimously recommended by the Premiers.

Of course, we would also call on the federal government to join us in our vision of broadband Internet for every home, business and farm, and to see them connected in the near future. We've provided \$1 billion in this budget to make this vision a reality, and increasing the federal investment today would be an excellent sign for the recovery of Ontario and Canada.

We'll continue to work with our federal partners and with all governments across Canada on behalf of the people of Canada and the people of Ontario to fight COVID-19. A very important part of that will be rolling out a vaccine as soon as it's available.

To turn back to the legislation before us today: As you will recall, on November 5, I rose in the Legislature to introduce this bill as part of the plan to implement our 2020 budget. It is a budget that included a lot of input from people and from businesses across Ontario. Throughout 2020, our government heard from more than 8,000 individuals, organizations, labour unions and businesses as part of numerous consultations, including the Ontario Jobs and Recovery Committee's consultations on the 2020 budget.

As all of you know, this committee held pre-budget hearings in January of 2020, hearing from people across the province and receiving 146 written submissions. The committee held 25 public hearings related to the sectoral impacts of COVID-19 in June, July and August, during which more than 500 witnesses made presentations and over 130 written submissions were received from individuals or groups who did not appear in front of the committee. I would like to thank all of the members of this committee for the role that they played in those unprecedented and important consultations.

This budget and Bill 229 mark the culmination of the most broad-based consultation for any Ontario budget. Of course, at the beginning of this year, our intention was to deliver a budget in the spring. However, as we all know, COVID-19 disrupted the lives of the people of Ontario in

an unprecedented fashion. Rather than table a budget this spring, our government instead released a one-year economic and fiscal outlook and the 2020 Ontario's Action Plan: Responding to COVID-19.

Ontario was the first jurisdiction in Canada to release a fiscal outlook that reflected the impacts of the COVID-19 crisis and our response. That urgent initial response was focused on ensuring that everyone could be safe and as healthy as possible, while putting in place supports for people and businesses. This budget builds on important early work and now sets out \$45 billion in support over the next three years to provide the resources to strengthen front-line health care, support people and employers and, importantly, lay the groundwork for Ontario's recovery.

Our plan can be summed up in three words: "protect," "support" and "recover." The first pillar of our budget is "protect." This reflects and remains the number one priority, which is to protect the health and safety of the people of Ontario. This pillar builds on the government's urgent response to COVID-19 that was put forward in March 2020 by providing \$7.5 billion in new funding, bringing our government's three-year investment in health care to \$15.2 billion.

This year, we are dedicating \$8.3 billion to support our front-line health care heroes and protect people from COVID-19. We are providing \$572 million for costs incurred during the pandemic, and since March, working with our hospital partners, we've added an additional 3,100 hospital beds to ensure our communities are ready for any scenario.

We're investing in a robust testing network—the best in the country—with \$1.4 billion to continue to ramp up testing and contact tracing across the province. Thanks to this work, Ontario is leading the country in testing, with over 5.8 million tests completed since March.

We know that fall and winter are dangerous times for sickness beyond COVID-19, and so our government has invested \$70 million to purchase flu vaccines—the largest flu immunization campaign the province has ever seen.

We have also purchased \$1.1 billion in personal protective equipment, which includes 300 million masks, 900 million gloves, 50 million gowns and six million face shields.

Of course, we know that the toll of COVID-19 goes beyond the virus itself. That is why our government has invested \$176 million this year to help expand access to critical mental health and related services. This investment is part of our overall \$3.8-billion mental health and addictions road map to wellness, a 10-year plan in partnership with the federal government to develop and implement a comprehensive and connected mental health and addictions system for Ontarians.

We know that COVID-19 affects those who are elderly and immunocompromised more than anyone else. That is why, since the beginning of the pandemic, we have made close to \$800 million available to protect our loved ones in long-term care. We are investing \$1.75 billion to build more beds and upgrade existing ones, and we're moving forward to accelerate the building of four facilities for

long-term care by early 2022, creating 1,280 beds in Mississauga, Ajax and Toronto. We're making Ontario the leader in Canada for long-term care by increasing the average daily direct care hours to four hours. This will be done over the next four years.

Protecting the people of Ontario is our number one goal in this budget as we continue to navigate COVID-19.

The next pillar in our budget is "support." This pillar builds on assistance already made available to families, workers and employers, providing a total of \$13.5 billion of support for people and jobs, including \$2.4 billion of new funding. This is in addition to the \$11.3 billion of cash flow support already provided to people and businesses this year.

The bill before you today creates a new Seniors' Home Safety Tax Credit for the 2021 tax year that would help tens of thousands of seniors stay in the homes that they love longer. The tax credit would be worth 25% of up to \$10,000 in eligible expenses and available to seniors and their family members, whether they owe taxes or not.

We're making \$4 billion available to municipalities and transit systems to provide one-time assistance, in partnership with the federal government, to help local governments address budget shortfalls related to COVID-19 and maintain the critical services that people rely on every day.

We're also supporting parents and families. We're investing \$13 billion over 10 years to build new schools and improve existing schools in Ontario. We are once again providing parents and caregivers a payment of at least \$200 per child through the Support for Learners program.

We are investing an additional \$60 million over three years, starting in 2021, in the Black Youth Action Plan, doubling its base funding to extend the current program and create new economic empowerment streams that will support Black youth.

This pillar will also include support for our job creators. We know small businesses are anchors of our communities that employ our neighbours, our families and our friends. That is why we are working with our partners in the federal and municipal governments to support these employers as they grapple with the economic impacts of COVID-19. We are providing \$60 million of one-time grants of up to \$1,000 of PPE for eligible small businesses. We are investing \$57 million in partnership with the federal government in the Digital Main Street program that has already helped 23,000 businesses build their online presence. On November 20, we announced additional public health measures to keep people safe, and we also announced a doubling of our grants for the program to provide \$600 million to assist eligible businesses with the costs associated with property taxes and energy bills. Thousands of businesses impacted by the necessary public health measures have already taken advantage of this important program.

#### 0910

The third pillar of our budget is "recover." While Ontario remains focused on getting through COVID-19,

the government and people must begin to build the foundation for a strong economic recovery fuelled by strong economic growth. This pillar includes \$4.8 billion in new supports for recovery efforts that will be built up over time.

We know that people lost their jobs and in many cases had their hours reduced as a result of COVID-19. That's why we are providing an additional \$181 million in employment services and training programs to connect workers—especially those in the industries hardest hit by COVID-19, including hospitality and retail—to skilled trades training. This includes \$60 million to help workers acquire in-demand skills rapidly to support a faster transition to a new job.

The “recover” pillar also includes a comprehensive plan to reduce job-killing electricity prices. The price of electricity for commercial businesses increased by 118% from 2008 to 2019. That is about five times the rate of inflation. That means lost jobs and lost opportunities for the people of our province. To protect and create jobs, the excess costs of high-cost contracts in wind, solar and bioenergy electricity generation signed under the previous government will be funded by the province starting on January 1. Removing these costs from electricity bills will save medium-sized and large industrial and commercial employers an average of 14% and 16% respectively.

As a result of our comprehensive plan, Ontario will go from being one of the least competitive jurisdictions for the cost of electricity to among the most competitive, better than the US average and better than most of the Great Lakes states, which we all know we compete with for manufacturing and commercial jobs. This will prepare our province not just for more jobs and more growth, but for a strong economic recovery.

Our plan also includes reducing taxes on job creators so that their resources can be reinvested in hiring more people, expanding their operations and innovating for long-term growth and prosperity. That is why our plan includes lowering high provincial property tax rates on over 200,000 employers' properties, or 94% of all business properties in Ontario. This represents a savings of as much as 30% and it starts on January 1.

Our plan also includes killing the job-killing Employer Health Tax for an additional 30,000 employers.

**The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu):** Three minutes left.

**Hon. Rod Phillips:** Sorry?

**The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu):** Three minutes left.

**Hon. Rod Phillips:** This is in addition to the relief of 90% of employers who will pay no EHT, saving private sector employers \$360 million in 2021-22.

We are also responding to requests from local governments by proposing to provide municipalities with the ability to cut property taxes in small businesses, and Ontario will match these municipal property tax reductions to further reduce taxes. This will provide small businesses with as much as \$385 million in total municipal and provincial property tax relief by 2022-23, depending on municipal adoption.

As COVID-19 has made clear, a lack of reliable Internet can make it almost impossible to earn a living, get an education or see your doctor without that Internet. We want every home, business and farm in Ontario to have high-speed Internet service, which is why we are topping up our initial investments and making a historic investment in our connectivity in Ontario plan. Over the next four years, we're committing \$680 million to the next phase of our plan, bringing our total investment in rural broadband to nearly \$1 billion.

Mr. Chair, I do see that the time is short, but before I conclude I just want to correct a few of the errors that seem to have made their way into the notes of the opposition members.

First, contrary to the NDP assertion, our government is substantially increasing funding to long-term care. Repeating incorrect information often does not make it true. As you will clearly see on page 183 of the budget, COVID-19-related measures are counted separately for the purposes of transparency. I'd be happy to chat further on this table if it is helpful.

Second, there seems to be a misunderstanding about the nature of federalism and how the provincial and federal governments play a role in areas where they have mutual strengths. It is true that federal one-time payments for COVID-19 represent 23% of the total support of Ontario's action plan, but by contrast, the federal government has contributed only 7% to what the province spends on infrastructure in this year.

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

**Hon. Rod Phillips:** Each government plays a role where it can best help out, and while we certainly won't apologize for working closely with our federal counterparts, we will continue to work with them to see where we can work mutually to the benefit of Ontarians.

Finally, I'd like to take a moment to explain the purpose of various contingency funds our government has put in place. Concerns raised in this regard have been incorrect. This is a tool that allows our government to be nimble, and it is now widely emulated by other provinces and territories. When the pandemic began, we did not know what to expect, so we put money aside for things like the PPE I mentioned. As move forward, we want to continue to be agile and respond to the changing needs of Ontario as the pandemic evolves, and ensure that our hospitals and communities have the support they need.

In closing, Bill 229 supports the very important work of our government's 2020 budget. It will implement measures to protect people's health, support job creators and families and lay the foundations for a strong economic recovery. Mr. Chairman, I look forward to the questions from the committee.

**The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu):** Thank you so much, Minister, for the presentation. We'll start with the questions now, but before we do that, I would like to do an attendance check. MPP Kanapathi, can you please confirm your attendance?

**Mr. Logan Kanapathi:** Good morning, Chair. It's Logan Kanapathi, MPP. I'm in Queen's Park, Ontario.

**The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu):** Thank you. We also have MPP Mamakwa in the committee room.

We'll start the questions with the official opposition. MPP Shaw?

**Ms. Sandy Shaw:** Good morning, Minister. Thank you for your presentation. I'd just like to repeat back to you, "Repeating inaccurate information does not make it true," and that flows both ways. That could be our theme for this morning's conversation, that that kind of comment flows both ways, so in order that we feel we are dealing with accurate information, can you let us know exactly how much of your COVID response is paid for by the federal government?

**Hon. Rod Phillips:** As I noted in the comments, approximately 23%.

**Ms. Sandy Shaw:** So is that 23% of what they've contributed to you or 23% of what you've spent?

**Hon. Rod Phillips:** That's 23% of the \$45-billion program laid out in this budget.

**Ms. Sandy Shaw:** Minister, I know that the \$9.3 billion, which is the current number before us, is what is currently in estimates that are before the Legislature, and that is the most recent report from the FAO. I know that in the Legislature MPP Cho has flipped through the budget quite a number of times and read out to us the footnotes. But what I would like to point out clearly—or maybe you could make this clear—is that what you're talking about is not money that's spent. What you're talking about is projected drawdowns, so can you give us a timeline for when that money will actually be in the field? And the second thing is, what direct program will it be associated with?

**Hon. Rod Phillips:** The budget lays that out in some detail. The total contingencies registered in this budget are in the range of \$13 billion. The FAO report, of course, was from the first quarter, so significantly out of date at this time. The current contingency in the budget, which of course will be confirmed through the various processes, is \$2.6 billion; that \$2.6 billion is the remaining contingency in this year for the remainder of the fiscal year, which now is just a little bit over four months.

I would point out that since the budget was presented, we've announced a further \$300 million of support for the businesses program in terms of the property tax and energy program. Roughly doing the math, that would be \$2.6 billion minus \$300 million, which would be about \$2.3 billion. I'd further point out that in the years ahead, we've put a \$4-billion contingency next year and a \$2-billion contingency into the future years on the health side. On the people-and-jobs-fund side, we've placed a \$1-billion contingency next year and an \$800-million contingency the year after that.

We have laid out contingencies going forward. As I mentioned in my comments, this has become the habit of, I believe, all provincial governments now in terms of their preparations for the uncertainty in the future. Again, there's about \$2.6 billion in the budget left—\$2.3 billion, after the \$300 million spend—which I think is responsible, given the volatility in the year ahead that we continue to anticipate in a second wave.

**0920**

**Ms. Sandy Shaw:** Thank you, Minister. I understand that we're in uncertain times, unprecedented times, and prudence is warranted, but the level of prudence, the level of contingency fund in this budget is extraordinary.

My double-barreled question to you is, one, don't you think it would be prudent right now to get this money into the field while businesses are closing? Businesses in my riding are closing all the time, and at the finance committee we heard a deputation from the convenience stores association—five convenience stores a week are closing in the province—

**The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu):** Two minutes.

**Ms. Sandy Shaw:** Pardon me?

**The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu):** Two minutes left.

**Ms. Sandy Shaw:** Oh, thank you. Sorry, I didn't hear you.

My question to you would be, would it not be more prudent to get this money into the field? And can you speak to the fact that in your budget you say if this money doesn't get spent, any unused contingency funds at the end of the year will go towards reducing the debt?

I just want to put it to you, most respectfully: People have seen your government manipulate the numbers in your debt position to your advantage, so if you don't spend this money in the field to save businesses and to keep people safe, which is what we're saying is happening, you can use this money to reduce the debt and show some pretty nice numbers on your books. But the people of Ontario will suffer.

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

**Hon. Rod Phillips:** So just in reverse order: I would disagree that this government has done anything but be transparent in terms of the numbers. The previous government missed or was late for eight of its quarterly updates; we have, on schedule and as required, provided full transparency with regard to the debt and deficit, and will continue to do so. We think that's vital for citizens to see.

In terms of putting dollars into the field, of course that is why we doubled the amount of money available, that's why we've added \$60 million for PPE support, an unprecedented level of support, and I look forward to the NDP's support of our going-forward measures. I've heard nothing but universal acclaim for our property tax cuts and electricity cuts, and I hope that the member will look closely at those in terms of an opportunity to support businesses in the days ahead and for the future.

When it comes to the handling of the contingencies, we make no apologies for setting aside dollars. In March, we did not know we would need \$1.1 billion just to buy personal protective equipment, but it was very, very important that those dollars were available—

**The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu):** I apologize to cut you off, Minister. We have to move to the independent members now. MPP Hunter.

**Ms. Mitzie Hunter:** Hi, Chair. I want to thank the minister for his presentation. Minister, you started off by saying that the federal government would be wise to follow Ontario's framework. I would caution against that,

because the federal government has been bold and proactive in its measures to help all Ontarians, whether it's providing wage subsidies or providing individuals who have lost employment with CERB, and now they have other programs that really give Ontarians the funds that they need to make it through the pandemic. At one stage, 97% of what was provided to Ontarians in direct supports and in transfers to the province was 97% of the overall response for COVID-19.

What I would have expected from your government in this budget, given that it's a budget that is two thirds of the way through the fiscal year, is that you would have taken the lessons learned in the first wave and used the summer wisely to provide the resources and supports that the people of the province need. I'm talking about in areas that are provincial responsibility, like public health. Your government has put significant expectations on public health units to really be on the front lines of the pandemic and to bear the brunt of the response, but there are no new investments in public health in this budget. That's a missed opportunity, because they are asking for supports.

There are no new investments in education. We know that, particularly in areas where COVID is spreading in the community, that puts a significant risk, for teachers, for education workers, for students and for where they live. The risk of students going out to school and coming back home in families that perhaps live in multi-generational households—there is a fear in those households of sending their children out to school each and every day.

Of course, in seniors' and elderly care: You said in your opening presentation that it's going to take four years to implement the staffing plan that would satisfy the four hours' average of care for our elderly in long-term care at a time when even your own [*inaudible*]

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

**Ms. Mitzie Hunter:** —has said that the need to respond is urgent, that it's beyond time for study and it's time to act. What I would say to the minister is that you can't just talk about it in headlines; you have to actually put the investments into the budget to back up the actions.

One of my questions would be, what is in this budget for vaccine preparedness that is there, that public health units and others can count on?

**Hon. Rod Phillips:** Well, the member covered a lot of ground, so I'm going to beg the Chair's indulgence to respond.

With regard to public health: \$270 million more in terms of expenditures; \$1.4 billion for testing and tracing. That involves an entire new IT platform as well. On the school front, \$1.3 billion for what has been widely heralded, even by the Toronto Star, as a very good re-opening program for schools—I mean the Toronto Star editorial board, there.

With regard to long-term care, the previous government started talking about the move towards four hours of care—

**The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu):** Thank you. I apologize, Minister, once again. We'll come back to that in the second round.

We'll go to the government side now. MPP Roberts?

**Mr. Jeremy Roberts:** Minister, thank you for your presentation. There's so much that we could talk about today in this budget. I know I've been hearing from a lot of my constituents who are really pleased to see the balance between those three pillars: protect, support and laying the foundation for recovery.

I guess the first thing I'd love to dive into a little bit is supports for seniors. As you know, Minister, my riding has one of the largest seniors populations in Ontario, and a lot of people have been really thrilled with the Seniors' Home Safety Tax Credit, not only because it will help allow more seniors to stay in their homes, but also will provide a boost to some in our renovation sector. I wondered if perhaps you could talk a little bit more about the home safety tax credit and perhaps any other initiatives in this budget that are going to help our seniors in our communities?

**Hon. Rod Phillips:** Thank you very much to the member. And you're right: Seniors deserve the kind of support that this government is providing.

First, I will talk about the home safety tax credit, a 25% tax credit that would be eligible for up to \$10,000 of expenditures. During the consultations, I know this committee heard about seniors wanting the opportunity to age in place and the importance of that opportunity to age in place. This provides that additional support for those seniors. So up to \$2,500, whether it's for stability bars or elevation devices or other supports that would be helpful to keep seniors in the home.

Two very important components of that tax credit that I know the member advocated for and are quite critical is that, first of all, it's a tax credit, so even those that don't pay taxes will have access to the support—we know that that's important so that all of Ontario seniors can have that support—and second, this is also eligible for families. We know that there are many multi-generational families that have a grandma or grandpa living in the home, and so those families can also take advantage of the tax credit and find that support.

The one other area I would talk about is our support in the long-term-care area. As you will all know, sadly, in the last five years that the previous government was in place, only 611 long-term-care beds were built. We've committed to building over 30,000 beds. But just in our three pilot projects and the campus of care project alone by 2022, there will be almost double that number: 1,220 beds built, just on those projects alone. Of course, there are many, many more to be built.

Similarly, the previous government started talking back in 2007 about expanding access to care. They talked about 3.5 hours. Of course, it is going to take us four years to get to that Canada-leading level of four hours of care. But if the previous government had done that in 2007, that care would have been in place in 2011, and we might not have had the tragic situation that we had through the pandemic.

**0930**

So we've committed to that important expansion of care. It's not just about quantity, but about quality of care and ensuring that our seniors have access to that quality of

care through the training of a massive number of PSWs and other professional support workers. It's a very important initiative to support our seniors.

**Mr. Jeremy Roberts:** For sure. Absolutely. I had the pleasure of being at an announcement with Minister Fullerton recently in Ottawa, where we're going to be building a new long-term-care facility at the Ottawa Hospital Riverside campus, in partnership with Schlegel Villages. Again, it's really welcome news and very much celebrated across the community.

Pivoting a little bit, Minister, during our finance committee consultations this summer with small businesses, we heard from a lot of representatives from the tourism and culture sectors. One thing that they kept talking about again and again was that once we were able to return to normal activities, they wanted there to be some sort of tax incentive for folks to use to get folks back involved in our tourism sector here in Ontario. Of course, you responded to that feedback in this budget with the staycation tax credit. I'm wondering if you could talk a little bit more about that and how we're going to support our folks' small businesses in the tourism sector.

**Hon. Rod Phillips:** Once again, I thank the member for the question. This is a very important sector that has been very hard hit. All of our high-touch sectors—hospitality and tourism. We heard from that sector about the need for support, so this government responded. We know that it's going to be safer to take vacations inside our borders than outside our borders in the near future.

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

**Hon. Rod Phillips:** When it is safe, we will institute a 20% tax credit, the Ontario staycation tax credit. We're currently looking forward to working with the hospitality and tourism sector to work on the areas that they think will be most effective. But we believe that supporting areas like accommodation and others is a critical area, just to make it a little bit easier for Ontarians to enjoy all the wonderful things that our province has to offer. Of course, I think that all of us will agree that when it is safe, it will be very much something that the people of Ontario deserve, and what better than a vacation right here in the beautiful province of Ontario?

**Mr. Jeremy Roberts:** Absolutely. I know even I myself am starting to think of where I'd like to go in Ontario, whether it's Blue Mountain or Niagara—so many great places to choose from.

Again, Minister, there are too many things to talk about. Thank you again for a very, very strong budget. Chair, I'll turn it back over to you now, since I know we're out of time.

**The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu):** Thank you so much. We'll start the second round with the independent members. MPP Hunter.

**Ms. Mitzie Hunter:** Back to the minister: Minister, I want to remind you of your government's record. It was to cut \$1 billion from public health over 10 years. That was a stated commitment by your government. In fact, this process was under way when the pandemic hit, which made public health units less prepared than they would have otherwise been to respond to the pandemic.

As it relates to long-term care, I do want to remind you—and yes, you are correct that under the former Liberal government, whose mandate ended in 2018, a full two years before this pandemic, we had started to implement the average of four hours of care for seniors in 2017, and that a \$50-million investment in one RN, a registered nurse, in every home was part of that plan that was already under way and implemented. I do think that your government has to be accountable for what it is doing two-plus years into a mandate and at the start of a pandemic.

I also want to remind you that between 2003 and 2018, the former Liberal government completed the redevelopment of 14,000 long-term-care beds and were in the process of implementing 30,000 new beds, a commitment that your government has continued to say that you will do.

We also, in the former government, built 10,000 new long-term-care beds between 2003 and 2018. Clearly, more needs to be done for long-term care. That is something that all sides of the House have acknowledged. What I want to understand from you: Given your own commission has recommended that your government implement the average of four hours of care per patient, why did you not include that in the budget so that this very important and critical initiative can start? Why the delay?

**Hon. Rod Phillips:** Well, I don't know where to start when we talk about delays. In 2007, your government started talking about expanding care, and by 2017, you made a further commitment to it. If you had actually done what you had said you would do in 2007, then there would have been the kind of care that we are now committing to provide.

In terms of the recommendations that came, one of the reasons that the government wisely opted for an independent commission was so that we could receive recommendations with regard to long-term care from an expert panel that reviewed the lack of investment—as I mentioned previously, in the last five years of the previous government, your government, 611 beds were built. I was at a new site in Ajax where 220 beds are being built in the next two years. That's in addition to 320 beds at the Ajax Pickering Hospital as a campus of care. In the community of Ajax, there are likely to be almost as many beds built in the next two years as the Liberal government built in the last five years of its mandate.

But when it comes to the care of those in long-term-care homes, we see now, again, that this requires a significant investment—tens of thousands of PSWs to be trained. It requires in-depth work, and so, this will be work that is started immediately. One of the reasons we had the independent commission was that we wanted to make sure that we could act immediately. Within two weeks—I'll say that again: within two weeks—of the recommendation of the independent commission, this government acted with the announcement and the commitment.

**The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu):** Thirty seconds.

**Hon. Rod Phillips:** I think that political commitment is something that, again, we'll be talking about in our March budget, in terms of—

**Ms. Mitzie Hunter:** But Minister, I do want to—

**Hon. Rod Phillips:** —that critical commitment is something that your government talked about in 2007; we talked about it a month ago.

**Ms. Mitzie Hunter:** Minister—

**The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu):** Can you please let the minister finish?

**Ms. Mitzie Hunter:** I'm sorry, but the time is going to run out, and I do want to say to the minister—

**The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu):** I will request that the members please not speak over each other.

**Ms. Mitzie Hunter:** Yes. Chair, I want to say to the minister that he missed the opportunity to back up the action with funding.

**The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu):** The time is up. We have to move to the government side now. MPP Smith or MPP Pang.

**Mr. Billy Pang:** Minister, thank you very much for your presentation this morning. It is a very strong budget for Ontarians.

I believe one of the very important and one of the most concerning issues for my riding of Markham–Unionville is about tax relief. Property taxes are fixed costs that are profit-insensitive. This bill lowers provincial property taxes, also known as the Business Education Tax, in some cases up to 30%. Could you please expand on what areas will see the most benefit and how this will help businesses?

**Hon. Rod Phillips:** Thank you, MPP Pang. This was an area where we received a great deal of feedback, both from businesses and from municipalities, saying that the focus of our response to COVID-19 should not be just about supporting businesses now—we all know that we need to support businesses now—but should also be about supporting them in the future.

The education property tax regime is one that the previous government failed to equalize across the province. As you said, there will be a reduction for 94% of the business properties across Ontario, but significant parts of the province were left with unfair property taxes. Mayor Holder of London was one of the key advocates for this, and he would give the example of a 30% difference between the property taxes in his community of London and, let's say, a property in Halton. So this was clearly an inequity that should have been dealt with and that we are now dealing with, but it has the added benefit of putting a direct savings into the hands of businesses immediately. In the case of Mayor Holder's community, a small boutique hotel would save \$11,000 on their property tax because of a 30% reduction in the education property tax.

I should note, of course, that the province is maintaining and, in fact, increasing the spending on education through this period, but we're absorbing this responsibility because we believe that supporting those employers in this and also the creation of a small business tax class are things that are going to help businesses now and in the future.

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**Mr. Billy Pang:** Thank you, Minister, for your great answer on relief on the business education tax. I just

mentioned that tax relief is one of the keys for businesses so they can survive in this pandemic. There's another tax relief that I'm very interested to look into, which is the payroll tax. The payroll tax is a tax on jobs, so, Minister, I'm glad to see that you recognize that. Could you dig a little bit deeper into the impact of eliminating the employer health tax for all but the largest and the most profitable corporations?

**Hon. Rod Phillips:** This is another example, as you correctly said, of a profit-insensitive tax. Whether it's property tax or payroll tax or electricity costs, all things that this budget addresses for businesses, these are costs that affect a business, whether it makes money or whether it has a bad year, and many people are having a very, very challenging year this year.

When we introduced our first plan, our one-year plan, we lifted the exemption from \$450,000 to \$1 million, and that relieved about 30,000 businesses of paying this payroll tax, this tax on jobs. We heard very strong feedback from the business community that this was very important, that this had kept people in jobs, that this kept people working.

**The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu):** Two minutes.

**Hon. Rod Phillips:** So we have now made permanent that reduction, and that means, as the member correctly points out, that 30,000 businesses now will not have to pay this specific tax, which is literally a tax on employment.

Again, I hope that all the members from all parties will look at this and see this is a very beneficial way of supporting our employers during this difficult time.

**Mr. Billy Pang:** Thank you, Minister. One more question—I hope have enough time. This legislation authorizes interim supply. In other words, it authorizes the spending laid out in the budget. Could you expand on some of the measures that you are taking to help protect the people of Ontario from COVID-19?

**Hon. Rod Phillips:** This plan lays out \$45 billion of supports and requires, and asks the Legislature for, permission to have access to those dollars to do so.

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

**Hon. Rod Phillips:** Principally among this, our main concern of course is protecting the health of Ontarians, so there is \$8.3 billion of additional spending on health care. As I mentioned in my comments, we've expanded the number of beds by 3,100 beds across the province. This is to make sure the communities are in a position to deal with all scenarios. Additional money for testing and tracing; the dollars to ensure that there is the money available for the distribution of a vaccine: These are all the vital investments that we want to make sure principally can be made. But it's a total of \$45 billion of vital, vital support, and I hope that all the members of the committee and the Legislature will see fit to support it.

**Mr. Billy Pang:** Thank you, Minister. This is great support for businesses and also the whole communities of Ontario and Markham–Unionville. Thank you very much.

**The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu):** Thank you so much. We'll move to the opposition now for their second round. MPP Shaw.

**Ms. Sandy Shaw:** Minister, I would have to say that the biggest disappointment I'm hearing from my constituents is not just your government sitting on billions and billions—perhaps \$9.3 billion—of unspent money, but it is your record on the environment.

Minister, when you were the Minister of the Environment, during that time your government cancelled cap-and-trade without replacing it with anything substantial. Your government forwent billions of dollars in revenue. You're continually in court fighting climate change and environmental issues, spending hundreds of millions of dollars. You're fighting the federal government right now in court. Your gas stickers were ruled unconstitutional. I mean, you pulled down windmills that cost the taxpayers hundreds of millions of dollars and pulled out charging stations. Then there was Bill 66, which really essentially was an attack—I would say the second or third attack—by this government on the greenbelt, and you had to roll back Bill 66.

What I would like to say is that currently we have before us a budget bill that has slipped in another attack on our environment. Minister, you know that the Auditor General's report just came out, and it is a scathing indictment of your government's performance on the environment. It said that you're failing to obey your own environmental laws and skirting the rules. For example, some of the key findings are that you're not collecting data to know whether you're conserving protected lands or endangered species. You've opened up protected wilderness areas for resource extraction, and two thirds of the land in Algonquin Provincial Park can't be considered protected any longer. You are missing your own climate risk targets—or emissions reduction targets.

Finally, the biggest thing I would say for the people of Ontario is that you are not compliant with Ontario's Environmental Bill of Rights. These are rights that the people have under our environmental laws. The Auditor General has said, quite clearly, that you are not compliant with your own laws.

Now let's look at what was supposed to be a budget bill. Again, people see that this government—it's been said you're using the cover of COVID to slip in things that the people of the province of Ontario have not asked for. Your government's current attack on conservation authorities is hugely controversial. My riding, my constituency office is flooded with calls and emails. People are upset by this, Minister. I do not understand why, when we were struggling to keep businesses open, to keep people safe, to keep hospitals running, this was a priority for your government.

Why, in a budget bill, Minister, have you put in schedules that will essentially take away all the powers of the conservation authorities to protect our environment, to protect wetlands, to protect flood plains—which is not only environmental protection; it makes economic sense. If municipalities and people are struggling with flooded basements, if municipalities have to deal with shore erosion and infrastructure degradation because of flooding—my question to you is, why was this a priority? How in any way does it make any economic sense to individual

residents, taxpayers, municipal property taxpayers? Who did you consult with and who asked for this change?

**Hon. Rod Phillips:** Thank you to the member for those comments and the question. I'll disagree with a number of the premises.

**The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu):** Two minutes.

**Hon. Rod Phillips:** In the first instance, the Made-in-Ontario Environment Plan produced, and now is proving, the potential to balance the economy and the environment. I know that is something that challenges some members, but it is an important balance that needs to be maintained, particularly during the worst recession in our collective lifetimes. There are important steps forward that have been taken with regard to that plan, and there are important elements of those steps that are contained in this budget: \$6 million of additional supports for Ontario Parks to make them more accessible for Ontarians; \$20 million to work with groups like the Greenlands Conservation Partnership, the Nature Conservancy of Canada and the Ontario land trust to expand—I say that again: to expand—the amount of green space in Ontario, again, working with very well-recognized and reputable groups in that regard.

Very important in terms of our protection of our waters is the \$37 million of support both to municipalities and to other entities around fresh water. This was an area of particular concern when we looked at what the previous government had done in regards to the—

**The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu):** Thirty seconds.

**Hon. Rod Phillips:** —water and wastewater into our lakes and rivers.

But in terms of conservation areas, the minister has, of course, been in conversation with conservation authorities. Conservation authorities are an important part of the infrastructure. I believe there are 36 of them across Ontario. Again, I would reject the premise that this is an attack in any way on these important institutions. I know that the minister has been in consultation and will be—

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

Unmute, please.

**Mr. Dave Smith:** Minister, we've had some really challenging times for business, and COVID-19 has really emphasized that. During the term of the last Liberal government, for small commercial businesses, their hydro rates went up an astonishing 117% over the last 10 years. One of the things that's being changed in this is some relief for these small businesses or these commercial businesses. Could you expand a little bit for me, please, on the \$600-million program to support businesses through COVID-19?

**Hon. Rod Phillips:** Thank you very much to the member for those questions. Electricity rates, of course, are a vital, vital input. All of us in our ridings have heard businesses say, "We want to expand our business, we want to keep our business here, but it is just so much more expensive for electricity in Ontario than it is in competing jurisdictions." By keeping their businesses here, they were being uncompetitive on this very important input.

This was a result of the previous government's Green Energy Act and energy contracts where a price is too high for energy that employers and others frankly didn't need. This drove that exact acceleration of cost that you talked about, and that cost is fundamentally making our businesses uncompetitive.

**0950**

What we've done now, over a long-term, 19-year plan, is laid out how we can remove those costs from businesses. But we're doing it in a way that makes them competitive now. Starting on January 1, on average, an industrial company will receive about a 14% reduction in their electricity costs. A commercial company—and you referenced commercial—will receive about a 16% reduction. Just to put that into real-world context: A mine in northern Ontario, for example, would see a savings of about \$3 million. A small gym in a community like Grimsby could see a saving of \$10,000. These are all very important savings that will support growth in our economy, not just now, when we really need to be supporting every business—and this will support them—but also for the future.

**Mr. Dave Smith:** One thing that seems to get lost on all of us, and I greatly appreciate that we're talking about businesses in this case, but this is also municipal relief. North Kawartha, a township in my riding, spends about \$11,000 a month on their arena. This reduction in electrical costs actually reduces municipal taxes because, in the end, it's the municipal taxpayer who's paying for that.

There are other supports that we're giving for businesses as well, like the property tax reduction that we've been talking about today. One of the things that people have said to me is, "We're focusing a lot on businesses. How come?" If we're reducing costs for business, it means that more people are able to be employed, and in the end, that is better for all of Ontario. Could you expand a little bit about how the property tax reductions that we're putting forward are going to help those businesses as well?

**The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu):** Two minutes.

**Hon. Rod Phillips:** We know that there are two major changes in the budget proposed related to the property tax regime. The first is the reduction of the education property tax, which is a significant savings: 30% in many communities, like your community in Peterborough. That's for both industrial and commercial businesses. That means that those businesses will be able to employ more people, or maybe keep the people employed that they have now.

Another important proposal has been the opportunity for municipalities, and this was one of the ideas that came to us from a number of municipalities—in particular the city of Toronto, and John Tory spoke about it—the idea for a small business tax class. This would allow municipalities to reduce those taxes by up to 30% and we, as the province, would match those savings to provide a broader savings. This would be about \$385 million of savings in the next two years, again, that lets those businesses stay in business, but it also sends a really clear signal about the future.

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

**Mr. Dave Smith:** Thank you very much for that. I'm going to pivot very quickly to one last thing, and that is with respect to credit unions. Kawartha Credit Union is the largest credit union in my riding and they have been a fantastic corporate citizen helping out our community. There have been some changes that have been made in this bill for credit unions. Could you talk a little bit about that and how it's being received by the credit unions?

**Hon. Rod Phillips:** It has been almost two decades since the government looked at the credit union act, despite the requirements to look at it, and so we've made changes very much in consultation with local communities and the credit union sector to make sure that they can be more competitive. It's been very well received. Again, some of the urban members wouldn't be aware of the vital, vital role that those credit unions play across our broader province in providing liquidity and support for businesses. This has been very well received by the credit union sector. I think it is an important signal about the importance of that sector, and we look forward to them continuing to be vital parts in our rural and suburban communities to support the growth of our economy through this challenging time.

**The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu):** We'll go back to the opposition for their final round. Any questions from the opposition? MPP Shaw?

**Ms. Sandy Shaw:** Thank you very much, Minister. I would like to just now move to the crisis that's unfolding in long-term care. Again, thank goodness for the Auditor General, because we did hear the Auditor General's report came out and really challenged the fact that this government, and the Premier in particular, has been saying that they are listening to the public health experts. There's evidence that shows that, in fact, these are political decisions that are being made. Given that backdrop, and what we see is an unfolding crisis in long-term care that we all know about—2,200, and growing, seniors, residents, loved ones—our grandmothers, grandfathers, fathers and mothers are dying in long-term care.

In my riding in Hamilton–Ancaster, at Chartwell Willowgrove, there's an outbreak that has been going on since October, and now there are currently 15 people who have lost their lives.

Just before this budget we had the MPP for London–Fanshawe's, Teresa Armstrong's, private member's bill, which advocated for four hours of hands-on care in long-term care. We put this bill forward four times; your government has supported this bill in words, as a gesture, but then, when the budget came forward, there was absolutely no human resource plan to hire the thousands and thousands of PSWs that we know we need, and no money allocated to that.

We know that the province of Quebec hired 10,000 PSWs. They started hiring when the first wave hit, so they were able to have those staff on the ground now. BC did the same thing; I believe they hired 7,000 PSWs. Your government has not done this despite the horrible lessons we've learned in long-term care. You can talk about the money that you're putting into long-term care and health

care, but this funding doesn't undo the cuts in, basically, the austerity budget that was unveiled in 2019, and what you're putting in there barely keeps pace with inflation, never mind the extraordinary COVID-19 cases that we're facing.

My question to you is: Why, in this budget, did you not take the opportunity—why did you fail to put forward a substantial amount of money directly, to ensure that we had the support, the staff, the PSWs that everyone knows that we need in long-term care today? Not in January, not in February, not in the next fiscal; we need those in place today.

Minister, I appreciate that you've talked about the money that you've put into your budget. You'll talk about high numbers, you'll talk about the billions here and the billions there, but what people want to hear from you is how this is going to impact their families. How is this budget going to show up when they arrive to visit their families in long-term care? How are they going to see a substantial difference in the care that their loved ones are receiving, and how are they going to be reassured that they are better protected than they were before you tabled this budget?

**The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu):** Two minutes.

**Hon. Rod Phillips:** I thank the member for the question. I think the last question is the right question: How are people going to be reassured? That reassurance comes in the form of \$8.3 billion of additional spending on health care and just under \$800 million of support.

But to the point about immediate requirements: Of course, the \$1.1 billion of PPE and the support for our long-term-care homes was part of that immediate support, in addition to the pandemic pay increase and the subsequent increase in the hundreds of millions of dollars that this province has provided, to provide additional dollars to support the vital front-line health care heroes that are working in our long-term-care homes, in particular the personal support workers. This is in addition to the advanced testing—again, the total cost of that is \$1.4 billion—and all immediate supports. But to the longer term, I think that we, as a government, have demonstrated that we can not only respond to the urgency of COVID—

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

**Hon. Rod Phillips:** —but also to longer-term issues that festered, quite frankly, over generations and over many, many governments. The commitment in the budget and written in the words in the budget to support four hours of care is going to put Ontario at the leading edge of this, the commitment to train tens of thousands of new PSWs.

Of course, that move to four hours will happen over time in a staggered way, so we'll see progress at each stage and be assured that the dollars for that are in the long-term financial plan of this government. We will do it in a purposeful way. We'll do it in co-operation with labour, with homes, with municipalities and others in this sector. But this is a very important commitment from the Premier and from our government to make sure that we build additional beds—and I've already spoken about the

importance of that—but that the quality of care for our elders is also advanced and that we are in a place to be proud in Ontario of having the leading amount of time, four hours of care, in a sustainable way.

**The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu):** Thank you so much. That concludes our time. Thank you so much, Minister, for coming and for your presentation and responding to the questions of the committee members.

**Hon. Rod Phillips:** Thank you, Chair.

**The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu):** That concludes our time this morning. This committee stands in recess until 1 p.m.

*The committee recessed from 0959 to 1300.*

**The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu):** Good afternoon, and welcome back. We're continuing public hearings on Bill 229, An Act to implement Budget measures and to enact, amend and repeal various statutes.

Pursuant to the order of the House dated November 23, 2020, each presenter will have seven minutes for their presentation, and after we have heard from all presenters, there will be time for questions from members of the committee. The time will be broken down into two rounds of seven and half minutes each for both of the recognized parties and two rounds of four and half minutes for the independent members.

Before I call upon our next presenter, I would just like to inform the members that the Toronto and Region Conservation Authority will have one extra presenter, Michael Tolensky, chief financial and operating officer.

MPP Thanigasalam, can you please confirm your attendance?

**Mr. Vijay Thanigasalam:** Good afternoon, Chair. I am MPP Vijay Thanigasalam, calling from Scarborough, Ontario. Thank you.

**The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu):** Thank you.

CANADIAN CREDIT UNION ASSOCIATION  
TORONTO AND REGION  
CONSERVATION AUTHORITY  
ONTARIO SECONDARY SCHOOL  
TEACHERS' FEDERATION

**The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu):** Our next presenter this afternoon is the Canadian Credit Union Association. If you can please state your name for the record. You will have seven minutes for your presentation.

**Mr. Nick Best:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. My name is Nick Best. I'm the director of Ontario government relations at the Canadian Credit Union Association. I'm joined here today by Rob Wellstood. He's the CEO of Kawartha Credit Union, based out of Peterborough. Thank you for hearing from us today on Bill 229.

Our sector is comprised of 65 credit unions who, combined, have 1.6 million members and manage \$70 billion in assets. When COVID-19 hit, we reimagined how to use our facilities and staff to continue offering critical services to our members safely, especially at the start of the pandemic, when financial markets were in turmoil. We

have since deferred tens of thousands of loans and acted as an agent for the government of Canada on its business support programs, but most importantly we've continued to offer advice and add value for our members in all their financial needs.

Our sector is growing. Over the past 12 months, deposits and loans have grown by \$6 billion. Membership growth is equally robust. The profitability on our core business lines—mortgage lending to individuals and loans to small business members—has tightened over the past decade because of margin compression: the spread between the cost of deposits and the revenue we can generate from those deposits.

Credit unions are diversifying but are hamstrung by a legislative and regulatory framework that limits our permitted business activities to a narrow range. We have been asking you for a legislative renewal to fix this and other problems from an act that was introduced in 1994. Bill 229 does that and has been unanimously well received by credit unions.

This act comprehensively modernizes our enabling legislation and provides a framework for us to accelerate our growth.

First, it will allow credit unions to offer a broader suite of financial products and services to members and non-members. This will be done by making permitted business activities permissive by default, rather than restrictive by default as they are presently. Credit unions will also have increased opportunities to launch subsidiaries and diversify their business lines through investments in other companies, provided it aligns with their core mandate. Our regulator will have the authority to determine whether a credit union can enter into these new lines of businesses based on a test of its capacity to do so permanently, rather than by an inflexible legislated metric. This was our main recommendation and we are happy to see it enacted.

Second, market conduct—how you treat your customer—is enshrined in legislation. This is a new addition from the previous act.

Third, credit unions are being given more flexibility in how they can govern themselves, provided they uphold the broad principles of good governance and good co-operative governance at the same time. For example, a credit union CEO can now sit on the board of directors if the board of directors allows it through their bylaws, and credit unions will now have to report on the gender diversity of their board of directors.

Fourth, the legislation makes wide use of a new process called “rule-making.” In effect, whenever our regulator, the Financial Services Regulatory Authority of Ontario, or FSRA, drafts a regulation using its rule-making authority, this regulation has the same power as a Ministry of Finance regulation. This process is intended to give the regulator more flexibility to introduce guidance or not introduce guidance, depending on the situation. It is also seen as a quicker, more responsive way to guide firms in a rapidly changing industry.

Finally, credit unions will be able to offer insurance in-branch. There is an understanding that this will be limited

to property and casualty. It must be offered either through a subsidiary of the credit union or a third party. Credit unions share a regulator with property and casualty insurers, and the same level of regulatory oversight will apply. Ontarians will benefit by being able to access insurance at more points of service and over time, we hope, lower rates.

In conclusion, thank you. The committee has heard our recommendations and the government has acted on them. While the changes won't be felt or seen immediately, as the legislation won't be proclaimed until the regulatory framework underpinning the act is complete, this will allow our sector to offer a broader suite of products and services to Ontarians. If you have any interest in visiting a credit union in your region to learn more about their business and how these changes will impact them, please let us know. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

**The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu):** Thank you so much.

Moving along to our next group of presenters, I would like to call upon the Toronto and Region Conservation Authority. If you can please state your name for the record, and you will have seven minutes for your presentation.

**Ms. Jennifer Innis:** Thank you, Chair, and thank you for the opportunity to address the committee today. My name is Jennifer Innis and I am the chair of the Toronto and Region Conservation Authority. I am joined today by John MacKenzie, our CEO, and Michael Tolensky, our CFO.

I'm just going to show the first slide. Since the province announced the proposed amendments, TRCA staff have worked tirelessly with the province to collaborate on potential enhancements and in regard to our substantial concerns over the conservation authorities' role in permitting, planning and enforcement. Next slide.

The TRCA is the largest of the 36 provincial conservation authorities, with five million people living within our jurisdiction, which spans across nine watersheds and over 70 kilometres of Lake Ontario shoreline, stretching from Mississauga to Ajax. Next slide.

Some of Canada's largest and fastest-growing municipalities, including Toronto, Markham, Brampton and Vaughan, are located within the TRCA's jurisdiction, which spans six upper-tier and 15 lower-tier municipalities. Next slide.

The TRCA supports amendments to enhance transparency and accountability, and it is already consistent with TRCA's current practice and levels of service to our stakeholders. Next slide.

Municipalities and community organizations in our jurisdiction, along with our neighbouring conservation authorities, have requested that schedule 6 be removed from Bill 229. The TRCA can support moving forward with transparency and accountability components in schedule 6, but it is requesting that governance, planning, permitting and enforcement provisions in schedule 6 either be removed from the bill in its entirety or immediately amended to address significant public concerns. As part of Bill 229, if the government intends on immediately passing amendments to address public concerns with schedule

6, TRCA requests that the proposed amendments provided in our submission related to governance, planning, permitting and enforcement be adopted so that we can continue to fulfill our core mandate of protecting communities and the natural environment.

**Mr. John MacKenzie:** Thank you, Madam Chair. To the Chair and members of the committee, I have included some photos of major infrastructure and private property that our work helps address. These are important for you to understand that our work in our jurisdiction, which is one of the fastest-growing jurisdictions in North America, basically helps to avoid billions of dollars in damage to public infrastructure and private owners. Importantly, related to COVID, it helps to facilitate billions of dollars of investment to redevelop areas that are in intensification areas, that are flood-prone or have risks present. So our work is very important in ensuring that our communities are developed safely, and this work has been confirmed by the provincial flood adviser, the Premier's flood adviser, as being of great value and leading-edge across Canada. Next slide, please.

Our work includes providing detailed input on land use plans, infrastructure plans, and a great deal of our work involves bringing forward scientific and watershed-based expertise and blending that with policy and specific land use plans for this area to ensure that the best decision and the best outcome is achieved, which will create certainty for investment but will also help avoid costly risks and billions of dollars in lawsuits.

Our work includes us being present in the land use planning process at the earliest possible stages and being involved in decision-making processes, including, sometimes, land use planning and appeal tribunal work. That and the Local Planning Appeal Tribunal work is very important work. There are proposed—

*Interjection.*

**Mr. John MacKenzie:** —with this plan that would take us away from being involved. I think that's a major concern and a bad idea.

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We are proposing some recommendations to keep us involved to protect natural hazards and to address risks in areas where we should be involved, as per the Premier's adviser on flooding. Next slide, please.

We have a number of high-risk areas that we regulate including—you can see photos of the Scarborough Bluffs present—valley corridors that are at risk and wetlands. On many of these, we played an important role in ensuring that development occurs safely. Our organization issues over 1,000 permits, on average, per year, sometimes many more. We do this without an issue and without any appeals.

**The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu):** Two minutes.

**Mr. John MacKenzie:** We haven't had concerns or appeals for at least 10 years. Over 10,000-plus permits have been issued with no appeal, related to our authority. The system is working in our jurisdiction. Next slide, please.

There are a number of permitting amendments proposed as part of schedule 6 in Bill 229. They are causing

us great concern, and we have also a concern that the information must be included. That's why we propose an amendment to include complete application requirements and to retain the Mining and Lands Tribunal as the appeal body. We think it's working well in our jurisdiction.

I want to now turn it over to speak to some of the enforcement and complaints challenges that are present. Chair Innis?

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

**Ms. Jennifer Innis:** Thank you. The following slides I'm going to go through pretty quickly, just to give you an idea of some of the issues and challenges that are being faced in our jurisdiction when it comes to enforcement.

On this slide that you see here, there were over 400 truckloads of illegal fill brought in that was potentially contaminated, dumped next to a wetland and pushed over the top of the bank. If you go to the next slide, which will show damage to trees, that is clearly an enforcement issue.

If you go to the next slide, this is in Vaughan. You'll see they tried to correct some erosion control problems that they were having with their property. What they did is they actually made it worse, and it also impacted their neighbour's property in the process.

If you go to the next slide, this is the Scarborough Bluffs. As anybody can see, if you stand on that deck, there is a good chance you're going to go down. This is not only just a concern about property, but this is a concern about safety and people's lives that are at stake as these bluffs are constantly eroding and falling into Lake Ontario.

Go to the next slide—

**The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu):** Thank you. I apologize to cut you off. The time has come up.

We'll move to our next presenter, the Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation. If you can please state your name for the record, and you will have seven minutes for your presentation.

**Mr. Harvey Bischof:** Thanks, Chair. It's Harvey Bischof, president of the Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation, which represents over 60,000 public high school teachers, occasional teachers and education workers in various job classes, working from early childhood education up to and including six universities in the province. We are pleased to make a submission on Bill 229 with respect to its impact on public education and university and college sectors.

It goes without saying the pandemic has taken a serious toll on Ontario's economy. Critical to a strong economy going forward is a robust public education system. Public education is an investment. The returns on this investment include lower costs in social services, including the health, judicial and welfare sectors.

However, instead of investing in our economy, Bill 229 all but ignores the education sector. The budget shows a three-year mid-term outlook of only \$300 million additional for education, when enrolment will grow by 4% and inflation will still rise. This will require school boards to cut programs and remove front-line workers. The result will be a weaker public education system and subsequently a weaker economy. This government has decided to

leave both our public schools and universities grappling with an austerity budget.

The university and college sector is subject to a restriction of funding, and a three-year mid-term outlook is limited to \$500 million, with over 93% of that being added to the post-secondary education system earmarked for building repairs and upgrades. That leaves \$34 million available for everything else across the entire sector. This amount will not cover inflation and will force our universities and colleges to become further reliant on tuition. New buildings are of little value without the front-line workers who make these institutions some of the world's best places to learn.

Bill 229 revealed only one new funding item for elementary and secondary education, to provide \$380 million directly to parents. Adding this to the previous \$376 million results in \$758 million diverted from the education sector with no accountability as to where the dollars will go. This represents two and a half times the amount of money the government projects to spend in the three-year mid-term outlook. Funding within the system leads to more equitable achievement outcomes for all students within the system. Direct funding to parents does no such thing. OSSTF/FEESO recommends that the government redirect this funding to the front lines of public education.

We're continually hearing that this government is pouring money into education, but the reality is that that's a sleight of hand. For example, adding the child care tax credit to the education budget is an attempt to give the impression that the education envelope is growing, when in fact not one extra dollar flows into schools on that account.

The government claims to have increased education spending. However, the government's claim included in these figures \$763 million from the federal government and \$496 million that school boards had in reserves, with most of those reserves already earmarked for local projects and commitments. This amounts to less than stagnant funding for public education. These tactics mesh perfectly with the information in a government document reported on by the Toronto Star, which revealed plans to cut over \$50 million a year for the next four years by forcing students into online learning.

The government states in the budget they will be investing \$13 billion over the next 10 years into building new schools or renewing current school buildings. There is a \$16.3-billion repair backlog for Ontario's public schools. This backlog has been growing despite the government allocating \$1.4 billion per year since 2016, in this funding model that has been failing for years. OSSTF/FEESO recommends this government take this opportunity to provide good-paying jobs to our construction sector and public school board maintenance workers, and fund the repairs that are desperately needed in our schools.

Citizens rely on governments to provide strong social services. Why does this budget contain so many tax cuts that will make the provision of services more difficult?

Cutting of wine and beer taxes, for example, will remove \$40 million from the government's coffers over the next two years. Why freeze a tax increase on a luxury item that leads to higher health care costs? Instead, let's look to real savings from eliminating services that do not provide value for money, like the failed Education Quality and Accountability Office. There's no excuse for spending \$34 million a year on a census-type test that tells us little more than a school's socio-economic positioning.

Public education is the great democratizer, and societies are judged based on the importance that they place on it. We urge this government to change direction. A properly funded public education system from kindergarten to post-secondary provides for a well-educated workforce—

**The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu):** Two minutes.

**Mr. Harvey Bischof:** —and attracts employers. As Premier Bill Davis used to say, when you get education right, everything else follows.

The Financial Accountability Office has confirmed that over \$9 billion of funding from the federal government has yet to be allocated. There is no real reason to plan an austerity budget for education.

While there are some positives contained in this budget, such as doubling the funding for the Black Youth Action Plan and freezing tuition rates for universities and colleges, the vast majority of the budget is cuts to taxes, which reduce the government's ability to provide services for all Ontarians. It is abundantly clear that this government still views education as an expense, rather than an investment, to the detriment of our students and our economy in the long term.

**The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu):** Thank you so much. We'll start with the questions now, and we'll start the first set of questions with the opposition. MPP Shaw?

**Ms. Sandy Shaw:** Thank you very much to all of you for your presentations today. I'm going to start by directing my questions to the Canadian Credit Union Association. Rob, it's nice to see you. It's been a while since we had a face-to-face conversation, and I would like to start by saying that, as many of you know, I've been a lifelong member of a credit union, a huge supporter in the value proposition of what credit unions offer communities. I served for a number of years as the chair of the board for FirstOntario Credit Union, so I'm all in when it comes to credit unions.

These changes were a long time in coming. When I was on the board of FirstOntario, we talked about modernizing the legislation, creating a level playing field or a fair playing field, so I support the fact that we're getting these changes in place.

But what I want to ask you very specifically is that in all of these hearings we've been hearing about small businesses and small businesses in the province of Ontario closing up every day. They're struggling to keep their doors open. We heard from the Ontario Chamber of Commerce, who said that small businesses—in the eight or nine months that we've had the pandemic, they've done everything they can. Debt: They have debt on top of debt. They availed themselves of whatever money was available

for them. They've used their lines of credit. They perhaps have used their credit cards to make payroll, for example.

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I know that credit unions have long been an important, important source of financing, liquidity and credit for small businesses—both urban and rural; I think that needs to be noted. Perhaps, Nick, or either one of you who chooses to answer: Can you talk about the state you're seeing of your members that are small businesses or perhaps people who work in small businesses—which are many in the province—if there are supports that you think are missing and/or if you, the credit union, are creating any kind of innovative programs to provide liquidity, access to credit, that these small businesses are not getting from this government? We know credit unions are innovative and have done this in the past. Any of your expertise and your learning would be helpful to us here on this committee.

**Mr. Nick Best:** Ms. Shaw, I'll make a quick comment and pass it off to Rob.

As you may be aware, the majority of the business support programs do come from the federal government, and they started out only being offered by the Big Five banks. It was a coalition of provincial governments that put a lot of pressure on Minister Morneau at the time to expand CEBA to be offered by credit unions, which expanded the window a fair bit. At the same time, we have been at the table to get CEBA 1.0, 2.0, 3.0, 4.0 and 5.0 to be a little bit wider.

I think Rob has a better answer in terms of what credit unions are doing on the ground, though, but at its core, we're getting good partners from the Ministry of Finance to knock on the doors at the federal level, while we've had partners in other provinces to get ahead on the business support programs.

Rob?

**Mr. Rob Wellstood:** Thanks, Nick. It's nice to see you, MPP Shaw. I can speak about what Kawartha Credit Union has done. I think it is a decent surrogate for the rest of the credit unions in Ontario.

Very early in the pandemic, back in March and April, we processed a lot of payment deferrals, specifically for our small business members. We processed payment deferrals for about 65 members. That accounted for about 25% of our commercial lending portfolio, which has a significant component in the accommodations sector, and as I'm sure you're aware, that sector has been hard hit.

I'm happy to say—and it's been great. I think going along with the payment deferrals is far more active in trying to work with our members. It's actually been quite heartwarming to see those business owners that innovated themselves in terms of replacing lost revenue. There have been some actual success stories that came out of that.

**The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu):** Two minutes.

**Ms. Sandy Shaw:** Thank you, Rob. But you must be seeing businesses struggling and closing. We're seeing it in my riding; we see it in ridings across the province.

**Mr. Rob Wellstood:** Yes. I would say, Sandy, we've actually been quite fortunate within our membership, and I think what we're doing to help them is to just be patient.

The payment deferrals are largely unwound, but we continue to work with our members to help them through. We actually specifically call that out in our 2021 business plan, to do all that we can to work with our members to help them survive.

**Ms. Sandy Shaw:** Thank you. So again, what you're saying and why I'm such a big supporter of credit unions is because they do have that kind of patient capital. They are able to respond and be flexible and nimble when things like these come up. I want to thank you for that.

I'll pivot very quickly. I just want to let you know that despite this bill having this great support for credit unions, we are not supportive of this bill, this budget because it does not do enough for—there's no money in there for long-term care, the additional four hours of hands-on care; there's no money in this budget for a cap on class sizes of 15 kids; and now we see a schedule 6 that is really going to gut the authority of conservation authorities across the province and contribute to the kind of watering down of environmental protections that we have seen across the province under this government.

I just wanted to let you know, while we will not be supporting this budget for those reasons, we are supportive of the notion that credit unions are recognized as playing an important role in our financial landscape in the province.

In the short time that I have left, perhaps—

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

**Ms. Sandy Shaw:** —Mr. Bischof, could you very quickly talk about what it would have meant to your teachers to have a capped size of 15 in the classrooms?

**Mr. Harvey Bischof:** Thanks for the question, Sandy. First and foremost, it would have meant that we could have followed the same rules in the publicly funded education system that are in place in every other public space within the province, which is to say there would have been room for physical distancing. Currently, we have classes of 30 and 35 students where there simply isn't room to distance, and the rules that apply everywhere else in the province don't apply there.

Beyond that, educators of all sorts—teachers and education workers—have risen up to take on the challenge of this pandemic, but it's exhausting them. It's overwhelming. We have seen school boards with insufficient funding going to this hybrid model of learning where you expect an educator to teach both the students face to face in front of them and the students at home online, two entirely different modes of education. It's like trying to do two completely different jobs at once—

**The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu):** Sorry to cut you off. The time has come up for the opposition. We'll move to the independent members now.

MPP Hunter?

**Ms. Mitzie Hunter:** Thank you, Chair, and thank you so much to all the presenters. All have made very strong cases.

I'm going to use this round to talk to the conservation authority, the TRCA. You mentioned the Scarborough Bluffs—it's a high-risk area for sure—and your role as a regulator. It's not just a one-time decision, it's an ongoing

protection and a fight, really, with the lake and the erosion that is happening. I've toured it with TRCA, actually, from the water and I've seen the spectacular work that you do. The same for Highland Creek: There are areas in my riding where Highland Creek only works because you worked to shore up the banks of the river, really fighting against the rapid way in which that waterway moves, given that there's so much runoff that goes into it. I've also seen salmon going to spawn based on the work that you've been doing. So I want to recognize that.

I read again, in preparation for this meeting, schedule 6, and in detail. One of the things that strikes me is, as you have outlined, the three areas of concern: governance, planning and permitting, and enforcement. But what strikes me is the governance, because it seems to me that this bill actually takes away your fiduciary responsibility as a board to oversee, for the sole purpose of why people convene in a board, which is for the entity itself. It really in legislation mandates municipalities to represent their own local interests at the board. I just see that as a conflict and not necessarily keeping the best interest, from a governance standpoint, of the conservation authority in mind.

Can you just expand a little bit about your concerns on the governance changes that are being proposed in this schedule 6?

**Ms. Jennifer Innis:** Thank you, MPP Hunter. With regard to the fiduciary responsibility and the role of the board, the reality is that watersheds do not know geographical boundaries. They don't understand municipal boundaries. The purpose of the board is to protect the watershed and the people and property that live within those watersheds as well.

Really, we need to be looking out for the best interests of the watershed and fulfilling our mandate to do so as directed by this government. So asking us to look at it from a solely municipal perspective when we're sitting around that table sort of contravenes the intent of why we are there. Just to reiterate: Watersheds do not know political boundaries, they don't know geographical boundaries, and we are there to protect them.

In regard to the other governance concerns that the TRCA has, in particular, the TRCA is a little bit different than our fellow conservation authorities, given our size and complexity. As an example, we cannot have—14 of our 28 members are city of Toronto members. That would give us a composition—

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

**Ms. Jennifer Innis:** —a majority of council sitting on our committee, which is in conflict with the Municipal Act and also a concern of ours.

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Also, our board members have some concerns with regard to the term limits of the chair and the vice-chair. Given the range of responsibilities that the TRCA has and the complexity of those issues, rotating out the chair every two years, or the vice-chair, is basically saying that that person's sole responsibility is just presiding over meetings, and we know that with the over 110 services that we provide, that is not the reality.

**Ms. Mitzie Hunter:** I also want to touch on, because I am very familiar with some of the flood protection works, the berm down at the mouth of the Don that was put in because of Hurricane Hazel—it's not just protecting the natural environment, it's actually protecting people and property as well. The fact that your permitting abilities will be restricted—

**The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu):** Thank you. Sorry to cut you off. The time has come up. We'll move to the government side now. MPP Roberts?

**Mr. Jeremy Roberts:** My questions are going to go to the credit union association. Nick, Rob, thank you so much for presenting today. Obviously, making sure that our credit unions get the support and modernization that they deserve has been a key priority for our government and certainly something we heard from a lot of your membership on when we did our pre-budget consultations last year.

I wanted to touch on a few things. The first thing I wanted to ask you about is the importance of the changes that are going to allow credit unions to better sell and engage in the insurance market. Obviously, this is part of our modernization of the act. I think—I was looking—the act wasn't updated since 1994, so it's great to see that action taken. Perhaps, Nick, if you could touch a little bit on that move to allow credit unions to be in the insurance game, both in branch and online, and how important that's going to be to your membership.

**Mr. Nick Best:** Thank you, Mr. Roberts. Insurance is absolutely huge for us, because it has not made sense to separate insurance from somebody's general financial well-being. It is part of the same service that comes across as part of their livelihood. This power and ability to sell and have insurance in-branch exists in Quebec and other parts of the country, and it's time that we aligned. But more importantly, it's that this already exists in Ontario, but it's done through so many logjams and hoops that it becomes impractical.

FirstOntario Credit Union in Hamilton has a subsidiary called FirstOntario Insurance, which needs to have an entirely different brand, business model and location to sell insurance to their membership, and they're offering that as a value. What this does is it allows us to put this on and consolidate our resources so we can offer the service more efficiently and more cheaply. So this is just—

*Interruption.*

**Mr. Nick Best:** I'm sorry for the fire alarms going on outside, the fire trucks.

This is what we've been asking for: being able to offer more services and provide a comprehensive suite of financial services to our members. At the same time, there's so much more than just insurance that comes into this in that we need to be able to do more than just issue loans. Providing financial services is far more than that nowadays, and this is what this act does: It provides a principles-based framework to allow us to do what we really need.

Rob, do you want to add a little bit?

**Mr. Rob Wellstood:** Sure. Thank you, Nick. I think our approach generally is to be very focused on our

members. My answer, though, will focus on the health of the credit union, which is fundamental to being able to continue to serve our members.

Diversifying our revenue sources is really, I think, a matter of life and death in the longer term for credit unions. We're restricted, as we have been, to basically being savings and loans. Eventually, that's going to strangle us. So I see the ability to retail insurance as a way to generate non-interest revenue that is separate from that margin compression that Nick spoke about earlier.

**Mr. Jeremy Roberts:** Appreciate that. Obviously, credit unions are such an integral piece in supporting a lot of our small businesses. Finance committee heard over the summer from dozens and dozens and dozens of small businesses right across the province. Perhaps each of you, or one or the other, could expand a little bit on the important role that credit unions have played in supporting some of our entrepreneurs and small businesses over the past couple of months during the COVID pandemic?

**Mr. Nick Best:** Rob, can I give a high-level answer, quickly? We're at about \$70 billion in assets right now in the province, so just purely in Ontario, and of that, almost 35% of that is small business lending. That is a much larger share than any of the Big Five banks or any large financial institution in Ontario. This is the expertise that we bring in to the table of knowing our market and supporting small business owners.

There were credit unions at the start of the pandemic that deferred nearly 40% of the loans to their small business clients. So almost two out of five businesses had their entire loans deferred in small business—and very few institutions can do that—because that is our mandate.

Rob?

**Mr. Rob Wellstood:** Thank you. I'll pick up on part of the answer that I gave to MPP Shaw's earlier question about small businesses closing. We have continued to lend into small businesses through the pandemic. I'll confess it's been curtailed somewhat just by the nature of the current environment. But I think the willingness to do that, the will to help small businesses continue to do well and, frankly, survive through this, has been part of how we have been able to help our small business members continue and survive through this.

**The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu):** Two minutes.

**Mr. Rob Wellstood:** As I mentioned in my earlier comment, it's been really heartwarming to see some of the innovative actions. I think what we bring is just a support that enables that and gives them the opportunity to do that.

**Mr. Jeremy Roberts:** For sure. I think both of your answers reinforce just how critically important it is to work with you guys to modernize this act, because you play such a critical role.

I just want to toss it over, Chair. I know my colleague, MPP Smith, wanted to join in as well. Of course, he's from the Peterborough area, where Rob is based. So, Chair, if MPP Smith is on the line, I'm sure he'd love to jump in briefly.

**The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu):** MPP Smith, you have about one minute.

**Mr. Dave Smith:** Rob, I'm going to throw it directly to you on this one. A lot of times I've heard from people that credit unions are nothing more than banks and you're only interested in the bottom line, and all you want to do is make lots of money. But you have been a fantastic corporate citizen in our community. We're coming up on 20 years now that you have been one of the title sponsors for the dragon boat races for cancer research. You've got 30 seconds or so to sing your praises of how great you have been giving back to the community. Please, go ahead.

**Mr. Rob Wellstood:** Thank you, Dave. I'm not very good at bragging, but it is a core part of our mandate. Our purpose, our mission statement is to support the financial success and well-being of our members and our communities, and we put our money where our mouth is. The dragon boat festival that you referenced is part of that, but we do similar things across our entire territory that we serve.

**Mr. Dave Smith:** Thank you very much for that. You're too modest. You have a few more seconds, and you could have sung more of your praises of what you do. I was president of the—

**The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu):** Thank you, MPP Smith, I will come back to you in the second round. We'll move to the independent members now for their second round. Any questions from the independent members? MPP Hunter.

**Ms. Mitzie Hunter:** Most definitely. I must move to education. I wanted to ask Mr. Bischof about—because you mentioned access to post-secondary education. It's unfortunate; I was looking in this budget for the restoration of the cuts that were made to OSAP. It was almost \$1 billion, actually, that was taken out of student financial aid. That cut is directly transferred in the form of tuition, really, on to students and families. How do you believe that that impacts your students in high school as they're thinking about their prospects or their opportunities, knowing that it's much more difficult to access financial aid in this province?

**Mr. Harvey Bischof:** Yes, it's a massive barrier for students, especially if those students come from lower on the socio-economic spectrum, if they come from a marginalized community. You can take a look at the average figures that tell you that university tuition is an investment and that you're likely to reap the benefits in terms of future income later in your life, but that's still a massive risk for any individual. So for the individual for whom it requires undertaking enormous debt in order to make it through the post-secondary system, that operates as just a massive barrier. It will dissuade many students from wanting to pursue that, and others will find themselves largely crippled by the student debts that they take on.

**1340**

Debt loads in Ontario are astonishing for students graduating, and all of those things, then—what they do, on top of all of that, is they serve to further the inequities that we already find in our society. Rather than providing supports in order to assist students from marginalized backgrounds to make it forward and to occupying a successful

place civically and economically within the province, we throw these hurdles in front of them, and that is ultimately counterproductive for individuals and for the social, civic and economic life of the province.

**Ms. Mitzie Hunter:** I like that you raise those students who are from marginalized communities. We see that the effects of the pandemic, in fact, have hit those communities very hard. Because there's community spread of the virus, it's now into the schools. Many of those parents have actually opted to send their kids through a virtual model, because they just can't trust the safety of even the transit systems to get them to and from school. How has that affected learning, do you believe, for students?

**Mr. Harvey Bischof:** Yes. So we saw a massive, last-minute migration to online learning from students. Tens of thousands, particularly in urban areas, suddenly switched to online learning, a clear sign that parents didn't have confidence in the safety of the system because the things that even the health experts had advised the government on weren't being followed: smaller classes, physical distancing, smaller cohorts, ventilation repairs, and so forth.

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

**Mr. Harvey Bischof:** One thought, when we saw that migration to online, that in-class classrooms would then be smaller, intuitively; all those kids are learning at home. Instead, the result is because you need those educators to teach the online students, they collapsed classes. So we now have empty classrooms sitting beside jam-packed, full classrooms with, as I mentioned before, 30 or 35 students. That's astonishing, and that's a choice.

The pandemic is not a choice. We are all struggling with that, and it's difficult for everybody in the province. But choosing to collapse classes rather than staffing up in order to ensure that you could have two classes of 15, side by side, rather than one of 30—that's a decision that's to the detriment of those students and to the health and safety of the province.

**Ms. Mitzie Hunter:** I have to say, Mr. Bischof, I agree with you. This province has not chosen to put students and education workers ahead. They see education as an expense, not an investment.

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

We'll go to the government side now for their second round. I'm not sure if MPP Smith wants to finish up his questions? No?

Okay. We'll go to MPP Kanapathi then.

**Mr. Logan Kanapathi:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Can you hear me?

**The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu):** Yes, we can.

**Mr. Logan Kanapathi:** Okay. Thank you to all the presenters. My question is going to the TRCA. Thank you to Jennifer and John for the work they do. I understand that the TRCA is playing a very important role in our community and in society, especially when there's a [inaudible]. I can't remember [inaudible] but I understand the TRCA is playing a vital role in all the TR system. I'm a Markham MPP.

My first question is to either Jennifer or John, if you could answer it. You have raised some concern about the legislation and the changes to governance. Can you please expand on your view of the amendment allowing the minister to stop programming, and why is this problematic?

**Ms. Jennifer Innis:** John, did you want to answer?

**Mr. Logan Kanapathi:** Either one of them.

**Ms. Jennifer Innis:** I'll speak, then. In regard to the programming, the TRCA already has really great MOUs with our partner municipalities. Those partner municipalities and particularly the one that I represent, the region of Peel, have been very strong advocates in ensuring that we continue those programs and services. So whether or not they are provincially mandated, our partner municipalities—especially with the impacts of COVID and the importance of providing green spaces and connecting people to nature—continue to advocate and are very supportive through those memorandums of understanding to continue those programs and services, whether they're core-mandated or not.

**Mr. John MacKenzie:** Yes, and thank you for the question. It's important for us to have a variety of different [inaudible] to make sure that some of our sites are financially viable, that we can allow community organizations to use our sites in some cases and to make them accessible, and have recreation opportunities so we can make our sites viable. That's why it's important to have flexible arrangements in place.

**Mr. Logan Kanapathi:** Okay. Thank you for that answer, Jennifer and John. How do you believe the governance change will impact the day-to-day operations of the TRCA? Could you elaborate on that? Are there many ways that different level of governments and different governments at different times—please elaborate.

**Mr. John MacKenzie:** Thank you for the question. I think the chair spoke to it a little bit earlier, but we have citizen members who are part of our board of directors, and a lot of them are professionals. A lot of them are PhDs and academics with an environmental focus. What's being proposed would affect—it would only be municipal councillors, and that is challenging, particularly in the city of Toronto, where you would have 14 municipal councillors, which makes up a majority of the city of Toronto council.

We have to recognize that with the diversity of the greater Toronto area and the size and the population, we may have to have some different board members. I think that's very important for the minister to recognize and to move forward with an amendment like the one we've suggested related to governance, that would allow for flexibility in that regard based on the context of that municipality, based on the context of our jurisdiction, which requires citizens potentially to be involved, or agency representatives.

**Mr. Logan Kanapathi:** Thank you.

How much time do we have, Mr. Chair?

**The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu):** Three minutes.

**Mr. Logan Kanapathi:** Thank you for that answer, John and Jennifer. You also mentioned in your presentation how the watersheds are not bound to a particular municipal boundary. I know that there's great work on that, in watershed and conservation land and protecting the green space and open space in our cities. Could you elaborate on that? What are the challenges you are facing in terms of protecting the watershed and dealing with the various different levels of government and all the tiers of government in Ontario?

**Ms. Jennifer Innis:** Thank you. It's a great question. I'll lead this into our concerns with regards to enforcement. Currently, as it stands, the proposed changes wouldn't permit a conservation authority to provide a stop-work order on illegal activity and actions in the watersheds. What's worse, we can't even go in and repair it.

Coming from a municipal background, you would understand that municipally regulated lands have the ability to do stop-work orders in order to comply. Should the land order not do that, they can rehabilitate the lands and put it back on their taxes. We don't have that ability as a conservation authority, so that leaves the protection of our watersheds open. We can't even do a stop-work order, but once the damage has been done, we can't actually go in and repair it, which is necessary. That is a big concern for us as it relates to the enforcement piece.

**Mr. Logan Kanapathi:** Thank you.

Thank you, Mr. Chair. That's all I have.

**The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu):** Thank you. Any further questions? Seeing no further questions, we'll move to the opposition members for their second round of questions. MPP Arthur.

**Mr. Ian Arthur:** Good afternoon. Thank you for coming in, or virtually calling in. Harvey, I'm going to start with you. It must be kind of hard to watch things play out exactly how you said they were going to. The top Ontario—

*Failure of sound system.*

**The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu):** Can you unmute, MPP Arthur, and see—MPP Arthur, can you unmute?

*Interjection.*

**The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu):** There is a lot of disturbance actually. We can't hear you.

**Mr. Ian Arthur:** Is that any better, if I move the mike back?

**The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu):** Yes, this is better.

**Mr. Ian Arthur:** Okay. Crappy microphone. Sorry, folks. That bit into a bit of the time.

Harvey, a question to you—to see things play out exactly like you warned it was actually going to play out: There was in-classroom transmission, the ventilation systems in schools are not functioning well enough to prevent that sort of transmission, and we have a 4.3% positivity rate when we actually tested all students in the Thorncliffe school that just confirmed 19 new cases today that were asymptomatic.

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What could we still do to change? You have been asking for a series of things for a long time. None of them

came to fruition. We are at budget consultations right now. This is the last opportunity we are going to have to shift to a better direction going forward. What does this government need to change tomorrow to protect students, their families and education workers across Ontario?

**Mr. Harvey Bischof:** Thanks for that question. There is indeed a series of things. I've mentioned a couple, but I'll just run through them again quickly:

- reducing class size to a maximum of 15 so that we have room for physical distancing and we also have the time for the kind of attention that students need;

- reducing the cohort, which currently is at 100 students and includes the educators, who may be itinerant, may move from school to school. There's no real cohort there. There's no boundary around that group of 100 students.

There are no standards for ventilation, no objective yardstick against which to measure the quality of ventilation in our schools. Many of our schools, as you will know, are old and borderline decrepit. It's astonishing to me that we have classrooms with painted-shut windows or no windows whatsoever. The ventilation is poor. There is no standard against which to measure it and insufficient money by which to raise the quality of the ventilation.

The Ontario Public Services Health and Safety Association issued transportation standards. Those aren't being used for school busing, so you can have a school bus with as many as 72 young students or 48 high school students. That means, again, no physical distancing or requirement for sanitation—all of those things.

There's a series of things that could be done that would make our classrooms safer. If they were safer, there would be more students in them. You would have less of a problem with this hybrid model of learning, which, as I've mentioned, is both exhausting and bad pedagogy. As we see students falling behind the curriculum—because for all of the efforts being put in, and they are heroic and extraordinary, there's only so much you can make up for when the system is under-resourced.

**Mr. Ian Arthur:** You watch question period and you watch the press conferences that happen. In your opinion, do you feel the Minister of Education has misrepresented what is happening on the ground?

**Mr. Harvey Bischof:** I've heard claims about a system that isn't the system that my members are telling me they're working in or that students are learning in. Like I say, the levels of stress and exhaustion tell me the system is teetering right now, and painting a happy face on that does nobody a service.

People are stepping up. People are putting in enormous efforts to make things as good as they possibly can be for their students. Front-line workers all across the province have done that, and they've certainly done it in education. But to pretend that everything is going swimmingly and this is somehow some great leap forward just flies in the face of the facts that we see on behalf of students and educators.

**Mr. Ian Arthur:** Thank you very much. Folks are stepping up; I see it all around me in my community. Perhaps the Minister of Education could step up.

I'm going to switch my questioning over to the conservation authorities. I'm the environment critic in the Legislature, so I've been following this very, very closely. The Auditor General's report on the environment stated that we're about to miss every single target that we have when it comes to the environment. She pinpointed the key role that conservation authorities play. You talked a lot about governance, but would you just tell the rest of the members of this panel where that governance structure comes from, why conservation authorities were given this power, what the damaging things were that were happening that allowed conservation authorities to do what they now do that led to that mandate? Then a follow-up question to that: Who doesn't like how it's working right now? Why is it that your entities were singled out in this budget and everything is being changed for you—how you operate, what your mandate is?

**The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu):** Two minutes.

**Mr. Ian Arthur:** Who is it who has a vested interest in making sure that you have your powers limited?

**Mr. John MacKenzie:** Thank you for the question. I'll speak to the earlier context for why we were created in the first place. It was because of widespread deforestation in the 1930s and 1940s. Conservation authorities were a response to deforestation, issues with erosion, the damage that was being caused by flooding and the loss of soil. Conservation authorities were put in place at that time following a conference in London to put us in a role of protecting those areas and being stewards of the land. In addition, there was of course a catastrophic flood—Hurricane Hazel in 1954—that killed over 100 people, which then re-emphasized the importance of conservation authorities in this area, and that has continued on. That's part of the rationale why we're here.

As you noted, it's been something that the Premier's adviser on flooding, the Auditor General and others have said, that there's a very important role that we play. We're very concerned with amendments that would take us out of the land-use planning process, where we flagged these upfront. We flagged that and proposed amendments either that part of schedule 6 be removed or significantly amended to make sure that we're there and involved in the upfront planning to protect our communities. That's one of our strong, strong requests.

In addition, we talked about the need to have us play a role in enforcing, to maintain and ensure that we protect our communities from the negative impacts associated with filling and illegal construction and activities that are occurring on our watersheds that create risks for infrastructure in downstream areas within the watershed. That's why we're proposing those amendments.

With respect to the other permitting ones that we've flagged in our submission to you, we're concerned about making sure that we're present and involved upfront in the process. We do over 1,000 permits a year at TRCA without any issue. We protect the environment—

**The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu):** Thank you. I apologize to cut you off. That concludes our time. Thank you to all three presenters for appearing before the committee and for your presentations.

CONSERVATION ONTARIO  
HON. STEVEN MAHONEY  
ONTARIO LONG TERM CARE  
ASSOCIATION

**The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu):** Moving along to our next group of presenters, first I would like to call upon Conservation Ontario. If you can please state your name for the record, and you will have seven minutes for your presentation.

Unmute, please. Please go ahead.

**Ms. Kim Gavine:** Good afternoon. Thank you very much for the opportunity to speak. I am Kim Gavine, general manager of Conservation Ontario, and with me is Hassaan Basit, CEO for Conservation Halton, and Bonnie Fox, manager of policy and planning at Conservation Ontario.

To begin with, I'd like to inform you that we are calling for the withdrawal of schedule 6 of Bill 229, and that we don't do this lightly. In doing so, we stand with our conservation authority members, other organizations and Ontarians, as well as alongside the Association of Municipalities of Ontario, Ontario's Big City Mayors and many individual municipalities that have passed resolutions.

Conservation Ontario is a non-profit association which represents Ontario's 36 conservation authorities. We've made several presentations to various standing committees over the years, and this recommendation to withdraw schedule 6 is unprecedented in our relationship with Ontario's Legislature. We feel that there is really no alternative than to respectfully request that schedule 6 be withdrawn so that fulsome consultation can occur.

Careful consideration needs to be given to the operationalization of the proposed amendments in order to ensure there are no unintended consequences. Due to time constraints, my comments today will not be able to address all concerns; I will focus only on the proposed amendments that are of the most significant concern.

Conservation authorities share the government's commitment to improve consistency and transparency, reduce red tape and create conditions for growth while protecting public health and safety and the environment. We do not believe that schedule 6 achieves these outcomes. Generally, we feel that the amendments will actually weaken Ontario's use of the watershed approach. They will also create additional delays and add red tape to the permitting and municipal plan review processes and increase risk to the public and the environment.

One of our key concerns is that the proposed amendments weaken the conservation authority watershed model, which was praised by Ontario's Special Advisor on Flooding in 2019. Conservation authorities use the watershed-based approach to identify and manage the impacts that our activities have on our natural resources. They do this in order to protect people and property from flooding and other natural hazards, safeguard drinking water and to prevent the loss of important local natural resources.

Conservation authority participation in the planning appeals process ensures that watershed science and data is being applied to planning and land-use decisions. This is valued by our municipal partners. It allows us to assess the impacts of activities occurring in upstream municipalities in order to see whether or not they will create dangerous or costly impacts to downstream municipalities. We run the risk of relying on a piecemeal approach if we don't make these connections on a watershed basis. This could snowball over time, creating costly environmental problems, some of which may be very difficult or even impossible to fix.

We also have concerns about some of the governance amendments, including the proposed amendment of the duty of members, which puts individual municipal interests above the interests of the conservation authority and the watershed. This amendment puts the members in conflict with their fiduciary duty to represent the best interests of the organization they are overseeing.

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We are aware of criticism directed to conservation authorities regarding too much red tape and a lack of timely approvals and transparency in our process. Our members have taken these comments very seriously. They have worked together with us, and the development and municipal sectors, to design client service and streamlining products and tools in support of the housing supply action plan. One of the outcomes of which we are particularly proud is that, as of to date, 2020, even with the challenges of COVID, more than 90% of CA permits in high-growth CAs were issued within provincial guidelines.

The new permit review and appeals processes being proposed in schedule 6 will actually slow down the permitting process. The proposed combination of direct appeals to the minister and appeals to the Local Planning Appeal Tribunal could add almost 200 days to the application process.

Relatively few permits are appealed to the Mining and Lands Tribunal because the current and affordable system is based on the natural hazard technical merits of the applicant's request. In 2018, less than 3% of conservation authority permit decisions were appealed to the Mining and Lands Tribunal.

As proposed in schedule 6, applicants will now be able to appeal a decision of the conservation authority to the Local Planning Appeal Tribunal instead of the Mining and Lands Tribunal. According to last year's annual report of Tribunals Ontario, the LPAT currently meets its timeline objectives 72% of the time, while the Mining and Lands Tribunal meets theirs 97% of the time. As well, the LPAT had a significant backlog of over 1,000 cases, while the Mining and Lands Tribunal had none.

The proposed amendment to the Planning Act is a significant concern. Conservation authorities have been regulating development for over 60 years and have learned that early involvement in the planning process is necessary to avoid future disappointment. If a municipality and developer were unknowingly designing a project to go in

an area that would create or exacerbate hazardous conditions such as flooding, conservation authorities would not be able to issue a permit when it finally got to this stage. Unfortunately, this would be after a lot of time and money has been spent already. The likely outcome is that more permits will be appealed, further exacerbating the backlog at the LPAT.

Additionally, this proposed amendment would also remove the conservation authorities' right to appeal Planning Act decisions as a landowner. Given that conservation authorities are the second-largest landowner in the province, this proposal will significantly limit their ability to conserve and manage their own lands. New delays created through this revised planning and regulatory system will mean more costs for developers, CAs, taxpayers and the province in order to manage what we believe will be an excessive appeal system.

Costs will also rise with fewer enforcement tools. For example, schedule 6 proposes to remove the use of stop-work orders, which would enable conservation authority officers to more quickly stop unpermitted work already in progress. Without this tool, there will continue to be additional costs for court injunctions and prosecutions, as well as increased costs for remediation and restoration work to repair—

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

**Ms. Kim Gavine:** —environmental damages.

In short, these changes are not small changes, as I have described. We value the long-standing partnerships among the conservation authorities, the province and the municipalities. Our working relationships are central to ensuring that we protect people from flooding and natural hazards, protect drinking water, and deliver watershed-based programs that will conserve Ontario's natural resources. So I'd like to repeat myself: We don't make the request to withdraw schedule 6 of Bill 229 lightly.

We understand that the province has a desire to improve conservation authorities. We are open to change and we need the province to work with conservation authorities and municipalities on the refinement of these amendments. We need to ensure that they are actually effective in reducing red tape and costs for all concerned, and that they help to stimulate growth without jeopardizing our fundamental ability to protect people and the environment. Thank you very much.

**The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu):** Thank you.

We'll go to our next presenter now, the Honourable Steven William Mahoney. If you can please state your name for the record, and you will have seven minutes for your presentation as well.

**Hon. Steven Mahoney:** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. My name is Steven Mahoney. Good afternoon to you, sir, and the members of the committee. I'm a former MPP from 1987 to 1995. In fact, I was Chair of this very committee at one point.

I'm here as an Ontarian, a senior and a universal life insurance policyholder to discuss my serious concerns around schedule 22 amendments to the Insurance Act, the addition of section 201.2 to the Insurance Act as described in sections 4 and 5 of schedule 22 to Bill 229.

As a former MPP, I still keenly follow the procedures of the Legislature and actively read the government's communication documents, including the 2020 budget. While reading, I stumbled across this amendment to the Insurance Act. It certainly caught my attention. I called my financial adviser and asked if he had any insights to shed on this particular amendment. He claimed that he had not heard of any amendments and was not aware of government consultation on this potential amendment to the Insurance Act.

After further investigation, I realized that these amendments, if passed, would negatively affect the life insurance policy that I personally hold. My policy gives me the right to invest additional funds into my insurance contract. The amendments in the budget actually take these rights away. But the point is, it doesn't just affect me; it affects thousands of Ontario policyholders, many of whom are seniors.

In the budget papers, the government claims that this amendment is needed to prohibit potential predatory practices from occurring. They claim that this practice leaves seniors vulnerable. The claim has not been backed up with any evidence. I would suggest, if it were true, why does the lobbyist registry suggest that the large insurance companies are the ones making this request to the government?

Many of the holders of such policies are seniors simply exercising their rights within the contract they signed with their insurer to make additional investments within the policy agreement. The fact is, these insurance amendments are being slipped through without any knowledge to seniors or other Ontarians or to key members of the insurance industry, such as selling agents and, in my opinion, are being made solely to the benefit of large insurance companies.

Ontarians purchased these policies because it gave them two distinct features: an ability to get insurance protection, combined with an investment vehicle. These contracts were not negotiated by the client; they were offered by the insurer as a take-it-or-leave-it contract. The government is choosing to intervene in a private arrangement between insurance companies and their policyholders to help insurers amend the terms of contracts that they may not like anymore.

How can a government that claims that it is for the people, for the little guy, think that this is a good idea? This proposal is certainly off-brand for this government. It boils down to opportunity loss for consumers. Is the government going to be compensating me and the thousands of other Ontarians on the investment returns that they are going to lose? Will the government use its legislative power to fix the litany of other contracts that big business no longer deem desirable? This is not the government's role, with all due respect.

I keep thinking, how would I have explained this to my constituents back when I was an MPP, especially given the fact that there was no formal industry or public consultation? Also, it seems to me that the government was attempting to hide these amendments in the midst of a

large budget bill and with the extremely technical explanation of the schedule.

So, Mr. Chair, I'm asking this committee to strike sections 4 and 5 of schedule 22 out of the budget bill and bring it back to the Ministry of Finance for a full, proper consultation. Please just take it out and examine this properly. In any consultation, the government must bring balance to the matter and consider the rights of those Ontarians who currently hold these policies.

I hope to look forward to participating in such consultation, and I thank you very much for the opportunity it presents.

**The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu):** Thank you so much.

We'll move to our next presenter now, Ontario Long Term Care Association. If you can please state your name for the record, and you will have seven minutes for your presentation as well.

**Ms. Donna Duncan:** Good afternoon. I am Donna Duncan. I am the president and CEO of the Ontario Long Term Care Association. We represent 70% of Ontario's long-term-care homes across all ownership models. I am joined today by Ruth McFarlane, vice-chair of our association board and chair of our association's pandemic advisory council and our HR emergency task force. Ruth is the CEO of Durham Christian Homes, a non-profit long-term-care provider.

As we're all aware, the COVID-19 pandemic has had a disproportionate and tragic impact on our residents and staff in long-term care, in large part due to long-standing structural issues we identified in our pre-budget submission to this standing committee in January 2020.

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These issues included a human resource crisis; the failure of governments to allow for the redevelopment of older B- and C-class homes in the development of new system capacity; a provincial wait-list of more than 36,000 people, which has since grown to 38,500; sector oversight focused on paperwork and not on resident needs and quality care and outcomes; and an unstable and outdated funding model that was not designed to ensure appropriate staffing levels and professional competencies to provide care to an increasingly frail resident population with highly complex care and behaviour management needs.

We know that the intensity of outbreaks has been more than two times higher in these older B and C homes than in new and A homes, and has been three times higher in older homes that include three- and four-person rooms. We know that where we saw, and are seeing again, significant staff shortages in a long-term-care home there can be tragic losses of life.

We are extremely grateful to the government of Ontario for the commitment to provide emergency pandemic funding to our long-term-care homes to enhance health and safety measures for residents, staff and essential visitors. These investments are helping to support staff stabilization, enhanced infection prevention and control, the purchase of personal protective equipment, and capital

enhancements such as air conditioning and HVAC upgrades to support infection prevention and control.

We also welcome the announcement for the redevelopment of older B and C homes across Ontario. More than 31,000 B and C spaces across the province will have their licences expiring in 2025. With recent government announcements and progress made on redevelopments to date, there still remain approximately 24,000 B and C spaces to be redeveloped in the next four years.

At a time when demand for long-term care is increasing due to our aging population, we welcome legislative, regulatory and policy changes to the current approvals process, including at the municipal level, to ensure that we are able to meet the needs of our residents for today and tomorrow. We had hoped to see those amendments in this legislation. Our wait-list will only continue to grow, as Ontario's population of those 80 years of age and older is set to double in the next 15 years.

While we are grateful for announced investments and for the government of Ontario's wave 2 action plan initiatives, more is required. Specifically, our homes will pay significant unfunded costs that threaten the sustainability of our homes. We require occupancy protection to be extended for a minimum of six months into the new year; full funding of costs incurred by long-term-care homes for COVID-19 prevention and containment—the estimated funding gap to date is \$189 million for the period ending March 31, 2021; this will likely increase as wave 2 escalates—and financial offsets for the loss of preferred revenues, which contribute to home maintenance and debt coverage for our homes, including our non-profit homes. Further, long-term-care homes require additional funding and support for dedicated infection prevention and control capacity in each home.

We are grateful for the announced commitment to increase care for our residents to an average of four hours and look forward to working with government and all legislative representatives and community and health partners to ensure that the commitment is implemented successfully, especially given the critical staffing shortage in long-term care today. Much of the ability of the majority of homes to stabilize in wave 1 was due to the introduction of staffing flexibility and new roles. We do not want to destabilize already fragile staffing teams by creating requirements that they are unable to meet.

Ontario's long-term-care homes faced a number of cuts in 2020-21, including reductions to long-term-care pharmacy supports at a time when we needed enhanced pharmacy capacity in our homes. We ask that the planned further reductions be paused so that we can work together with government and pharmacy partners to ensure that we are able to meet the complex medication needs of our frail residents in long-term care.

Ontario long-term-care homes are facing an existential crisis—

**The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu):** Two minutes.

**Ms. Donna Duncan:** —with the loss of insurance coverage for infectious diseases. While recently passed legislation for liability coverage mitigates some risks, the

introduction of broad exclusions for long-term-care homes will result in the loss of financing for redevelopment, the loss of directors and officers' liability coverage for our non-profit volunteer boards and their officers, and increased risk in exposure for others.

In closing, we are grateful to all members of the House and this committee for your commitment to our long-term-care sector, our residents, staff and families. COVID-19 has highlighted the devastating impact to the historical structural issues facing our homes, but it is essential that we all work together to address these long-standing challenges as quickly as possible.

**The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu):** Thank you.

We'll start with the questions now. We'll start the first set of questions with the government. MPP Thanigasalam.

**Mr. Vijay Thanigasalam:** Good afternoon, everyone. Thank you to all the presenters for your presentations.

My first question is to the chief executive officer, Donna Duncan, from the Ontario Long Term Care Association. Thank you, Donna, for your presentation. My question is: The Ontario Long Term Care Association applauded budget 2020. Ms. Duncan, your statement said, "The government of Ontario is illustrating its leadership by committing to increase direct care to an average of four hours for long-term-care residents, and we look forward to working with them to create a workforce with thousands more skilled health care workers to serve our seniors." These are objectives our government shares, and I believe we must all work together.

You have spoken about the need for a resident-centred approach, one that is not an across-the-board approach. Could you expand upon what you mean by this, why a one-size-fits-all approach would not work for the sector?

**Ms. Donna Duncan:** Thank you very much for your question. I'll ask Ruth McFarlane to respond on our behalf.

**Ms. Ruth McFarlane:** We thank the government for their important commitment to increase resident care to an average of four hours in the next four years. This commitment will allow homes to provide individualized resident-centred care, but it will need to be implemented in a flexible and responsible way.

Our resident care model is holistic in nature, and we need to have the flexibility to be able to implement it in a responsible way. We look forward to harnessing innovation and to providing excellence and quality outcomes for our residents within the circle of care.

One challenge is that no one model works for all residents in every long-term-care home. One resident's needs—clinical, emotional and spiritual—will differ from any other resident's, and every home's resident population is unique and has different characteristics due to the distinct resident population mix.

In order to ensure the appropriate staffing levels and professional competencies to provide resident-centred care in our increasingly frail resident population—with highly complex needs and behaviour management needs—we need to be innovative and flexible in order to implement and increase [*inaudible*] successfully, especially given the staffing shortages.

Much of the ability of the homes to stabilize in wave 1 was due to the introduction of flexibility in more rules. It's important to maintain this flexibility going forward, not only to help with stabilization of our staffing, but also to provide the flexibility for us to meet the current and future needs of our residents and their families. Thank you.

**Mr. Vijay Thanigasalam:** Thank you, Ruth, for your answer.

My next question is for the Honourable Steven Mahoney. Thank you, Steven, for your presentation. I see that you have served in all three levels of government. You have a vast amount of experience, even as a chair for WSIB Ontario.

During your time as a federal MP in the 37th Canadian Parliament, when Canada was going through the SARS outbreak, what were some lessons that you learned from the government point of view?

**Hon. Steven Mahoney:** Well, it would be difficult for me to tell the government what to do. Frankly, I've been quite impressed with the Premier and the government's actions so far and how they've handled things in the current situation. It is substantially different than SARS in that it is much more widespread and affects literally everyone, including myself locked down in my home at the present time and you folks sitting in committee separately and on camera only. I would be really wrong, I think, to give advice on what to do—

**The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu):** Three minutes.

**Hon. Steven Mahoney:**—except to say that I think the steps being taken in handling things so far are the only steps that seem to make a lot of sense to me. I can only hope that we get through this in the way that we eventually got through SARS.

**Mr. Vijay Thanigasalam:** Thank you for that answer.  
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My next question is to Kim Gavine, general manager of Conservation Ontario. Kim, thank you for your presentation. Conservation Ontario has raised concerns that this legislation could impact their ability to protect the watershed. Can you please explain how this legislation, which is primarily about governance changes, will impact that? Thank you.

**Ms. Kim Gavine:** One of our main concerns is about the fiduciary responsibilities to the conservation authority. Conservation authorities were created on a watershed model. By putting that fiduciary responsibility back to the municipality, it could result in piecemeal decisions being made.

Let's take a water monitoring program, for instance. If a decision is made by a local municipality to say, "We don't want that," but it's critical that we look at things on a watershed basis, that's when you start to see some of the piecemealing take effect.

I'd like to pass it over to Hassaan Basit. He might be able to give you a CA example.

**Mr. Hassaan Basit:** Certainly. Thank you, Kim. Thank you for the question. We certainly agree with the government's focus on looking at strengthening governance, but the amendments proposed under schedule 6 cover more than just governance.

To your question, MPP, on how would some of these amendments potentially put lives at risk: There are several. One way in which it would do it that really springs to mind is having the ability for the minister to issue permits instead of conservation authorities. Conservation authorities issue permits—

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

**Mr. Hassaan Basit:**—based on the expertise that we have in-house. If you think about what that expertise is, those are water resource engineers and hydrogeologists. We follow the template laid out for us by the province, and that's how those permits are issued. They're done on a very scientific basis. We don't feel, given the nature of decision-making that goes into ensuring that somebody builds their home or their business in a safe place, that that can be replicated if the minister is taking over that decision-making.

**Mr. Vijay Thanigasalam:** Thank you, Hassaan, for your answer. This question is either for Kim or for Hassaan: Can you please elaborate on—

**The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu):** Thank you. Sorry to cut you off, MPP Vijay. I'll come back to you in the second round.

We have to move to the opposition side now. MPP Shaw.

**Ms. Sandy Shaw:** Thank you, Chair. I'm going to direct my questions now to the long-term-care homes. I suppose [*inaudible*] on that panel. That was a very great conversation and reflection [*inaudible*] in long-term care.

We want to say that we, along with some of the fellow panel members, were shocked that this government continues to sit on \$9.3 billion of unspent money, the vast majority of which came from the federal government, at a time when we are in a second wave. Everyone knew the second wave was coming. It apparently seems we did not learn the lessons from the first wave. In my riding of Hamilton West–Ancaster–Dundas, we have an outbreak at Chartwell Willowgrove. So far, 15 people have died. This is being replicated all across the province, so at the time when everyone seems to see the urgency of the situation, when everyone knew that this was coming, we're shocked by the government's failure to put money in the field now to address what's happening in long-term care.

I specifically would like you to reflect on the fact that the government's own commission—to the degree which we even know what they're talking about, because the Auditor General has said they're keeping some of that information not fully disclosed—said that they urgently needed funding to go to four hours of hands-on care. The iron ring that we promised has not happened—everybody knows that—so why is this government not putting this money in the field, and why do you think that this government doesn't seem to understand the urgency of this?

The evidence that they're underfunding the system is that in long-term care, this budget underspends their planned spending in March by \$100 million. They cut funding from long-term care. You talked about how your organization—they have a \$189-million deficit. The

Ontario Hospital Association has said that they have an \$850-million deficit just from the COVID experience. Do you have any understanding as to why the government does not seem to understand the urgency of getting money in the field now to save lives?

**Ms. Donna Duncan:** Well, certainly, you've made some very strong recommendations and observations. Our association together with our members have been advocating for urgency since wave 1 and launched a wave 2 action plan. We're working very closely with the government and our community, hospital and other partners now. Is this perfect today? No. We're certainly seeing that wave 2 is equally hitting our homes very, very hard. We're certainly working to mobilize the government and ensure that the response is as fast as possible. We are where we are today, and we need to focus on today and tomorrow and making sure that, as each home goes into outbreak, we do whatever it takes to stabilize our homes.

We do know that decades of underfunding in a system that has been largely outside the health care system has created structural issues for us. We are encouraged insofar as, if there's anything good coming out of this it's that people know who our residents are; they know what our structural challenges are, they know that we have a staffing crisis. We encourage each and every one of you on this committee and your colleagues to mobilize together to make sure that we're doing whatever it takes; we're getting those resources into our homes; we are not cutting but stabilizing staffing and mobilizing to do whatever it takes to shore up our homes. That's going to take all of us together, and it's going to take all of us together today.

**Ms. Sandy Shaw:** Yes, thank you for that and thank you for your advocacy that this government needs to be mobilizing and acting now. I want to just focus on—you mentioned the conditions of staffing and the struggles that you have with the shortage of staffing. If we didn't know before, we certainly know now the importance of the role of PSWs. Everyone now understands that PSWs were all working part-time jobs in multiple homes because they struggled to find full-time jobs with wages, so they were cobbling together jobs in multiple homes just in order to make a living, and that was a contribution to the spread that we saw in the first wave. We know that now. But we still, in my opinion, have not done what we need to do to ensure that the working conditions are such that not only are they keeping staff and residents safe during the second wave but we want to attract people to this industry.

On a panel of *The Agenda*, we heard that 68% of PSWs are making less than they were before because of some of the restrictions around COVID. A great quote I heard is, "The conditions of work become the conditions of care." We've been advocating for four hours of hands-on care. All the experts are; the government's panels have been advocating for it. We know it's needed. I just wonder, are you shocked that the government paid lip service to the idea of having four hours of hands-on care in all our homes? When they had this huge opportunity with this budget to have a human resources plan that was funded,

they failed to do so. It's a shocking failure of this government to act when they need to act now; not in the next year, not six months down the road.

This is a bit of a treatise on my part, but my question is, what could this government have done that they didn't do to ensure that residents get the care they deserve, the four hours of hands-on care, and PSWs that are still working in ward rooms across the province, that still tell us they're having difficulty getting access to PPE—what could this government have done now to ensure that we were having a better response for our residents in long-term care? Thank you, and I appreciate your answer to this.

**Ms. Donna Duncan:** Unfortunately, what should have been done should have been done decades ago. We are dealing with these legacy issues.

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

**Ms. Donna Duncan:** We know that our PSW shortage is not unique to Ontario. We certainly believe that there is an opportunity to aggressively move very quickly to stabilize our long-term-care homes. We know the morale and the mental health of our staff is low, which creates a barrier to recruitment, but if they feel safe and supported and funded—and we know that the government has committed to an extra \$3 an hour and we're looking forward to be able to flow that to our staff. But let's work with our colleges, let's work with our PSW associations, let's work with our hospitals, let's work with our local communities. We're certainly seized with working with the colleges, especially, to get in-home learning, credentialing, getting people into our homes who may have lost their jobs, where they can train in the homes and support their PSW partners. We also have significant shortages of RPNs and nurses, so it is a—

**The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu):** Sorry to cut you off. The time has come up. We'll have to move to the independent members now. MPP Hunter.

1430

**Ms. Mitzie Hunter:** Thank you to all three presenters—a very interesting discussion so far. I'm going to start with the Honourable Steven Mahoney. It's good to see you, sir. I'm wondering if you could shed some light on why this schedule is embedded deep within the budget papers and hasn't had any consultation or input, particularly as it affects purchases that would have been made in good faith by policyholders with an expected result. It seems as if, with these sweeping changes, that's going to be changed. Can you explain what type of policies this will affect and why it's a concern?

**Hon. Steven Mahoney:** Certainly. Thank you very much for the question. I feel, listening to the other presenters, that my case is a little bit self-serving, but I must say that there are, in addition to me, about a million Ontario residents, mostly seniors, who are caught in this exact situation. This is an insurance policy that I bought in the 1990s that allowed me to make investments—up to me for how much and whatever—that would give me a fairly decent return. I've taken advantage of that to a limited degree and will continue to do so, but this particular

change would eliminate the ability for me to make those investments.

While it doesn't quite come up to the serious concerns expressed by other folks here today, I do believe it is really virtually taking away the rights of over a million people in this province to manage their financial affairs in whatever way that they see fit. I cannot see how taking away this right as a senior to make investments and secure good returns is applicable. How it would up in this particular budget, literally buried in the bottom of the budget, is a puzzlement to me. So what I'm asking is that it be taken out of this budget and let it stand alone. I would debate the case in a separate committee hearing at any time that the government wishes to call it and put forward our arguments that may make sense at that time.

**Ms. Mitzie Hunter:** And would you not say that typically, with these types of financial changes that are being made that impact policyholders, there would have been some upfront consultations, perhaps utilizing—the Ministry of Finance had established the FSRA, which is the Financial Services Regulatory Authority, that is there to protect consumers within the financial industry. But there doesn't seem to be any request made by returning to that process, and yet here it is.

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

**Ms. Mitzie Hunter:** I'm just wondering, what would it harm the government to do exactly what you said: to stand down on this schedule and go through the consultation procedure?

**Hon. Steven Mahoney:** Thank you very much for that. I don't see it as harming the government's position at all. They have an opportunity to hear from people like myself. I do believe there's another gentleman presenting tomorrow to this committee expressing similar concerns. It just makes sense that you have good, broad-scale discussion within the public sector as to what the impact of this change is. I see this as simply a move by the insurance company to pass something through unheard of and hopefully that would be not picked up by people such as me to express concern. That's why I'm asking that, in all fairness, it be taken out of this bill and dealt with as a separate item.

**Ms. Mitzie Hunter:** And to be fair, you wouldn't have been aware of these consequences until after it has affected you as a policy owner.

**Hon. Steven Mahoney:** That's exactly right, and I do make a point of really—

**The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu):** Thank you. Sorry to cut you off. The time has come up.

We'll move back to the opposition. MPP Arthur.

**Mr. Ian Arthur:** Good afternoon again, and thank you for coming in.

Kim, I'm going to start with you for questions. I would say a theme of the last couple of years has been quite a lot of unwarranted and potentially unwanted attention being focused on conservation authorities, which frankly were fairly happily doing their job for a very long time and doing it in a very cost-effective manner. The way this is reflected in cuts to your operating budgets, limiting what

you're allowed to do—I asked a similar question of the Toronto conservation authority that was previously on. Where is this coming from?

I was struck by how you said that you took criticism with a lot of thought into what it was, how to improve things and how to do things, but to butcher the saying, it feels a bit like throwing the house away with the floodwaters. Why do you think it is that there's this level of attention being focused on conservation authorities?

**Ms. Kim Gavine:** Thank you very much for your question. There is no question that a regulatory role is not a very popular role to hold. It's a very important role with respect to keeping people and their properties safe. We had heard concerns about time, taking too long to issue permits. Again, we heard this. We've been working very aggressively with the conservation authorities to try to reduce some of those timelines. We heard about consistency. We've been working with our municipal partners, with the development sector, and coming up with best management practices and guidelines that will help support some of that consistency.

There are a number of things, though, where we would ask for additional—and we have been, for many years, asking for support from the province itself around updating technical guidelines, updating section 28. That is the section that deals with our flood responsibilities, especially in light of climate change and extreme weather events. It's really critical that we've got some sort of support in helping to make those decisions.

Again, we have been working very hard to address some of the concerns around timing and consistency. That's why we started working with our municipal partners, the development sector and others to make those changes.

The other ironic point that I think it's important to raise is that it was a funding cut that we received last year, right in the middle of a flood event. This is really critical work that we do. It's important that any operational changes on the ground—that we consult with the province, the municipalities and the conservation authorities to make sure we get this right.

**Mr. Ian Arthur:** You talk about steady improvements based on feedback received. Given that you are demonstrably trying to improve processes, having the government step in with a terribly heavy hand and mandate those changes—do you think that's fair or do you think you should be given an opportunity to self-correct to whatever ability, to be an active partner in this rather than a recipient?

**Ms. Kim Gavine:** Well, this is quite frankly why we're asking for the entire schedule to be removed: in order to allow us to have further consultation and dialogue with the province and our member municipalities.

I'd like to pass it over to Hassaan Basit, if I might, to talk about some of the work that they've been doing.

**Mr. Hassaan Basit:** Thank you, Kim. Thanks for your great question.

Are there issues that need to be addressed? Yes. Can they be addressed by us ourselves? Yes, and I speak as

somebody who leads a conservation authority that did exactly that four years ago. We looked at some of the things where we were inconsistent, where there was perhaps not a great deal of emphasis put on product delivery, service standards, the pricing, the costing of things. We addressed all of that at Conservation Halton because we made it a priority. Today, we publish our turnaround times for permit applications every quarter, and if they're off in Q1, we fix them by the end of Q2. We've done so for four years. Everything is delivered on time.

We worked with the development industry, with our local BILD chapter, to actually ensure that the price for permits clearly reflected the right scope, the right amount of effort—

**The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu):** Three minutes.

**Mr. Hassaan Basit:** —and when we're asking them to pay, it was actually just doing cost recovery. We received that endorsement from them.

There is the ability for us to solve the problem ourselves, and anything in these amendments that is not enabling but is in fact more prescriptive dealing with governance and other issues will take away our ability to address actual problems; we'll just keep focusing on high-level rhetoric like accountability, governance, openness and transparency without actually delivering a better product on the ground.

1440

**Mr. Ian Arthur:** Just because it was mentioned very quickly, and we're running out of time: If anything, in my opinion, the role of conservation authorities should be expanded at this time. You touched on climate change and the changes that are coming. Would you just speak very briefly to what might happen to people and the value of their properties and the integrity of the properties that they own if we do not manage watersheds well as we see the impacts of climate change?

**Mr. Hassaan Basit:** Absolutely. As my colleague from TRCA said earlier, in the 1930s, when there was deforestation, CAs were asked to come in and fix the problem. When we had Hurricane Hazel, CAs were asked to come in and come up with solutions. When we had the Walkerton tragedy, CAs were given the ability to look at how to address safe drinking water. Every time there's a crisis, MPP, CAs step up, and we do so every single time with reduced resources.

We're now looking at climate change, and flooding is probably going to be one of the most substantive, unfortunately tangible ways in which Canadians experience climate change. The conservation authorities need support from the province to update our guidelines, update our models and look at what is actually happening on the ground.

The province walked away from CAs in the 1990s, and nothing has been updated. I think it's unfair to attack conservation authorities when you pay no attention to the tools they're given, no attention to the funding they're given, and then say that they're being problematic and they're being inconsistent. We're being inconsistent

because we're trying to figure things out on our own, and we're looking for that true partnership with the province.

We were created by the province. The governance was given over to local municipalities. I think it's a fantastic model. Let's try and address the problems, rather than be prescriptive with high-level amendments that may actually exacerbate the problem.

**Mr. Ian Arthur:** Chair, how much time left?

**The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu):** Twenty seconds.

**Mr. Ian Arthur:** Okay. Sorry. We're out, but thank you. That was fantastic. Thank you very much.

**The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu):** Thank you.

We'll go back to the independent members for their second round. MPP Hunter?

**Ms. Mitzie Hunter:** Thank you, Chair. Perhaps I can continue with Conservation Ontario. I wondered how the changes to permitting will affect your budgets?

**Ms. Kim Gavine:** Again, I'll pass it over to Hassaan, please.

**Mr. Hassaan Basit:** Thank you for the question. If I understood it correctly, MPP Hunter, it's "How would the changes affect our budgets?" Is that what you said?

**Ms. Mitzie Hunter:** Because from my read of the legislation, an individual can actually circumvent you altogether and go straight to the minister for permits.

**Mr. Hassaan Basit:** Yes. Thank you for that. That will be highly problematic. If anything, it brings into question the integrity of the entire permitting process. Again, I would draw the attention of the government and this committee to exactly what it is we're talking about here. The core mandate of a conservation authority is to ensure that people build their homes and their businesses in a place where they're not going to get flooded, potentially leading to loss of property or loss of life. We are strictly looking at floodplains based on a risk factor that is standard across the province. Those decisions are not looking at biodiversity. They are not looking at natural habitats. They should be, but they're not and we're okay with that. That is our core.

How, then, can you have an alternate body—we have CAs with 60 or 70 years' worth of expertise, trusted science and clear transparent processes that are listed. We have policies, we have legislation through the CA Act and we make decisions openly based on the science, so we're talking about that level of decision-making. There's no subjectivity, in my opinion.

When solutions are required, CAs actually work with the customers quite a bit. We're not the black-and-white agency. Sometimes we're criticized for being slow; I think that's because if you come to us with an application, we would like to say, "Let's sit down. This doesn't meet the standard, but if you can move your building here and if you move the parking lot back here, it can actually work."

That level of solution-finding is missing, in my opinion, in many levels of government. It's there in CAs. It comes at a price. Things sometimes take a little bit longer. We are there finding solutions and we're there looking at priorities while still ensuring a balance in terms of life and property, so I don't understand the need for the minister to have the ability to come in and make these decisions.

**Ms. Mitzie Hunter:** I totally agree. I think the work that you do, proactive management to protect watershed areas and flood plains, as you've pointed out, is really an important role. And I was wondering the same; how is the minister going to manage the ability to do this, with so much power going to the minister? Really, what the legislation says is that it's going to be delegated, that authority, to someone, I believe, in the ministry; not in the community, not on the ground, not scientists, not experts, and that's a real shame.

I do need to ask the long-term-care folks a question. It just relates to the B and C homes that you have noted—24,000 up for redevelopment. We see the devastating of COVID-19—

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

**Ms. Mitzie Hunter:**—when it gets into homes that are older homes where there are limitations for cohorting and for managing the outbreak, what happens. When you look at this budget, do you believe that there is enough being paid attention, based on the mandate coming down from the commission where the recommendation is for the average four hours of care, plus the need for improvements in terms of the physical space? Do you think that the budget goes far enough in addressing the immediate issues?

**Ms. Donna Duncan:** We certainly support increased care. To our earlier comments, we don't feel that it needs to be prescriptive right now, especially given the critical staffing shortages. On capital, we would welcome legislative—

**The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu):** Thank you. I apologize to cut you off. The time has up for the independent members.

We'll move to the government side now. MPP Fee.

**Ms. Amy Fee:** Thank you, everyone. Thank you for being here. I just want to say thank you to everyone for taking the time out of their days to come to committee to express your feedback and answer our questions today.

I am going to focus at least—possibly all my questions, but at least the first bit, for sure, on long-term care. I'm just wondering, Donna, if you can provide some expertise for us around various things.

One of the things I'm very passionate about is trying to encourage people to enter the field of being a PSW. I was previously a school board trustee, and we actually had in our continuing adult education program PSW programs as well. The Ontario Personal Support Workers Association head office is located in my riding.

I've had a lot of conversations with different PSWs around what they need to be able to stay in the role, the support that they need, what they're looking for. I'm just wondering if you have any suggestions. You did mention around mental health and supports like that as well, and we've talked about needing the full-time work, the hours, being in one home, that sort of thing. If you can touch on any ideas or suggestions that you have and how we can not only encourage people to enter the field of being a personal support worker, but also to stay in the field once they're there.

**Ms. Donna Duncan:** Great question. Ruth chairs our HR task force, so I'll ask her to respond. Thank you.

**Ms. Amy Fee:** Perfect. Thank you.

**Ms. Ruth McFarlane:** Thank you. It's true that a staffing crisis is existing in our long-term-care sector and that homes are struggling with retaining staff. Pre-pandemic, over 80% of our members stated that it was their main challenge in operations. People aren't entering the PSW field the way they once did, and we need to look at how to make this more attractive in the sector. We need to explore and enhance more robust partnerships with colleges and universities, and we've been reaching out to them to look at those innovative models that might be able to bring people into our sector—committed people who want to care for our seniors. There are some really innovative programs currently under way, and we need to not lose sight of these programs, and continue to grow them in the future.

In addition, there are several innovative care models that are needed in order to provide that individualized, resident-centred care. That isn't just with PSWs, but that's with a mix of different care providers within the circle of care: social workers, residents, ward aides, volunteers, family members, essential caregivers.

Our residents and resident populations are not the same, so every single home has different needs, and we need to be flexible with that. We really do need to allow for innovation in long-term care. We need to provide for excellence. We have to focus on quality outcomes in order to provide the resident-centred care and safety that the residents and families want, but also to make the workplace a valuable and wonderful place to create a career in.

1450

**Ms. Amy Fee:** Thanks, Ruth—maybe build on that a little bit. I went to a PSW conference, I guess just over a year ago. One of the topics was actually—they had a veteran who came in to Ontario from British Columbia to meet with PSWs and talk about how to support veterans who may be suffering from PTSD, who may have been suffering in silence for decades, because we know that veterans, especially from world wars, Korea etc., tend to hold everything in, more so, maybe, than today's veterans from Afghanistan. Trying to help the PSWs to be able to bridge that gap and help their patients feel that they do have that support and that care they need from their PSWs—and really, a PSW does build up that connection with the people they work with, where they're almost that supportive, caring friend. But what we're finding is that the PSWs themselves don't have those tools on how to handle that—

**The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu):** Three minutes.

**Ms. Amy Fee:**—but also the emotional toll that it was taking. I'm just wondering if you could speak to any ideas that either of you have as to how we could best support our PSWs and our workers in our long-term-care homes.

**Ms. Ruth McFarlane:** I think that as our resident population becomes more complex, it's not only medically complex, but it's also mental health-wise complex. Having some mental health training and some mental health

supports within our long-term-care homes—including PSW training, but also social workers; I always talk about a holistic model of care for our residents, where we meet their emotional and spiritual needs as well as their clinical and medical needs—I think that that is greatly advantageous.

I know that our centre has been really good on addressing quality improvement. A few years ago, and as it continues now, we've really been doing some significant training with our staff on Behavioural Supports Ontario and providing them with the tools to be able to support our populations with mental health and also with responsive behaviours. So those are great initiatives to continue to grow and to look for innovative ways to move and inform into the PSW curriculum.

**Ms. Amy Fee:** Donna, I don't know if you have anything to add to that?

**Ms. Donna Duncan:** I'm a lifelong mental health advocate. I think the more that we can embed those skills and competencies, both in secondary education, starting young, fostering empathy in our schools, as well as building mental health literacy into our PSW programs and curriculum and continually making sure that we're building it out as a family—it's our collective responsibility, not just the social worker's or the therapist's.

**Ms. Amy Fee:** Wonderful. Donna, I do have one question that you might be able to answer a little bit for me. We know that we definitely need to be doing the redevelopment of long-term care. Our government has made the commitment to that, and I spoke about that.

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

**Ms. Amy Fee:** I'm just wondering if you could maybe highlight anything you think could be a barrier to being able to work towards that redevelopment that we should be taking a look at.

**Ms. Donna Duncan:** Certainly process, and we know that in small communities, having scale is going to be a real challenge. We need somebody appointed who has a mandate, as they did in the 1990s, to facilitate and problem-solve against all projects across the province, especially in small communities, rural communities and urban centres. We need somebody on point to work across the provincial government, but also with municipalities.

**Ms. Amy Fee:** Wonderful. Again, since we're already under a minute, I want to say thank you to everyone who joined us here today.

**The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu):** Thank you so much. That concludes our time as well. Thank you to all three presenters for your presentations.

MISSISSAUGA BOARD OF TRADE

ONTARIO FEDERATION OF  
AGRICULTURE

ONTARIO CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

**The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu):** We'll move along to our next group of presenters. First, I would like to call upon the Mississauga Board of Trade. If you can please

state your name for the record, and you will have seven minutes for your presentation.

**Mr. Brad Butt:** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair and members of the committee. My name is Brad Butt. I'm the vice-president, governance and stakeholder relations. On behalf of the Mississauga Board of Trade, I would like thank you for the invitation to appear before the committee today on Bill 229, the Protect, Support and Recover from COVID-19 Act.

Since being established in 1961, the Mississauga Board of Trade has played an important leadership role serving and representing the interests of businesses of all sizes and sectors in our community. Mississauga is now Canada's sixth-largest city and the third-largest in Ontario, with a population of close to 800,000 residents and over 50,000 businesses employing more than 440,000 people, including 60 Fortune 500 Canadian headquarters.

Mississauga's economy is very diverse. We have businesses in virtually every sector, and Mississauga is a net importer of thousands of jobs. While COVID-19 has had a tremendous impact on Mississauga, just like other parts of the province, we are confident that a rebuild of the local economy is doable and that Mississauga businesses can thrive once again.

Just recently, the city of Mississauga economic development office reported that over 66,000 jobs were lost in the first wave of COVID-19, but that close to 50,000, or 78% of those, have returned. Unfortunately, Peel region is now back in the grey lockdown phase, and it is likely that many of those jobs will once again be threatened, and in the most vulnerable sectors, such as retail services, hospitality and tourism. This is one of the key concerns for our Mississauga Economic Recovery Group, also known as MERG. This is a six-sector initiative with Mississauga's best and brightest presidents and CEOs. They're sitting at the table to provide pre-COVID prosperity to Mississauga and Ontario, and the goal is uniting businesses for a thriving Mississauga and province of Ontario.

The Mississauga Board of Trade has been providing leadership and support to our business community during the COVID-19 pandemic, and working with the federal, provincial and municipal governments to make sure that programs and supports meet the needs of businesses and workers during this unprecedented time. We have also worked with our colleagues at the Canadian Chamber of Commerce, the Ontario Chamber of Commerce and the city of Mississauga's economic development office.

We would like to compliment the federal and provincial governments for some of the very important programs they have implemented to support businesses. The Canada Emergency Wage Subsidy, the Canada Emergency Business Account and the Canada Emergency Response Benefit have all been welcome programs to provide much-needed income support to both businesses and workers, and we are optimistic that the new Canada commercial rent relief benefit will hopefully flow very soon to help businesses cover rent costs.

In less than an hour, we will hear from federal finance minister Chrystia Freeland, who will undoubtedly share some more details on federal support and measures for businesses and workers. And on that, I would like to remind the committee how important it is that the federal and provincial governments work together on these support programs. They need to be seamless and easy to navigate for the very small businesses they are designed to help. Generally, we would like to congratulate and thank both governments for working closely together during the pandemic.

The government of Ontario should be complimented on initiatives around tax payment deferrals, WSIB premiums, employer health tax exemptions, regulatory changes and a recently announced \$600-million program for businesses hardest hit by COVID-19 restrictions to help cover the costs of property taxes and utilities and PPE requirements, especially in regions like Peel.

However, the government of Ontario must do more to provide support to businesses, particularly in those lockdown regions. Deferring taxes and payments and offering credits do not help with cash flow today; only direct financial assistance will help keep these businesses alive.

But today, we're here to talk about Bill 229, which will implement many measures announced in the recent provincial budget. First, we recognize that the only significant priority right now is the fight against COVID-19. The government has announced that spending on Ontario's health response to the pandemic will be a projected \$15.2 billion.

**The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu):** Two minutes.

**Mr. Brad Butt:** We support all levels currently to support Ontarians, health workers, the most vulnerable and our hospitals and other services dealing with the pandemic.

**1500**

We're also pleased to see that some of these resources are being allocated to begin to prepare for a post-COVID-19 world, which includes investments in job training and skills development, infrastructure, innovation and the new economy, and in doing so, we're very happy to see a commitment to deal with historically high electricity rates in Ontario, which have stifled investment and job creation and in some cases led to industry leaving Ontario for other jurisdictions. The government is committed to lowering electricity costs for commercial and industrial ratepayers by directly funding a large portion of the global adjustment costs to remove them from electricity bills. This will result in estimated savings of 16% for class A and 14% for class B customers.

Budget 2020 included a number of tax reforms aimed at reducing the tax burden on businesses, including reducing payroll taxes for private sector employees by making the previous increase to the EHT exemption from \$490,000 to \$1 million of payroll permanent.

The government is also addressing property taxes for businesses—

**The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu):** Thirty seconds.

**Mr. Brad Butt:**—by standardizing the business education tax rates at 0.88%, and we are pleased to see that municipalities will be granted the option to target property tax relief to small businesses through the introduction of a new optional small business property subclass.

The budget also includes \$100 million in funding for skills training programs directed towards Ontarians disproportionately impacted by COVID-19. The government has reaffirmed its commitment to modernize Ontario's skilled—

**The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu):** Thank you. I apologize to cut you off. The time has come up now.

We'll move to our next presenter, Ontario Federation of Agriculture. If you can please state your name for the record, and you will have seven minutes for your presentation.

**Ms. Peggy Brekveld:** Peggy Brekveld, president, Ontario Federation of Agriculture.

The Ontario Federation of Agriculture proudly represents more than 38,000 farm-family members across the province. We are the leading agricultural advocate for Ontario farmers, their businesses and their communities. Today's conversation is in regard to Bill 229. Schedule 6 speaks to proposed changes to the Conservation Authorities Act. OFA would like to speak specifically to this portion of the bill.

We commend the government for its thoroughness in reviewing this act, including two years of consultations, which we were a part of. In the words of MPP Jim McDonnell, "Conservation authorities play a front-line role in protecting residents and property from the impacts of natural hazards, like flooding and erosion." As farmers, we care about those same issues.

Before addressing the proposed amendments, OFA emphasizes that there's only one Ontario landscape. Urban, rural, agricultural, natural heritage, cultural heritage and mineral extraction must share that landscape. Our agricultural areas provide us with food, fuel and fibre and a broad range of environmental and ecological goods and services for all Ontarians. This is where CAs most often interact with farming.

While there are further comments in our written submission, the following are a few that we would like to highlight:

Sections 14 and 14.1 suggest that municipal councils must appoint a municipal councillor to be its representative, but what if there are capable and interested citizens that would better represent both the needs of the municipality and the watershed area? OFA believes that conservation authorities benefit from having board representation that is not limited to municipal councillors but reflective of the broader interests of the watershed. We recommend that the current system of appointments to the authority's board be retained, allowing whomever council chooses as its municipal appointment the authority to serve.

Section 14(4) proposes that the minister may appoint a representative of the agricultural sector to its CA board. This has been a long-standing OFA ask and we welcome

this proposed change. We do have questions about the duties of this representative, though, such as what will their role be, how will they be chosen, to whom will they be accountable and will they be a voting member? OFA recommends that the role of the agricultural rep on the board be defined and that CAs work with their farm communities to ensure an agricultural representative that is respected by their community peers. For example, the appointment process for agricultural reps for source water committees under the Clean Water Act has been extremely successful. It may be a model to be followed. We also recommend that the agricultural representative be a member of an accredited general farm organization.

Section 20 defines the roles of the CAs. As in the past, we support the division of mandatory activities from the programs and services that a CA provides on behalf of a municipality or for a fee. We recognize, also, the variety of land bases and populations that CAs have to financially support their work. An authority's ability to deliver those mandatory programs and services should not be jeopardized by an authority's limited financial resources. OFA recommends that the definition of mandatory programs and services—

**The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu):** Three minutes.

**Ms. Peggy Brekveld:** —be combined with a provincial commitment that ensures all 36 conservation authorities have the financial resources to fully deliver the provincially mandated programs and services. As well, a CA's agricultural stewardship programs have benefited both farmers and the CA's watershed areas. We recommend that agricultural stewardship programs be included in the authority's mandatory programs and services list.

Subsections 28.1(8) and (9) of the current act provide the option to request a minister's review. Bill 229 proposes a structure for such an appeal to the minister, including timelines, required information and filing an appeal to the LPAT. While the proposed changes provide a degree of structure, will the outcome of these proposed changes simply be added time and costs?

As well, the proposed changes seem to circumvent ministerial reviews. OFA recommends these sections be rewritten to clarify their intent and to ensure that the current process for a minister's review is not circumvented. As well, section 28.1.1 appears to supersede a CA's existing permitting authority under section 28 and just gives it to the minister. OFA questions the rationale behind these provisions.

Section 30.2(1), as proposed, will be repealed and replaced with two situations: "Entry without warrant, permit application", and "Entry without warrant, compliance". We understand these changes being proposed to split the current warrant list entry provisions into two scenarios, one related to permit applications, one to compliance. In the situation of the "Entry without warrant, permit application", we wonder why a CA would need this power. If a property owner requires a permit to undertake an activity on their property, it would follow that they would grant the conservation authority the right to enter.

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

**Ms. Peggy Brekveld:** If a property owner refuses entry for a permit application, they should expect the permit not to be issued. In regard to "Entry without warrant, compliance", OFA supports that.

Thank you for your time today. We also have thoughts on fees and stop-work orders, and some definitions within the act. They are in our written submission. We look forward to engaging with the ministry in any further processes regarding conservation authorities.

**The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu):** Thank you.

We'll move to our presenter, Ontario Chamber of Commerce. If you can please state your name for the record, and you can get right into your presentation.

**Mr. Rocco Rossi:** Thank you so very much, Mr. Chair, and to the committee and to all parties, my thanks for the incredible level of collaboration and co-operation that you've all demonstrated both with us and with your colleagues. It truly will take a team effort to get through all of this.

I'm joined today by my colleagues Michelle Eaton, VP of public affairs, and Daniel Safayeni, who is the director of policy. Of course, you've already met two of our other remarkable members, Brad Butt, representing the Mississauga Board of Trade, and Peggy from the OFA that's also a member, so we really have a family affair here. Brad spoke of the best and brightest, and with my exception, you're getting that.

Look, I don't want to reiterate everything that Brad and Peggy have already gone over. I would certainly underscore those—and let me focus on maybe a few additional things, because, no question, the tax changes and the electricity rate changes are really important, and particularly important for the recovery and beyond in terms of competitiveness. But to Brad's point, it doesn't do a whole lot for today.

**1510**

My colleague Daniel has been leading an incredible survey effort of our members. As of the end of October, for our members of 20 or fewer employees, roughly a quarter of them expressed severe doubt in being able to withstand a second lockdown. So today may be Cyber Monday, but it's really "survival Monday" for thousands upon thousands of businesses. As Brad has already stated, we encourage the ongoing thinking about what measures can be added right now. This is not simply a provincial responsibility, as he has already mentioned, because, again, the federal government most certainly has to step up as well.

Those investments in broadband, both at the federal and the provincial level, are critical. We're seeing, if nothing else, that it highlighted the whole issue of the digital divide and the critical importance of ensuring that all corners of the province can access broadband if we're going to be able to compete, succeed and survive in the modern digital economy. The workforce investments in reskilling and retraining are also critical. Again, I would also highlight the creation of the investment attraction agency. These are all important things for the recovery.

But right now, we are delighted to see the increase in investment in testing, tracking and tracing, and would encourage all parties to triple down, because the more detail we can actually get in following and in containing the crisis, absent widespread availability of the vaccine, is going to be critical. Our members look for clarity and consistency of messaging by all levels of government. We know this is going at an incredible pace. We understand that government is not designed to move quickly—it's designed to think about things, to test things, to go through committees—but COVID is basically saying, "That's just not good enough." Being able to test, track and trace is our best tool beyond the public health measures to be able to really surgically look at opening and closing different areas and sections of the economy.

We would also encourage you, as you look forward, to think about fairness in some of our other sectors. We think specifically of the beverage alcohol industry. For craft distillers, who rely on inputs from Peggy's members and farms across this province, but are taxed at a very different level than their colleagues in the beverage alcohol business, we would like to see the application of a graduated tax policy—

**The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu):** Two minutes.

**Mr. Rocco Rossi:**—similar to what BC has already instituted, to help Ontario craft spirits producers scale, and to align taxation levels for the craft cider industry with those of the craft beer industry, to help level the playing field and encourage both of these job creators in our economy.

And fairness for the cannabis industry, as well, so that it be treated as other legal retailers are treated with respect to curbside delivery and their ability to continue to operate: Again, once we've made that decision to legalize and to really try to put a bite into the illegal sector, let's not hobble it by introducing additional restrictions that make it different than the rest of the retail sector.

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

**Mr. Rocco Rossi:** On the support for people, one of the areas we would again encourage the government to look at is really a stabilization fund for our not-for-profit sector. The OCC represents not just businesses, but not-for-profit organizations, which play a critical role in serving our communities and will be critical through this and into the recovery and must not be forgotten.

I'm happy to take any questions, along with my very esteemed colleagues. Thank you very much for this opportunity.

**The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu):** Thank you so much. We'll start with the questions now. We'll start this set of questions with the independent members. MPP Hunter.

**Ms. Mitzie Hunter:** Thank you to all three presenters. I want to start with the Ontario Federation of Agriculture. I really thank you for your presentation today. I agree with you that the aims of the agri-sector are very consistent with protecting the environment. In fact, you are fiercely protective of the environment, and your sustainability,

livelihood and, frankly, resiliency are very much consistent with that. So of course you want to make sure that there is a strong system of management for flooding and for all of the extreme weather that we're seeing, and to be able to figure it out in a proactive way.

I wondered if you could speak a little bit more about what you're seeing in terms of these changes to the ability of conservation authorities to be able to freely carry out their mandate, which is to focus on flood risk, watershed management and forestry management in the province and to do it in a way that protects people, property and the environment.

**Ms. Peggy Brekveld:** First of all, I'd like to say that there's a quite a difference between the 36 different conservation authorities across the province. You have some doing significant work and certainly having a financial base for that, and you have other areas that rely a lot on volunteers to get the work done.

I actually have a colleague here, Mark Reusser. He's been very active with his local conservation authority, and I think he's going to give us some examples of things that have happened with his conservation authority.

**Mr. Mark Reusser:** Hello, everyone. My name is Mark. I'm from Waterloo. I have a very good relationship with the Grand River Conservation Authority here in Waterloo. I deal with them all the time.

We tend to look at the CA as our partner and as a collaborator and try to refrain always from an antagonistic relationship. Our conservation authority consults with us before they do anything that affects us, recognizing that farmers are the stewards of the vast majority of the landscape in the watershed. It's tremendously important to have good planning, and we look at the conservation authority as a partner in the planning in the region. It provides valuable advice from the perspective of the environment and, we would say, agriculture, in that their perspective deserves as much merit as anything else.

One of our concerns with this legislation is that it appears to sometimes circumvent good planning. Some of the changes are actually somewhat similar to an MZO. We are great proponents of good planning and don't like to see good planning circumvented. It works, and the conservation authorities, as they are designed now, work very well, in our opinion.

**Ms. Mitzie Hunter:** Thank you very much. That was a very good perspective.

I do note, Peggy, that you raised in your initial presentation that there is no real need to [*inaudible*] the permitting authority of the conservation authorities. That's actually their regular operations. It seems as if some of the powers that the government is prescribing to themselves for the minister, who will then actually have to delegate most of his or her authority to someone within the ministry, is already being handled locally by the conservation authorities. So why is there a need? I don't know if that was in the drafting and if that needs to be caught and changed. I think that you were giving the benefit of the doubt in that regard—

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

1520

**Mr. Dave Smith:** I'm going to start with the Ontario Federation of Agriculture. Peggy, you made comment that the OFA has been asking to have a representative on the CAs for a very long time now. We have had a couple of CAs who have come in and presented and said that there's no need to make any changes whatsoever to their board structure.

Could you elaborate a little bit on why you think it would be important, then, for OFA members to actually have some significant input since, as Mark has pointed out, farmers represent the largest land mass and land stewards in the province?

**Ms. Peggy Brekveld:** Yes, outside of the crown, agriculture, collectively, is managing the most land base in this province. So there's significant investment and concern about the watersheds etc. that govern this province. Our desire is to work with the CAs, and we see this as a step towards that; certainly, an opportunity for us as agricultural people to provide our expertise on how water is managed, including things like the Drainage Act, which significantly impacts on farms and also is related to the conservation authority.

It's about a conversation, and we want to ensure that that possibility is there. So we appreciate the fact that through the proposed changes, there will be an agricultural seat on the board. Again, we are curious what that role will be. We certainly hope to have a voting presence and to ensure that it is a quality position that we are being offered. We certainly are appreciative of this offer, though.

**Mr. Dave Smith:** It would seem to make sense to me that you would have a vested interest in watershed and making sure that we don't have flooding issues and we don't have drought issues. Having a voice from the agriculture society or agriculture and agri-food business or industry on this makes absolute perfect sense to me.

**Ms. Peggy Brekveld:** Yes, it's about water resources, and that's one of the things that simply we need to either grow cattle or to grow crops on our fields. It's about measurement of it. Too much is not good; too little is not good. For that resource, we have ways we can manage that and conversations to be had with our conservation authorities.

**Mr. Dave Smith:** Thank you. I'm going to pivot a little bit and over to Rocco if he could comment. One of the things that you brought up was broadband, and it's an investment that Ontario is making. It's a significant investment—in total, just over \$1 billion that we're investing in it.

I'm going to steal a line; I've used it a few times now. It came from Oracle, back in the early 2000s. It was with the release of Oracle 8i. They were touting that you needed to be in e-business, or you were going to be out of business. We're seeing that now more so with the pandemic.

From my perspective, coming from a rural riding, or a large portion of my riding is rural, it doesn't matter whether you're shipping from Buckhorn or Brampton, Havelock or Hamilton; if you're online, if you're in e-business, you can be doing business anywhere in Ontario, anywhere in the world. We ship everywhere as it is now, so it really doesn't matter where you are.

Could you talk a little bit about how having that good broadband presence in rural Ontario would make a game-changer event for all of those businesses?

**Mr. Rocco Rossi:** Yes, and thank you very much for the question and for the investment in this area. We do think it's critical and not just for business—and we're talking businesses of all sorts, including agri-food. I would point out that there are more autonomous vehicles on farms today than there are on the roads, and that's only possible with good connectivity. But beyond the obvious ability to do business online, it's also the issue of education and training.

Trying to do online teaching at dial-up speeds is ridiculous and putting communities at a distinct disadvantage to others. When we think of our ability, or inability, to provide virtual health care—again, don't try sending massive images via dial-up. So on all three of these dimensions, whether it's education and training—and that's of our children and our workers—whether it's virtual health care or whether it's enabling businesses to be able to operate on a global basis from wherever they are in the province, broadband is critical to that.

**The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu):** Two minutes.

**Mr. Rocco Rossi:** And it needs to happen as fast as possible.

**Mr. Dave Smith:** Sorry, Chair, how much time is left?

**The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu):** Two minutes.

**Mr. Dave Smith:** I'm going to jump back, then, to the Ontario Federation of Agriculture again. And thanks, Rocco. I really appreciate that. You stole, a little bit, my thunder with the autonomous vehicles; I was leading in with the broadband.

To jump back to agriculture on it, in my riding, I have a couple of farms where they use high-speed Internet to direct where they're going to send tractors to do their herbicide [*inaudible*] and so on. It's very, very targeted. I have one farm in particular where in about 50% of his fields, he can do that and have a targeted response to whatever threat there is to his crops, but in about half of his fields, he doesn't have connectivity. He can't do that. Can you speak to how having reliable high-speed Internet can be a game changer, then, in the agriculture industry?

**Ms. Peggy Brekveld:** It's about investment in technologies and automation. It's about the fact that, as a dairy farmer, if I want to do milk robots, I need to have connectivity. I need to be connected to broadband. It's about—

**Mr. Dave Smith:** I'm going to interrupt you just for a second there. For people at home, they're not going to know what milk robots are. I think it's a fabulous idea. Do you want to speak a little bit about that? Because it's really cool that happy cows give more milk.

**Ms. Peggy Brekveld:** Yes, happy cows give more milk. It's about the fact that I can use automation to help me milk cows when they are ready to be milked, rather than at set times. But you need to be online. You need to be connected 24 hours a day to be sure that it happens.

**Mr. Dave Smith:** A couple of dairy farmers in my riding—one in particular was milking 148 head at any given time. He's now down to about 100 head that he has been milking, and he's producing more milk because he is—

**The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu):** Thank you. Sorry to cut you off. We'll come back to you in the second round. We'll go to the opposition now. MPP Arthur.

**Mr. Ian Arthur:** Good afternoon, and thank you all for coming. Automated milking is very cool; I think that the public does kind of know about that. I'm thrilled that MPP Smith thinks that people are actually watching this.

But I'm kind of curious; this whole push for broadband—yes, I support rural broadband, exactly. But my gut tells me the government has missed the boat on this. We have Starlink testing; it's beta testing. We've got 175-megabytes-a-second upload, over 200-megabytes-a-second download in beta tests for the low-orbit satellites. That's only going to increase. To me, we're on the cusp of a poor government decision right here, to invest hundreds of millions of dollars into what is about to become a redundant technology. That's not to say that there is not a role for the deployment of traditional broadband to communities that need it, but when you're talking about a site-by-site delivery of high-speed, extremely reliable Internet, I think we're on the cusp of seeing that change. I may be very wrong, but I would hate to see good money thrown after bad in this area. That's not to say—I will reiterate that in this day and age, we all need to have broadband connectivity, and getting there in the most efficient way possible is certainly the most ideal situation, with the least amount of scarce taxpayer resources being put towards it.

So I hope that we're not about to make a mistake in that area, and I really do hope that some of these other companies are able to deliver you the services you need, frankly, far more rapidly than the government, even if they put the money in at this point, is going to get to.

I will switch gears just a little bit. Sorry; that was me just getting something on the record rather than asking a question. But to the chamber of commerce: We heard from you in the summer. We talked about how the last quarter of this year and the first quarter of next year are really going to be the devastating ones for business. We talked a little bit about the supports that were going to be needed to get through that.

1530

I would like to shift the conversation a little bit to how we stimulate growth in the time of recovery. If we're looking at the deployment of a vaccine over whatever period of time it happens to be in 2021, and the kind of slow transition we're going to have back to the world we had before, which is forever going to be changed, where is the role of government and what do we need to do to

ensure that that growth is as speedy as humanly possible, to get those businesses back on track?

**Mr. Rocco Rossi:** Great question. First of all, it's important to understand that it is the private sector and not the government that will create the jobs, so it's about the conditions for growth. Several of those steps—and we're looking forward to also hearing what the feds are going to say—are around a better tax structure and lowering predictable energy costs so that you're not picking winners; you're providing the context within which they can grow.

That said, with the role that government does and can play with respect to skilling and reskilling, it's absolutely critical. How we manage credentials of immigrants, who come in on a points system that encourages people to have credentials in their home country that then, when they come here, are not being utilized to their full potential, is an issue.

The issues that we've outlined in our recent she-covey report, ensuring that we have the preconditions to allow for women to more fully participate in the economy—one of the biggest productivity gains prior to the pandemic that we had over the last two decades was actually the higher and higher growing participation rate by women. Clearly, they have been hit the hardest, far more than men, at the front end of the pandemic, and are coming back to the economy more slowly, in part because of the sectors where they over-index being more in the areas of tourism, hospitality and more of the “high touch” industries, but also because of the issues around child care and the absolute critical need for cost-effective, efficient, available child care to permit women to fully participate in the economy. This isn't a women's issue; it's a fundamental economic issue, and also—

**The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu):** Two minutes.

**Mr. Rocco Rossi:** —a regulatory burden etc. But those would be some of the key pillars of stimulating growth and recovery.

**Mr. Ian Arthur:** I'm really happy to hear you bring up the child care issue, because to me this is one of those policy areas where the data exists. Quebec did it; it led to huge amounts of growth very, very rapidly. There is no silver bullet in a recovery from COVID, but that would be one very effective way of stimulating growth going forward.

You talked a little bit about the subsidizing of the global adjustment. Because it was COVID and courses were being delivered online, I took a course this summer by Bryne Purchase, who is the former Deputy Minister of Energy under the Davis government. The most poignant lecture he gave was called *The Train Wreck in Slow Motion*. It was talking about the layers upon layers of each successive government in messing with our electricity sector in Ontario.

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

**Mr. Ian Arthur:** The subsidizing: Is there a way that you see—distributed generation and storage or whatever it happens to be—out of this kind of layered mess we've

made in the electricity sector? Because it is driving companies away, and we need them here.

**Mr. Rocco Rossi:** You know, the reality that has led to those circles within circles is that we have an incredibly high fixed cost, as is the case with most energy regimes around the world. It's a highly capital-intensive, high fixed cost. So changing that cost base in the short term is very, very difficult. Over the long term, the keys will be in actually increasing the numerator. Because of that fixed cost base, it works the other way around that as you grow demand—and not holus-bolus—because we want it to be done efficiently and with conservation measures—

**The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu):** I apologize to cut you off. The time has come up.

We'll move to the government side now. MPP Thanigasalam.

**Mr. Vijay Thanigasalam:** Good afternoon. Thank you to all the presenters for your presentations. First, I would like to direct my question to David, president and CEO of the Mississauga Board of Trade. David, thank you for your presentation. You mentioned that 66,000 jobs were lost and 78% of them returned. With this budget announcement with the electricity bill help to businesses, how would a 14% or 16% decrease in electricity bills help the businesses that are in Mississauga? Can you explain how these cost-cutting measures impact their competitiveness as we move into the recovery and beyond?

**Mr. Brad Butt:** Thank you very much for the question. I'm the younger, better-looking version of David Wojcik, the president and CEO of the Mississauga Board of Trade, but I do appreciate the question.

Mississauga has a very strong advanced manufacturing sector and, of course, Pearson airport is located within the boundaries of the city of Mississauga. So electricity costs are a huge input cost for those types of businesses to continue to operate in the city of Mississauga and for us to attract new businesses. Mississauga is part of Toronto Global and other organizations that are encouraging foreign direct investment into Ontario, but obviously I represent the Mississauga Board of Trade, so we'd love to see those businesses be in Mississauga.

But this is an issue for the entire province of Ontario. If you don't have competitive electricity rates, you cannot continue to keep those types of manufacturing businesses in Ontario, for one. Number two is you simply can't attract new businesses to come when you're competing against neighbouring jurisdictions that have much lower electricity rates. So we were certainly very pleased to see the announcement in the budget and obviously the corresponding regulatory changes that will be needed to reduce those electricity costs in Ontario and to keep and attract business in the province of Ontario.

**Mr. Vijay Thanigasalam:** Thank you, Brad. My apologies. I wrote your name here and responded from the notes from the computer.

In terms of the success stories from Mississauga, how have your members adapted during these months? Are there any success stories that other businesses in Ontario should consider to help—whether they're strong leaders—

to be successful? Is there anything in particular that you would want to share with us at this time?

**Mr. Brad Butt:** I think that some of the success stories have been, if we think about our main street businesses, if we talk about the Digital Main Street program that was launched and we talk about even some of the programs that I know my colleagues at the Ontario chamber and the Canadian chamber were involved in, in supporting businesses through the Canada United campaign and support for PPE and really helping businesses transition to how this new working environment was going to be in light of COVID-19—I think we've got lots of success stories in the city of Mississauga that we could specifically say, companies that have transitioned, have learned to use this new digital world for online purchasing, for better contacts, even engaging their local customers to order online and be successful.

So, listen, I don't want to say this has been perfect or great. There are many businesses still significantly suffering. When Peel region was put back into the grey zone, I can tell you my phone was ringing off the hook. These are very, very difficult times for businesses in the city of Mississauga. We're hoping to get through it. We're hoping governments are going to continue to work with us and be supportive and that these businesses will be able to hang on through a very difficult time right now and still be here in 2021.

1540

**Mr. Vijay Thanigasalam:** Thank you, Brad. My next question is for Peggy or Mark.

**The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu):** Three minutes left.

**Mr. Vijay Thanigasalam:** Thank you, Chair.

My question is for either Peggy or Mark. In the budget, there includes \$25.5 million over three years for the Agri-food Prevention and Control Innovation Program to support our capacity to save supply, save high-quality food by reducing the disruptions and risk as a result of COVID. Can you please explain how this funding will be used to keep migrant food workers safe while maintaining the supply chain for essential goods?

**Ms. Peggy Brekveld:** At each step along the way, agriculture has seen vulnerability in this COVID time. On the farm, it's about our workers and ensuring that they can safely do their job with proper PPE, which will be supplied through this. It's about setting up digital commerce, which, actually, Rocco spoke to as well. Those are important steps and pieces of it. It's a conversation about further up the chain to our processors and ensuring that they are able to continue to bring, whether it is new production or packaging fruits and vegetables, and ensuring that that then proceeds to grocery stores, where you can receive the product. Every step of the way has had risk and has had challenges, like I said, for both our employers' and our employees' health, and funding like that will help us to ensure that we can do business at this time.

**Mr. Vijay Thanigasalam:** Thank you, Peggy.

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

**Mr. Vijay Thanigasalam:** My next quick question to Rocco: Rocco, welcome back. How would the proposed business education tax reduction and employer health tax exemption impact the business of your members? Could they use these savings to invest in other areas to adapt their businesses to the current circumstances?

**Mr. Rocco Rossi:** Absolutely. Over the long term, they will be able to do so. It's a measure that our members have been calling for for some time, so we congratulate the government on getting there. We look forward to it being implemented so that those who have been disproportionately hit by it in the past will be on an even field with other businesses across the province.

**The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu):** Thank you.

**Mr. Vijay Thanigasalam:** Thank you.

**The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu):** The time has come up. We'll move to the opposition side now. MPP Shaw.

**Ms. Sandy Shaw:** My question is for the OFA and to Peggy specifically. First of all, I'd like to congratulate you on recently being elected president. It's fantastic. I'm pretty proud to say that your VP, Drew, is from Hamilton, so I think he'll represent you well.

Our MPP John Vanthof helps educate all of our caucus on the realities of agricultural families in the province. He really makes sure that we understand that ag families—they really are environmentalists. They protect the land; they understand the land. There are generations of farmers who do know about flood plains and about wetlands. He also makes sure that we understand that we're seeing a loss of agricultural lands in the province of Ontario, despite the fact that ag is one of, if not—I think ag and agri-food processing is the number one economic driver in the province. You can correct me on that.

The work of the conservation authorities is really important to agriculture, and we get that. We from the official opposition are very concerned about these changes that were slipped into a budget bill, of all things, and we're concerned that these changes, essentially, could fast-track development on these declining ag lands and, as Mark had said earlier, undermine good planning.

In your presentation, you talked about some of the changes, but can you elaborate on the risk, the threats that farmers and farm ag families are facing if these changes are implemented?

**Ms. Peggy Brekveld:** As I spoke about, there's only one landscape across this province, and everything needs to fit. We certainly need places to develop and grow business, but we also need to remember that food is a basic, essential need, and we're losing 175 acres a day to developments in this province, between the last two censuses. So I think a continued focus on good planning which includes the conservation authorities is necessary.

I do not think that we need to stifle business. I think we need to plan well for it—and we are business. To support our businesses, we need to, again, do good planning. We also need infrastructure to ensure that our businesses stay healthy enough that we can stay in business, because sometimes farms quit because we just didn't make a profit.

So again, the broadband things that are announced in here are important, but also, once again, we do need good planning, including the conservation authorities and our concerns about water in this province.

**Ms. Sandy Shaw:** Thank you, Peggy. I really do appreciate and like the way that you're explaining that we all just live on the same blue globe. What I heard quite clearly from the tours that this committee, the finance committee, did through the province is that rural communities are struggling, not just for the infrastructure including broadband, but just road infrastructure and shore erosion and flooding. These are all things that conservation authorities have been working to mitigate against.

It doesn't make economic sense to me that this government would undermine the role of conservation authorities. It may be that they needed to make them more responsive, fund them in a way that they could get back and get approvals quicker, but the fact that they're just eliminating their power altogether just seems to be that we're going backwards in this regard. To that end, I think that citizens should have voices in all legislation. Just how we want to see rural and farm families have a voice at the table, we think that everyone should have a voice at the table which, to me, contributes to good planning.

I want to bring up the issue of ministerial zoning orders. To me, this circumvents or short-circuits good planning, when we have these ministerial zoning orders. I think that we've had 30 of these since March in the province of Ontario.

**The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu):** Three minutes.

**Ms. Sandy Shaw:** In Stratford, people are up in arms because the ministerial zoning order is putting up a factory on what was agricultural land; in Duffins Creek, which is a protected land in the area of Ajax, a ministerial zoning order has happened there; and in Hamilton, an area that was going to be used to expand Mohawk College was subject to a ministerial zoning order. These are all municipalities that have official plans, that have robust processes, that have zoning bylaws. Can you just further explain, maybe yourself, or Mark, how these—do you share my opinion that these ministerial zoning orders are so counterproductive to all the work that people have done to ensure we make good, policy-based planning decisions in the province?

**Mr. Mark Reusser:** If it weren't for good planning, we wouldn't have any farmland at all. I am a big proponent of good planning, and the OFA is a proponent of good planning. How do we survive without it?

I'll tell you just a little story. My future daughter-in-law is a planner in a local municipality. She came to me the other day and she said, "Mark, what are you doing about MZOs?" And I said, "Well, we oppose them." She said, "I'm a planner because I believe in good planning. That's my job; that's my vocation. Part of what I do is protect land for environmental services, for farmland. I'm just a good planner." She said, "What is happening is I feel like my job is being taken away from me. If MZOs are allowed, how can I plan? I may as well not plan. We spend a lot of time and money developing official plans and trying to do

the right thing, utilizing public input every step of the way. If we can circumvent that, what's the use of having that process in the first place?"

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

**Mr. Mark Reusser:** It's disconcerting, and it is a threat to farmland and a threat to food production in Ontario.

**Ms. Peggy Brekveld:** I'll add that the appeals process is still important. I know it takes time for those who are desiring to do development, but there's always sometimes the knowledge that you didn't know until you found out you didn't know.

1550

**Ms. Sandy Shaw:** Exactly. That's what I said earlier. There are generations and generations of farm families who understand. In some of these decisions, they may be based on plans from a year or two years' worth of data, but you're sitting on generations and generations' worth of data.

I will just tell you that I had a town hall in Hamilton on schedule 6, its impact on the conservation authorities. Over 1,000 people participated. It was shocking to me—or almost funny—that average people were now saying “MZOs.” The average person understands MZOs and they're feeling cynical about their ability to have an impact on their community—

**The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu):** Thank you. Sorry to cut you off. The time has come up.

We'll move to the independent members now. MPP Hunter?

**Ms. Mitzie Hunter:** I'm going to start with the OCC. I want to continue the conversation around the recovery, particularly as it affects women, who are amongst the hardest hit, along with certain racialized groups, in this pandemic in terms of job losses and the rate at which those jobs are coming back in this recession. I wonder if you could talk about, from what you're hearing from your work, what is needed to support women to have a full labour force participation recovery post-pandemic.

**Mr. Rocco Rossi:** Multiple things: Clearly, daycare is an enormous piece of the puzzle, but there are also longer-term systemic issues as well. Women remain way under-represented in STEM. That starts right in our schools; it starts with guidance counsellors. Women continue to be under-represented in actual numbers in entrepreneurship, although once they do become entrepreneurs, they are ever bit as good as male entrepreneurs. We need to be encouraging that as well.

The other piece that we've seen repeated over and over is flexible work arrangements. If you could say there is a silver lining around COVID, COVID has forced us to do a lot of experimentation around flexible work arrangements. I think there are lessons to be learned from that that could go into the recovery period.

Dan and Michelle, have I've missed out any of the key findings?

**Ms. Michelle Eaton:** No, just to add on what you were saying, Rocco, about flexible work: There are studies. Microsoft Japan did a four-day work week pilot project. [Inaudible] governments institutes for flexible work that

would have to be largely done by the private sector, but there could be tax incentives where government could do pilot projects and see what the results show. But Microsoft Japan did a pilot project where they did a four-day work week in August a couple of years ago, and their sales went up by about 40%. So there are a lot of stats around that.

Then in countries where you have better flexible work programs, there tends to be more women staying and remaining in the labour market because they have more opportunities to upskill quickly.

**Ms. Mitzie Hunter:** Thank you. I really appreciate that, and I certainly support the work the chamber is doing to raise the voice on women's economic recovery, and having a lens that focuses on the she-covey, including investments in job training and entrepreneurship. As you said, these are things that we have been calling for as well.

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

**Ms. Mitzie Hunter:** I also wanted to touch on the fairness issue, because you did raise that, and perhaps Brad can also opine on this: That is the fact that in the current lockdown, which Mississauga and Toronto are in, large big-box-type stores can remain open. I saw a few parking lots really overflowing, whereas our main streets are quiet and those businesses have largely closed or are trying to reach their customers online. What do you think that that approach is going to do to the main street recovery as we move through and get out of the second wave?

**Mr. Rocco Rossi:** I know Brad has a lot to say on this, because the mayor of Mississauga has also been quite outspoken on it. But from an OCC perspective I would say off the top that we don't believe that small wins by punishing large. So, yes, there's an argument that says, “Let's treat everyone the same way”—

**The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu):** Thank you. I apologize to cut you off. That concludes our time. Thank you to all three presenters for coming and for your presentations.

## WILDLANDS LEAGUE

### ONTARIO HEADWATERS INSTITUTE

### CREDIT VALLEY CONSERVATION

**The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu):** Moving along to our next group of presenters: First I would like to call upon Wildlands League. If you can please state your name for the record, and you will have seven minutes for your presentation.

**Ms. Anna Baggio:** Thank you. My name is Anna Baggio and I'm the conservation director for Wildlands League. Would you like me just to go ahead?

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

**Ms. Anna Baggio:** Okay. Thank you for allowing me to appear before you today on Bill 229. My name is Anna Baggio, and I will be joined by Dr. Anastasia Lintner, the principal of Lintner Law. She'll be able to answer questions with me at the end.

Wildlands League is a leading conservation group representing approximately 30,000 supporters in Ontario.

Throughout our 50-plus-year history, we have provided expert policy advice to improve forestry in Ontario and to ensure Ontario meets its commitments around sustainability, biodiversity conservation, public consultation and respecting Indigenous rights. An important example of this is our work in the Cochrane area, where we co-created a plan with industry, municipal and Indigenous leaders to protect the habitat of boreal caribou, ensure wood supply for mills and respect Indigenous peoples.

We strongly object to schedule 8 and call for it to be removed from Bill 229. We also strongly object to schedule 6 and support removing it as well. We understand that both the Ontario Headwaters Institute and Credit Valley Conservation will be speaking to this in this session. We have read the Canadian Environmental Law Association's written submission and support those comments as well.

Forestry operations cover almost half of Ontario and affect more than 50 species at risk, including boreal caribou, a species of high national public concern; turtles; fish; and migratory songbirds. That a permanent exemption is being proposed for industrial logging from protecting and recovering our most vulnerable species at a time when we're facing three interrelated crises—a pandemic, a climate emergency and a biodiversity crisis—is reckless and short-sighted.

The permanent exemption is not the only objectionable aspect of schedule 8. Perhaps even more alarming is the amendment that will prevent the Minister of the Environment, Conservation and Parks from ever issuing a species protection order or habitat protection order for any forest operations that are conducted for the forest operation exception. The province appears to be going to great and radical lengths to remove key environmental oversights and protections, thereby tilting the scales in favour of industry in our public forests; the tilting has been so lopsided the scales may even be broken, and all this to double logging in Ontario.

Keep in mind that these amendments are coming on the heels of another permanent exemption for forestry from the Environmental Assessment Act through Bill 197 that passed in the summer. Bill 229 is the most recent in a disturbing trend of using omnibus budget measures bills to make substantive changes to environmental laws and thereby sidestepping the public's rights under the Environmental Bill of Rights. The EBR's purpose is to better protect the environment by enabling all Ontarians to participate and hold the government accountable for important decisions that affect air, water, lands and resources, plant and animal life, ecological systems and community well-being.

We know this matters deeply to the public. In a very short time, over 2,300 people have used our website to register their concerns. They join thousands of others, including the Toronto Star editorial board, in calling out the government's pro-development agenda that is coming at the expense of nature, wildlife and people.

For more than a decade, Wildlands League has closely and carefully tracked Ontario's progress in meeting the

legislative requirements of both the Endangered Species Act and the Crown Forest Sustainability Act, the CFSA, for forestry operations on public lands. We have participated in numerous public consultations and workshops—

**The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu):** Three minutes.

**Ms. Anna Baggio:** Sorry?

**The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu):** Three minutes left.

**Ms. Anna Baggio:** Thank you. We have participated in numerous public consultations and workshops hosted by MNR on this topic. Every one of these ended with a temporary blanket exemption for forestry operations from the ESA. This means forestry has never been subject to meeting any of the legislated protection or recovery requirements for species at risk in the 12 years since the ESA came into force. Moreover, it is false and misleading to say ESA authorizations are a form of red tape and duplicative of what's already covered under the CFSA.

**1600**

I've laid out two tables below comparing the two legal regimes, but to briefly summarize, the CFSA enables exploitation of our public forests through logging, road-building and other activities while mitigating impacts on species at risk. "Mitigate" means trying to do "less bad." We have decades of experience with resource extraction and logging statutes that make things "less bad" while threatened and endangered wildlife have continued to decline. The point of the ESA was to turn this whole system around, to create a safety net based on the needs of wildlife to help them recover and ensure habitat is protected.

For over a decade, Ontario promised to reconcile the two legal regimes. Now the Ford government is walking away from that in order to reduce red tape and to double logging. Biodiversity conservation is a key tenet of sustainable forest management. It would be inconsistent with the latter to permanently exempt forestry from the ESA and would fundamentally undermine the province's claims of sustainable forest management internationally and in the marketplace. We call on you to remove schedule 8 from Bill 229. Thank you for your time today.

**The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu):** Thank you.

We'll go to our next presenter, Ontario Headwaters Institute. If you can please state your name for the record, and you will have seven minutes for your presentation as well.

**Mr. Andrew McCammon:** Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. It's Andrew McCammon speaking from an empty room; I hope the echo is not too bad. Unfortunately, Internet is broken up here in Bala, Ontario.

Could somebody go to the second slide, please? I just wanted to do a very quick introduction. Obviously, as our name implies, the Ontario Headwaters Institute started focused on headwaters. Headwaters comprise at least half of every watershed, contribute the bulk of—

**The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu):** Mr. McCammon, we're not able to see your slides since you are calling from the phone.

**Mr. Andrew McCammon:** I had asked staff to try to do that, but I understand the problem. I hope the members of the committee have the handout that I sent in this morning. Anyway, I'll just continue, with the time left, Chair.

**The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu):** All right; thank you.

**Mr. Andrew McCammon:** As headwaters provide the bulk of water, comprise the bulk of the geography of every watershed and contribute the most important aspects of water chemistry, we quickly moved from headwaters into being a full watershed management organization, commenting on things like the evolution of the provincial policy statement and other aspects. One of the things we shifted very quickly to was to be a champion of integrated watershed management. We were supported in that, obviously, by huge organizations, such as when Gord Miller was the environmental commissioner, and Conservation Ontario.

Many of the CAs adopt and pursue integrated watershed management, but not all and not all provincial ministries. We believe the conservation authorities provide a tremendous leadership on IWM and represent extraordinary value for money, and that their mandate should be expanded and not reduced.

On my third slide, if you have the handout, we're very concerned about schedule 6 of Bill 229. It continues the recent efforts of the government under its open-for-business platform to reduce duplication, but very often without much evidence and very often creating gaps. We think the gaps are far more dangerous than any duplication.

We're also concerned about a significant trend to minimize meaningful consultation. To give you a litany of examples, no NGOs were invited to the aggregate summit, very few to the consultations on flooding, very few to the consultation on conservation authorities. It's very difficult to get significantly engaged in omnibus bills, and there have been several. There was huge social pushback to remove schedule 10 of Bill 66. By not engaging upfront in meaningful consultation, the government actually creates a tremendous onus on civil society to have to react, to have to mobilize and get tens of thousands of signatures, as we have done in this instance.

Finally, flipping to my last slide, if you have it front of you, we have four suggested directions for the committee.

The first is that we recommend you withdraw schedule 6 from Bill 229, honouring the hundreds of organizations and the thousands of signatures that you have.

Secondly, we recommend that the committee direct the government to stop using omnibus bills on issues that require public consultation. You create a horrendous onus on society, as I mentioned earlier. Without a proper framework for consultation, we all have to scramble and get our presentations into one committee meeting.

So thirdly, we ask that you recommend that the MECPC expand its current discussions on the Made-in-Ontario Environment Plan, which are going on right this moment while we try to get you to adjust Bill 229—

**The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu):** Three minutes.

**Mr. Andrew McCammon:** —to expand the Made-in-Ontario Environment Plan from a simple checklist into a full strategy for Ontario. There are huge things that could be done in that way: ecosystem awareness, integrated watershed management, even, for example—the province has expanded the window for land use planning to 2051. I'd like to know what the province's vision is of natural heritage for 2051, of water quality for 2051. There's no balance here, and balance is extremely important. We have to balance our growth with environmental protection.

Finally, as my last point, which is going to become telegraphed quite easily in previous slides, we ask you to recommend that the province explore how integrated watershed management can help safeguard Ontario's long-term ecological, social and economic well-being. Rather than pull planks out, have the system have gaps, as on the road you're currently continuing down, we really need a strategy. We're getting more people, more pressure on land and water, and we ask this committee to take its financial and economic activity responsibilities seriously and recommend the tremendous value for money that conservation authorities provide: flood protection, hazardous lands, sustainability education, tree planting, water quality. These things really need to be embraced and emboldened, and not restricted.

Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

**The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu):** Thank you. Our next presenter is Credit Valley Conservation. If you can please state your name for the record, and you can get right into your presentation.

**Ms. Karen Ras:** Thank you, Mr. Chair and members of the standing committee, for the opportunity to speak to you this afternoon. My name is Karen Ras. I'm the chair of the Credit Valley Conservation authority and the city and regional ward 2 councillor for Mississauga and Peel. With me today is the vice-chair of the authority, Tom Adams, the ward 6 town and regional councillor for the town of Oakville and the region of Halton, as well as Deb Martin-Downs. She's our chief administrative officer of Credit Valley Conservation.

We are here today to ask that schedule 6 be removed from Bill 229. The changes proposed in the act have significant consequences to public safety, and schedule 6 must be removed from Bill 229. We need to do this to allow for proper public debate and careful crafting of changes to ensure that both the mandate of the conservation authorities and the goals of the government are met.

First, as a board member and a municipal councillor, we support the provisions in the act for conservation authorities to operate in a timely, transparent and consistent manner. Our board agrees that CVC has met the spirit and intent of these requirements. However, those are the only provisions in schedule 6 that we are able to support.

Let me elaborate. CAs are delegated natural hazard responsibilities by the Ministry of Natural Resources and are responsible for representing the provincial interest on

hazard matters in planning exercises where the province is not involved. In the changes to the CA Act made under Bill 108, CAs maintained mandated responsibility for natural hazards as well as for source water protection, implementing the requirements of the Clean Water Act created after the Walkerton tragedy. The province is not involved at the local planning table, but CAs are, in order to ensure that a project meets hazard and source protection policies and can be permitted under section 28 of the Conservation Authorities Act.

Watershed boundaries have been selected three times over political boundaries as the most logical unit for managing the issues for which we are responsible: first in 1946 to address land management issues, again in 1956 to address flood management in the wake of Hurricane Hazel, and most recently in 2002 by Justice O'Connor as a result of the Walkerton Inquiry.

**1610**

Good land management results in good water management. This fundamental principle has been verified time and again. When carrying out our source protection and natural hazard functions, we apply watershed and science-based information, tools and decision-making to inform our response.

If you want the development process to go smoothly, a number of technical issues related to natural hazards in watershed management as well as municipal issues need to be satisfied at the front end of projects to avoid bigger issues at the tail end of projects. If the project cannot meet technical requirements, it is modified and, in some circumstances, heads to appeals, where CAs defend both the natural hazard and source protection requirements under our mandated responsibilities. However, the proposed changes to the act allow a proponent to appeal directly to the Minister of Natural Resources and Forestry for a section 28 permit, which the minister is given the rights to issue before or after a CA has considered it from a technical perspective.

Technical specialists and tools are not available directly to the minister, as they are to a CA, to do the assessment and make technical decisions on an application. CVC alone has about 30 staff whose role it is to provide the tools and participate in the planning and permitting process. This reduces the minister's decision to a political one instead of a science- and engineering-based one.

Then—and this is a non-starter—schedule 6 removes the CA as a public body under a consequential amendment to the Planning Act, removing our right to appeal Planning Act decisions. Schedule 6 also significantly complicates the process by a new appeal mechanism through the LPAT instead of the Mining and Lands Tribunal, which has adjudicated section 28 appeals for decades.

With the lack of expertise and resources at the ministry and a system that encourages appeals instead of working to meet important public safety objectives, how can streamlining and efficiency be realized? Forget about good decisions. The LPAT is unlikely to concern itself with a watershed-based approach and provide decisions consistent with CA policies if CAs cannot be there to defend the policies and the science.

Now, I'm going to share my time with Councillor Adams. Thank you.

**Mr. Tom Adams:** Thank you, Councillor Ras. I'm Councillor Tom Adams.

While a CA may continue to sit at the planning table, the effectiveness of a CA is going to be damaged by the province signalling from the very outset of any planning application that no matter what a CA says, the CA cannot appeal, and the CA can be circumvented in the permitting process by having the minister issue a permit without the review of the CA. This is being proposed in the name of streamlining, but it's dangerous to public safety, and all of our residents are demanding better. As a landowner, CAs would also be the only landowner in Ontario without the right to appeal applications that affect their own lands.

We ask you, how can we be mandated to undertake certain functions on behalf of the people of Ontario and not be empowered to carry them out? Conservation authorities have been defining and defending natural hazards from inappropriate development for 60 years, and it's a role that's been recognized by the flood adviser in the recent provincial flood strategy. Our communities expect a standard of care. Who's going to accept the liability for decisions that are made without science or technical merit?

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

**Mr. Tom Adams:** Thank you.

The CAs are more than willing to sit at the table with the province and determine ways to streamline processes, and we have offered to do so without any uptake. We have taken it upon ourselves to shorten timelines on permit delivery, and CVC has done so 99% of the time, even through the COVID-19 pandemic. Not once since the passage of Bill 108, 18 months ago, has the province asked us to work with them on finding ways to make the process faster without the extreme measures being included in schedule 6.

Respectfully, we ask you to remove schedule 6 from Bill 229 to allow conservation authorities to work with the province on changes that will meet the objectives of both the province and the CAs, which ultimately would benefit the health and well-being of the people of Ontario.

Thank you very much for your time today. We look forward to any questions.

**The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu):** Thank you so much. We'll start with the questions now. We'll start the first round of questions with the opposition. MPP Shaw.

**Ms. Sandy Shaw:** Just to be clear to everyone on the call here, Ontario's official opposition NDP is completely opposed to the schedule. It's the biggest reason why we are not supportive of this budget bill, Bill 229, not the least of which is the government is sitting on \$9.3 billion of COVID relief money that they're not spending. That's another big reason why this budget is such a huge disappointment.

I would just like to share with you that I'm the finance critic. But because this government keeps slipping in schedules that attack our environment, like Bill 66, which would have opened up the greenbelt for development, as

the finance critic, I end up spending a lot of time talking about the erosion of our environmental protections. I just want you to understand that we clearly are also as opposed to this as you are.

There are so many areas that we could go into, but with the opposition to this schedule, there is such a huge outcry. As you know, you are elected officials—specifically I'm referring to the Credit Valley Conservation Authority. Mayors across the province have written letters to this government. The city of Hamilton, for example, passed a unanimous resolution speaking out against schedule 6. There is huge opposition to this.

I can go one of two ways. My first point: What I would like to say is, who asked for this? And why, for example, would the government put into a budget bill something that is so hugely controversial? It seems to erase citizens' input and voices, and as you have so clearly articulated, it goes against good planning. I'm not trying to be too paranoid or cynical about this, but who would this benefit? Why we would be attacking the good work of conservation authorities, the ability to do integrated watershed and water protection planning across the province, with no consultation? How did this get to be a priority of this government in what should have been a \$9.3-billion budget to spend COVID relief money?

**Ms. Karen Ras:** Thank you for the question, MPP Shaw. It's Karen Ras from Credit Valley Conservation. I think, by removing schedule 6, there are no budget implications. These pieces affecting conservation authorities aren't about financial issues nor are they, in my mind, about streamlining issues; they're about appeasing some special interest groups with respect to developers and rural landholders. It's that apparent.

**Ms. Sandy Shaw:** Thank you. Tom, did you want to add to that?

**Mr. Tom Adams:** Yes. You asked who's been supporting it and who's been against it. I can certainly tell you that all of our municipalities in the area have been passing resolutions against including schedule 6: the town of Oakville, the region of Halton—Councillor Ras, I believe Peel has also done so. So we have an awful lot of support for removing schedule 6.

The reason that there is so much support for removing schedule 6 is, as Councillor Ras said, this has nothing to do with the budget. This has to do with planning process and governance issues within conservation authorities, all of which need better consultation and more consultation with the members of the public who are impacted very directly when the ability of conservation authorities is severely reduced in so many different ways.

**Ms. Sandy Shaw:** Yes, thank you for that. I will tell you that I held a town hall in Hamilton on this very issue. There were over 1,000 people participating, which is a huge number of people when they could be watching The Crown instead, so they decided to participate in this. Average citizens are outraged by this. They're outraged and they understand more about good planning. They understand that this shouldn't have been slipped into a COVID-19 budget, so they're outraged by this.

What they spoke about a lot was not just the short-circuiting of good planning for municipalities that have done a lot of work to have their planning policies and bylaws, but really, what it does is it cuts out the citizen's voice.

**The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu):** Three minutes.

**Ms. Sandy Shaw:** We just had the Auditor General's report on this government's performance on the environment. It was a scathing report. One of the many things that she had to say was that this government essentially is not compliant with their own Environmental Bill of Rights.

This is not a government that had a good track record on the environment and so there are all kinds of pushback. We were successful in Bill 66: They pulled back the attack on the greenbelt. Do you think this government is going to listen to everyone who is saying that they are outraged by this schedule in a budget bill?

1620

**Ms. Karen Ras:** I think they have an obligation to listen to everybody. When it comes to things like governance buried in this bill, it flies in the face of good governance principles and also goes against sections of the Municipal Act. So I think that the government needs to take a good, hard step back on this particular schedule. It deserves its own public consultation process and one where we can work with the government to fix the things that truly need to be fixed.

But as Councillor Adams mentioned in his remarks, if these changes get made, who's going to be on the hook for the liability that we know is going to be a problem when there are major climate events that affect flooding and damage to people and property? Who's going to be responsible for that?

**Ms. Sandy Shaw:** Well, you know who that is, because you're elected municipal officials: It's going to be residential municipal taxpayers. We already know that they have to pay for all of the infrastructure costs that flooding and these extreme weather events that happen—there's shore erosion. So we know about that.

Chair, how much time do I have left? I don't know whether I'm going to rant or ask a question.

**The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu):** A minute and 10 seconds.

**Ms. Sandy Shaw:** Very quickly, in the minute and 10 seconds that I have—I'll save my rant for another day—ministerial zoning orders, the one, for example, that we have right now in the Duffins Creek area that's a protected wetland: That, to me, seems like part and parcel of this attack on good planning and the environment. My question also is, should that have happened?

**Ms. Karen Ras:** I can speak to ministerial zoning orders, because up in Peel region, we have actually asked for them in the past. They do have their place when it comes to expediting good projects that have a larger community benefit. They should not be used at the expense of the environment, and that's where the difference lies. You can use them in good instances, but not at the expense of filling in wetlands.

**Ms. Sandy Shaw:** Tom, you probably have 30 seconds.

**Mr. Tom Adams:** Yes, we have very similar concerns, as Councillor Ras has mentioned. You also asked or mentioned issues earlier around the cost of changes. The costs associated with the schedule 6 changes are very expensive to municipalities, which would end up holding the bag of having to go through the appeal process—

**The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu):** Thank you so much. We have to move to the independent members now.

**Ms. Sandy Shaw:** Thank you.

**The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu):** Any questions from the independent members?

**Ms. Mitzie Hunter:** Absolutely. Thank you, Chair.

I actually wanted to go to the Wildlands League, because you've raised an issue that has slid under the radar, but it's actually lasting, the changes that are being made there. And no wonder it's been overlooked: The government has slipped it in right after schedule 6, which is the big issue that everyone is sort of unanimously saying "Take it out" on, because it's not what is required for good watershed management. Then we have a very lengthy—really a bill that should probably be on its own, for credit unions. It's almost 100 pages long. And there you go: schedule 8, which is not protecting endangered species, for the benefit of doubling output on forestry.

I'm just wondering if you can speak to, is there another way to handle the government's goal of accessing more of the crown lands, I would imagine, for logging purposes—which has an economic benefit, but should not be at the cost of endangered species and biodiversity in Ontario.

**Ms. Anna Baggio:** Thank you, MPP Hunter. That's a good question. Actually, the funny thing is, the Ontario government has made it their objective to target environmentally conscious consumers with their new Forest Sector Strategy, so you could build up a whole approach where you demonstrate your environmental chops by protecting caribou habitat, by protecting the habitat of endangered species, then you truly market your product; and then consumers—and a lot of them are American—will be able to purchase these products and feel confident, knowing that they come from well-managed forests.

We think there's more than enough wood in the forests for the government to do environmentally conscious—and also respecting Indigenous rights, because the Crown Forest Sustainability Act is so old and out of date it doesn't serve Indigenous peoples, it doesn't serve species at risk and it's not even serving climate. We need our forest to be absorbing our carbon pollution.

The government could actually, if it put some enthusiasm and energy into it, be producing plans for forests that are actually good for climate, good for species, good for communities, that have the support of Indigenous peoples, and market those forest products to Americans and to the world, and have a great big green rubber stamp on it that says, "Buy from Ontario." Right now, our products are controversial. Nobody should be wanting—if you're looking to avoid controversy and do right and spend those extra dollars, you're going to want to avoid some of these controversial areas in Ontario.

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

**Ms. Mitzie Hunter:** Thank you. Anastasia, did you want to jump in?

**Dr. Anastasia Lintner:** I'll just add that one of the challenges generally for the way forest management is done in Ontario is that, not unlike what happens with our municipalities and our conservation authorities, the political boundaries, the forest management unit boundaries don't match what is ecologically relevant for managing to protect and recover species. So just from the start of it, the way we're doing forest management in the forest management units is not compatible with an approach that will be able to protect and recover species.

**Ms. Mitzie Hunter:** I appreciate you coming today and raising these very significant and really life-changing concerns for the people of Ontario, and making sure that we could emphasize why there is a problem with Bill 229 and that the government should revisit—

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

We have to move to the government side now. MPP Fee.

**Ms. Amy Fee:** Good afternoon, everyone. I just want to start by saying thank you for all of the work that you do and for joining us here this afternoon.

I want to start off by talking about the consultations that our government did over the last year or year and a half or so around these issues. Maybe, Councillors Adams and Ras, if you took part in those consultations—if you did, what did you discuss in those consultations? And if you couldn't for whatever reason, what are some areas that you think you would have been highlighting at that time?

**Ms. Karen Ras:** Thank you very much, MPP Fee. I attended the consultations along with Deb Martin-Downs, and I believe that Councillor Adams did have some participation as well. We had some really good conversations at the round table sessions. We focused on things like permitting, planning and how we can protect the environment. At our tables, we had a number of differing opinions. Those were really good conversations, and we noticed that there were a lot more commonalities than there were differences.

In those conversations, it was more about streamlining processes, making it more transparent, better governance, and then we heard nothing, despite the offer to work with the government to develop potential legislation and regulations. Since that consultation, which I guess was about a year ago, it has been crickets, so I think that there is that missed opportunity to work with the government on putting in place what are workable regulations to actually drive this forward.

I know Deb may want to jump in there as well.

**Ms. Deborah Martin-Downs:** This is Deb Martin-Downs from Credit Valley. I'd just like to add that while the consultations occurred, they were very general in nature. They did not have any level of discussion about the kinds of measures that are now presented in this bill. Those consultations were generic, on what could be fixed with the conservation authority, and now the consultation should be on the specifics of what's in there and what

impacts that might have, as opposed to the general nature that happened in January and February.

**Ms. Amy Fee:** Can you—

*Interjection.*

**Ms. Amy Fee:** Oh, sorry, Councillor Adams.

**Mr. Tom Adams:** Sorry. Again, I'm Councillor Tom Adams. I was just going to add, I know that, in addition to the comments of my colleagues here, many colleagues from the Halton area also took part in the consultations. I know that you had a delegation earlier from Conservation Halton, and many of them from that board also took part in similar discussions and consultations. So again, I would echo the issue that while there was some discussion, these specifics were never part of that discussion, and we've never had the ability to have a proper public debate and discussion about what the impacts would be on the conservation authorities and on the municipal partners, who will end up, really, holding the bag in terms of trying to figure out how to clean up the mess afterwards. We think it would be better to figure out the details before they get passed through schedule 6.

1630

**Ms. Amy Fee:** What are some of the recommendations, then, Councillor Adams, that you would like to see move forward?

**Mr. Tom Adams:** Well, in terms of moving forward, we really believe that schedule 6 should be withdrawn from Bill 229 so that some of the issues around the permitting that we've discussed can be fully understood and we can understand what the implications are for appeal processes that would happen if the schedule 6 changes occurred. Those are not only very expensive changes in terms of the cost of the appeal process through LPAT, but also very time-consuming. If the government's desire is to speed up the building and development process—which is a goal that we fully understand; we've been working very hard to improve our permitting processes and speed that up—the appeal process that's being considered is a much longer one and one that will slow down the development process and the building process, not speed it up.

**The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu):** Three minutes.

**Mr. Tom Adams:** That's because the choice of using the LPAT is one where you're going through a tribunal that's already overloaded, already has a whole lot of backlog in terms of the appeal process, and it's very adversarial. If you look at the appeal process that's in place right now, first of all, the vast majority of applications don't go through appeal. They get permitted immediately through the conservation authorities. Of the ones that do go through appeal, it's a very, very tiny number of them that receive an approval through an appeal process.

The process that's in place is a good one for the way the conservation authority system works. It would be very bad for the permitting process to change it to an LPAT process. It would really slow things down and it would be expensive, not only for the applicants but also for the municipalities and the province, which might end up

having to find themselves in front of the LPAT with cases—lots of cases.

**Ms. Amy Fee:** Moving into, if I can talk to you just a little bit about—I did find it quite fascinating, your views on wildlife protection and how this could impact and that stance. I'm just wondering if you can elaborate more around areas where you think you could see some changes and benefits, maybe, going forward.

**Ms. Anna Baggio:** Was that to me?

**Mr. Tom Adams:** Sorry, are you—who is the question—

**Ms. Amy Fee:** Sorry. I was looking at you as I was asking the question, so it's me.

**Mr. Tom Adams:** Thank you very much.

We recognize that conservation authorities are also very large land owners. In Credit Valley alone, we have thousands of acres of land that are under management. The land has multiple reasons for being under management. Part of it is for natural hazard issues, but some conservation areas—

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

**Mr. Tom Adams:** —are also used as parkland space for our communities, and they're very much loved. They're places where, in Peel and in Halton, we have maple syrup festivals, for example, that are managed through our park space.

The spaces allow for the natural area to be protected and preserved for the community, so they do act as places for biodiversity; they do act as places for plants and animals to thrive and to be well managed and preserved. The withdrawal, for example, of our ability to make appeals ourselves means that we can't even protect our own land for the residents for whom we're serving. So you can have applications to land that's adjacent to ours, for example, that would severely impact the quality of life of our residents and the residents of Ontario in terms of enjoying those lands and—

**The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu):** Thank you. Sorry to cut you off. The time has come up.

We'll go back to the independent members now for their second round. MPP Hunter.

**Ms. Mitzie Hunter:** Thank you, Chair. I do want to say that the Auditor General, in her report on the environment, has really highlighted that the government is not focused on endangered species and lacks the capacity to address—and it's evident from schedule 8 that even just their internal ability to analyze the effects of this legislation on the result in our forestry areas shows a lack of competence and care for biodiversity and species in this province, and it's a real shame.

I do want to just take a minute to speak regarding the conservation authorities. The presenters from, I believe it was, Credit Valley, are two councillors who talked about the governance side of things and the collapse of that as a result of this legislation and schedule 6. I want to draw attention to schedule 7, because as I was reading it, it's clear in there: "Every director, officer and member of a committee shall exercise their powers and discharge their duties honestly, in good faith and in the best interests of

the credit union.” That is the definition of duty of care. You sit on a board and you’re there for the best interest of that board.

Yet schedule 6 is trying to create some other group, because the board is not going to be there for the best interests of that conservation authority; it’s there to represent individual municipalities’ needs on the board, which is not duty of care or fiduciary responsibility of how people serve on a board. So I’m wondering if you could speak to the concerns that you could see down the road when we lost the cohesion and good governance of the boards of the conservation authorities. Where do you see this going? Maybe we could start with Karen.

**Ms. Karen Ras:** Thank you, MPP Hunter. A very good question. We at Credit Valley Conservation have a number of municipalities in our watershed. If just the Mississauga members went and just tried to represent Mississauga interests—we’re a \$25-million budget at CVC, but we have to take a holistic watershed approach, to make sure that we’re putting money in where there are capital improvements and operational requirements that spread throughout the watershed, because what does happen upstream greatly impacts those of us down by the lake, downstream.

So you have to take that overarching view. You have to put on your CVC hat when you’re there. You can’t just throw good governance aside and only take that independent view of your municipality. We know that with some of the changes, with some of the smaller municipalities—

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

**Ms. Karen Ras:** —by having only members of their municipality, that basically creates a municipal committee, which goes against municipal meetings requirements under the Municipal Act.

We don’t have any independent members such as citizens or members of the agriculture community in our committee, but there are others that do, and they add value based on those committees. I don’t think you can take this one-size-fits-all bad-governance approach. You really need to take a look at what works for those municipalities.

In Peel region, where we do represent the largest population for CVC, that’s 1.3 million people, plus some of the smaller municipalities. Where do people in Mississauga go when we’re truly densified and built out? We go up north. We go to Caledon to see the fall colours. There is a—

**The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu):** Thank you. Sorry to cut you off. We’ll have to move on to the government side. MPP Cho?

**Mr. Stan Cho:** Thank you very much, Chair, and thank you to all presenters for being here this afternoon. I certainly appreciate your time. I’m from a riding in Toronto, and so we appreciate the input from all conservation authorities. We had the Toronto conservation authority appear here earlier this afternoon. I want to just read one of their comments that they said regarding this budget:

“We are encouraged that the act continues to provide for the organization and delivery of programs and services

that further the conservation, restoration, development, and management of natural resources in watersheds in Ontario. We also support proposed amendments made to enhance the transparency and accountability of conservation authorities, which represent best practices and levels of service that we provide to our government partners, stakeholders and the close to five million citizens living in our jurisdiction.”

1640

My constituents are part of those five million.

I’m hoping to get your comments from all three presenters’ organizations this afternoon not just about environmental protection, of course, which I think we all agree is a priority, but also on how to better focus CA mandates. We’ve heard some concerns that certain conservation authorities have brought into their mandates to include programs like zip lines and ski hills, and certainly, we want to make sure that the primary mandate focus is on those protection measures that we spoke about. Maybe we can start with how do we focus that mandate, if you agree that that transparency and accountability is something that we should be focused on as well, and do you maybe believe that a CA should provide a report on the measures that they’ve worked on. We’ll start with that and see if there’s time left.

**Mr. Tom Adams:** Thank you very much. We have, as I said, a number of other programs that do operate through conservation authorities. Now, you mentioned ski hills, which is really a Conservation Halton kind of thing. Many of these programs are self-supporting. In fact, the ski hill operations in Halton generate funding that support the CA. And so, from a municipal perspective where we pay the vast majority of the levy costs of operating the conservation authority, we welcome some of those kinds of operations. Because we are appointing the members to the board, we in effect have direct control over what’s happening there. If we didn’t like the way they were operating or we felt they were being too expensive or extravagant, we would have a direct line of communication to be able to rein in the things that are going on there. From that perspective, we feel that we’ve got good control.

In terms of the governance, because we’re appointing those people, we as municipal council members are responsible for the activities that are going on there. So if residents and constituents felt that there was mismanagement or going into areas that, really, conservation authorities shouldn’t go into, they would yell at us and we would be the ones that would have to go in and fix it.

**Ms. Deborah Martin-Downs:** If I might add just briefly to that, the government has said that we have increased our mandates, but the only thing that they can point to is some recreational programs, which, as Councilor Adams mentions, are for the good of the local community and are usually self-funded. It would be very useful for us to have an understanding of what came out of the consultations and exactly what programs and services they feel that we’ve offered that we should not be doing. I can assure you the Credit Valley is very focused on its mandate and I would say that the majority of our

conservation authorities are focused on their mandates, so some additional information coming from the province would be very helpful to us if you want us to address that.

**Ms. Karen Ras:** I just want to quickly add: I'm also chair of the Credit Valley Conservation Foundation, where we do raise money. Last year, it was about \$1.5 million outside of the taxpayer and developer-fee envelope, so it was through donations and sponsorships, and we are able to fund additional programs within CVC itself. So that has no impact on municipal funding envelopes.

**The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu):** Three minutes.

**Mr. Andrew McCammon:** It's Andrew McCammon. I want to thank the government member for asking the question. I think that is the question, and I think we should have been discussing it since the previous round of amendments to the Conservation Authorities Act, which tinkered with the watershed management and conservation of lands mandates. We've got a climate crisis, we're having invasive species and some issues with biodiversity, and we need to adapt to integrated watershed management. So let's discuss that. Let's figure out which agencies are going to juggle which things. But pointing a finger at an agency that was subjected to significant budget cuts from the province many years ago and had to shift to a municipal-funding-level basis and was encouraged to develop creative revenues—it's come full circle. Those things are revenue-neutral.

It's a great question. People want to discuss it. An omnibus bill and a very short allocation of time at committee and in the House is not a serious atmosphere to have those discussions.

**Mr. Stan Cho:** I appreciate that. Thank you there, Mr. McCammon. What I'm hearing is that it's important to focus on the core priorities of our agencies out there, so I'm hoping that all three organizations will provide their support when we're talking about a better line of sight to those outcomes, because outcomes are important, and making sure that the best value for taxpayer money is ensured and to protect those priorities that we all find important.

I guess the final question, in the minute that we have left, is, will you support that public reporting, that process to communicate to the public where these funds have gone—

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

**Mr. Stan Cho:** —and can the government rely on that support moving forward, for a better line of sight?

**Mr. Tom Adams:** Thank you very much for the question. We fully support the need for transparency. All of our budget materials, all of our agendas are all online. We discuss that publicly. It goes through each of our municipal councils for approval, and we look forward to continuing on that transparency.

**Ms. Deborah Martin-Downs:** If I might weigh in on that, our transparency is very important to me, but we report mainly to our municipalities. The province provides, in our \$25-million budget, \$85,000 towards our hazard function. Whatever is happening on this bill is not going to change the provincial budget in any way. It is a

relationship that we've built with our municipalities, and we work with them to get a budget approved that they can live with and that meets their needs through the programs and services. We're happy to have the province come back to the table—

**The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu):** Thank you so much.

We'll have to move to the opposition members now. MPP Mamakwa.

**Mr. Sol Mamakwa:** Thank you to the presenters. I'm going to talk about schedule 6. It seems there's a direct conversation on schedule 6, as it further weakens the power of the CAs to protect Ontarians from flooding—and then the houses that result from development within the conservation areas—and allows for further criticizing the development approvals.

I get it. I am familiar with that. My riding is in northwestern Ontario. It's 294 square kilometres in northwestern Ontario. One of the things that I'm really clear about, as well, is when we talk about conservation, when we talk about the environment. Indigenous people have been around for hundreds of years, thousands of years, and we know what conservation is. We know how to protect the environment, and we've been doing it for years. It's a way of life. Sometimes when governments come into power, they have these different visions and whatnot and try to do things at the expense of conservation, at the expense of the environment, at the expense of treaty rights.

I just want maybe a quick question to Anna Baggio of Wildlands League. I wonder if they are working with Indigenous people, with the First Nations. There's a piece in there, within schedule 6, that talks about a non-derogation clause to affirm existing treaty rights and Aboriginal rights, but there's no provision at all to enable or require First Nations representation on the CA boards. Do you have any comments on that?

**Ms. Anna Baggio:** I'm going to pass that over to my colleague Anastasia, because she actually, when she wears her other hat, knows that very well. Anastasia, if you don't mind?

**Dr. Anastasia Lintner:** Well, I'll point out that there is similarly a non-derogation clause with probably very, very similar writing in the Crown Forest Sustainability Act. These non-derogation clauses basically state the constitutional reality that anything that people are choosing to do as activities can't violate Aboriginal and treaty rights that have protection under section 35 of the Constitution.

**1650**

Where there are not, when anything is implemented, their impacts are both consistent with the government's duty to consult and respect inherent Indigenous rights—those are a matter of practice. Certainly within the proposed amendments to the Conservation Authorities Act, there is nothing to suggest that Indigenous perspectives will be brought into the governance structure. It will be the municipal councils with municipal interests, as it's proposed, and then an appointment of an agricultural interest

by the government. So there's no mechanism that would seek this within the legislative language. In my experience, what we're hearing is Indigenous communities, First Nations, Métis, Inuit, are not being consulted. So in practice, how it's implemented is of concern, I think.

**Mr. Sol Mamakwa:** Okay. Thank you. I know that when we talk about that there are some chiefs who have recently criticized this government about ignoring treaty and Aboriginal rights when having a controversial minister's zoning order, which allows construction on provincial treaty lands, such as of Williams and pre-Confederation treaties, right? I know it's one of the things that the Indigenous leadership was saying, that the increased MZOs by this government is a disturbing abuse of power, especially when applied to override environmental protections. Do you have any commentary on that?

**Dr. Anastasia Lintner:** It's Anastasia Lintner of Lintner Law, again. I have seen communications on the Williams Treaties motions about the concern about the minister's zoning order on Duffins Creek, and I understand that there was litigation launched with respect to that particular minister's zoning order by a number of environmental groups. So, it certainly has been an issue of concern.

I am aware, in communicating with some First Nations folks that I'm in touch with, that the pressure and the situation that we're in with the pandemic is very difficult—in the best of times—for First Nation communities to deal with all of the requests for consultation and the need to try and understand what's going on. It's not possible to respond this quickly and sort out how meaningfully they can participate. There is some great concern, an ongoing concern.

**Mr. Sol Mamakwa:** I know that, certainly, a concern is when we talk about that the government is sitting on \$9.3 billion from the feds that they're not using. To kind of use the, I guess, environment conservation as a part of the economic recovery, it's just—

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

**Mr. Sol Mamakwa:** —it should not happen that way, in that way. So I'm wondering about—I don't know if you have any more questions, Sandy.

**Ms. Sandy Shaw:** How much time is left, Chair?

**The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu):** Forty seconds.

**Ms. Sandy Shaw:** Okay. There's not that much time, but I think what colleague MPP Mamakwa was saying is that, as we've said, this is a government budget bill; \$9.3 billion could have been allocated to support communities that Sol represents that are still under boil-water orders, like Neskantaga, and still under evacuation. We are shocked that this is a government that, rather than supporting the people of Ontario, is taking this opportunity to attack the environment.

Again, with schedule 6, I'm going to reiterate that we are completely opposed to this schedule and we support your calls for having it withdrawn from this bill. Thank you for your presentation today.

**The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu):** That concludes our time as well. Thank you to all three presenters for coming and for your presentations.

## SKILLS ONTARIO

### ELEMENTARY TEACHERS' FEDERATION OF ONTARIO TOWN OF AJAX

**The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu):** We'll call upon our next presenter, Skills Ontario. If you can please state your name for the record, and you will have seven minutes for your presentation.

**Mr. Ian Howcroft:** Thank you, Chair, and good afternoon to all the committee members. My name is Ian Howcroft, and I'm the CEO of Skills Ontario. On behalf of Skills Ontario, I am very pleased to provide the following submission to the standing committee regarding the Ontario budget.

First, I'd like to acknowledge and thank the Ontario government for demonstrating leadership throughout the COVID-19 period, particularly as it relates to the skilled trade files, and for the steadfast support that has been shown for Skills Ontario in what has been an extremely challenging period. With support from Minister McNaughton, the government, educators and labour industry partners, we've been able to pivot quickly to virtual and remote activities that continue to advance our mandate of inspiring and enabling the next generation of skilled tradespeople and skilled trade technology leaders.

We've been able to offer our programming remotely and offer some new initiatives, including our #SkillsAtHome series, our podcast and a paper glider competition. The registration and survey data support the fact that we continue to have a significant impact on the remote and virtual context and delivery. For example, our new virtual summer camp program allowed us to double our registration numbers from previous years.

We were very pleased that the government has included Skills Ontario in the budget and in the skills strategy. The government has recognized the importance of skilled trades, and we fully support the initiatives that will assist us in getting the message out to youth, to parents, to employers and to others. We have an enormous opportunity to work together to have more success in realizing our common goals and our common objectives.

The pandemic has truly underscored the value of skilled trades and technology careers. Ontario's skilled professionals have been critical in keeping our economy, our health care system and our society running as smoothly as possible in these extraordinary circumstances. I believe that many now view these career paths far differently and far more positively than they did only a few months ago. Many of these skilled jobs are essential to the functioning of the economy and to the health and safety of the system and the province. We need to build on this.

Notwithstanding the progress we're making, the skills shortage remains one of the most significant challenges of our time. In total, skills gaps in Ontario cost an estimated \$24 billion or \$25 billion in foregone GDP. Ontario is currently facing a skills shortage of 190,000 skilled workers, which is projected to increase to about 560,000 by 2030. This concern is only expected to intensify with

demographic realities being what they are. Our workforce population is aging and there will be more skilled workers leaving the workforce than entering it. Meanwhile, COVID-19 is expected to further exacerbate the skills challenges with delays in training and certification, coupled with growth in key demand areas such as construction, health and safety, manufacturing and advanced IT.

Better connecting skilled people with the needs of business is a social and an economic imperative. Over the past 30 years, Skills Ontario has grown into the most impactful organization, encouraging youth to consider a career in the skilled trades and technologies. Skills Ontario has changed millions of minds and millions of lives about the quality of career offerings in skilled trades and technologies. With the wind-down of the Ontario College of Trades, Skills Ontario is well placed to assume an expanded and enhanced role to ensure the momentum of promoting skilled trades. We continue to increase our impact on improving those employment prospects and addressing the skilled trades shortages.

Notwithstanding our success, there is still a lot more that needs to be done and a lot more that Skills Ontario will do. We've increased our efforts to better engage other crucial audiences, particularly parents and the business community. Skills Ontario held its first business summit early this year to better inform, include and engage businesses in developing awareness and skills solutions. Skills Ontario has developed and engages a vast network of key stakeholders in the apprenticeship system, including businesses, educational institutions—primary, secondary and colleges—unions, students, apprentices and tradespeople. We will continue to play a role in bringing those groups together to realize success in the skills ecosystem.

A key area of opportunity that we are looking at is improved inclusion and engagement of businesses in this process. We'll be highlighting successes and sharing best practices in helping them overcome the barriers that have prevented them from being more involved in developing solutions and being proactive.

To summarize, Skills Ontario would like to recommend that we build on what has happened in the budget and what's now included in the skills strategy, particularly now with the wind-down of OCOT, the Ontario College of Trades. Specifically, we would like to see and recommend the scale-up of Ontario's successful programming and further increase our commitment to engaging underrepresented groups in skilled trades, such as young women, Indigenous students, persons with disabilities and new Ontarians. We also would like to suggest sustaining increased support to leverage our network for enabling and promoting skilled trades and technology careers to youth and influencers—again, particularly parents, who we think could do a lot more to help promote skilled trades to their families and their kids.

Skills Ontario is well positioned to take on an enhanced role related to enhancing and promoting skilled trades and technology careers. We look forward to partnering with all

who share our passion and our common goals. Thank you again for the opportunity to present today. We look forward to answering any questions during the appropriate time.

**The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu):** Thank you so much. All right. The next presenter is Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario. If you could please state your name for the record, and you will have seven minutes for your presentation.

**1700**

**Mr. Sam Hammond:** My name is Sam Hammond, president of the Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario.

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

**Mr. Sam Hammond:** Thank you. Good afternoon. I'd like to start by thanking the committee for the opportunity to speak to you on behalf of the 83,000 members of the ETFO. Our time is limited today, so I'll focus on the government's response to the pandemic and some of the legislative changes included in Bill 229. In addition, ETFO will follow up with a written submission to the committee.

The ongoing COVID-19 pandemic has created incredible challenges for all of us. Together, we've mourned the loss of thousands of lives in Ontario, and we've seen the devastating economic impact on families across the province. We've also witnessed the disproportionate effect of the pandemic on marginalized communities, including racialized and low-income communities.

While educators have shown incredible resilience and commitment during these difficult times and are doing their best to continue to provide their students with high-quality public education, I must tell you that they feel abandoned by their provincial government. Like many others, ETFO spent the summer doing everything we could to convince the government to put in place the measures that would ensure a safe reopening of schools. Unfortunately, the government failed to implement the most effective measures to stop the spread of COVID-19: namely, smaller class sizes to ensure appropriate physical distancing, masks for all students and adequate ventilation in every classroom.

The Premier and the Minister of Education have repeatedly told us that their plan to reopen schools was based on the advice of public health experts. However, as revealed in the Auditor General's report released this week, we now know that not only did the government fail to listen to educators, parents and public health experts, but in fact it outsourced the creation of the school reopening plan to McKinsey and Company while sidelining public health officials and key education stakeholders.

The Auditor General found that the public health experts did not play a leading role in the health command table and the provincial response. She also concluded that the government does not have effective systems and procedures to identify, learn and respond to the COVID-19 pandemic on an organized and timely basis.

We've seen the results of the government's failed strategy to control the pandemic. Ontario is now in the

middle of a second wave, with more than 1,700 new cases reported on each of the last four days. More than 670 schools are currently dealing with COVID-19 cases, representing 14% of Ontario schools, and yet the government continues to downplay the role that schools might be playing in the spread of the virus. According to Dr. David Fisman, professor of epidemiology at the University of Toronto, Ontario does not have the appropriate data to determine how schools are contributing to the spread of COVID-19. In his opinion, we do have a COVID-19 amplification in schools.

Elementary classes in some of Ontario's hot spots are as large as 32 students, making physical distancing impossible. Unlike the mandatory two metres of distance recommended in public spaces, the government implemented a lower threshold of one metre of distance between students, simply to save money. But even this lower threshold is impossible to maintain in many of our classrooms.

The refusal of this government to invest in public education is reflected in this budget, where no additional funding was allocated for public education in general and no additional funding to improve the safety of our schools in the coming months or to help meet the increasing needs of students engaged in virtual learning.

Earlier this fall, the FAO found that the provincial government was sitting on \$9.3 billion of unallocated contingency funds for the pandemic response. What we are asking the government to do now is simple: Allocate the necessary funding from these contingency funds to reduce class sizes so that appropriate physical distancing can be achieved, make improvements to ventilation in every classroom, provide additional resources to support students, engage virtual learning and make masks mandatory for all students attending school.

**The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu):** Two minutes.

**Mr. Sam Hammond:** I want to take a couple of minutes to address some of the changes to the Ontario College of Teachers Act. Schedule 33 of this bill represents unprecedented government interference in the OCT. The college is currently composed of 23 members who are elected by their peers and 14 people appointed by the government. Under the new structure, there will no longer be elected members of the college on the council. Instead, the council will be composed of nine government appointees who are not members of the college and nine members who are hand-picked.

Schedule 33 would dissolve the college and put a single person chosen by the government in charge of all of the decisions of the college until the new council is formed. This person would also appoint nine members of the college to the new council to join the nine others that would be appointed directly by the government. This would effectively end self-regulation of the teaching profession and is yet another example of the lack of respect this government has shown for teachers. Imagine the outright rage among physicians or lawyers if the government was interfering in this manner in the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Ontario or in the Law

Society of Ontario. Schedule 33 should simply be withdrawn.

This budget shows that the government is more interested in providing tax relief to large corporations than investing in the public services Ontarians rely on. Our hope is that the scathing report of the Auditor General gives this government pause. ETFO calls on the government to take this opportunity to change course, start listening to public health experts and make the necessary investments to keep students, educators, their families and our communities safe.

Thank you, and I look forward to your questions.

**The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu):** Thank you. We'll move to our next presenter, the town of Ajax. If you can please state your name for the record, and you can get right into your presentation.

**Mr. Shaun Collier:** Okay. Just let me get my notes. Good evening, everyone. Committee members, thank you for having us here today. I'm Shaun Collier, mayor of the town of Ajax. Also on the call with me is my councillor colleague, regional councillor Joanne Dies. Thank you for allowing us to speak today.

We appreciate your commitment to stakeholder engagement on this very important bill. I have to say, I think a lot of measures in the bill are very well thought out. In Ajax, council has a mandate of rolling out the red carpet for business, and initiatives like the significant investment in broadband infrastructure will continue to make municipalities in Ontario more competitive and sustainable. We also applaud you for making COVID-19 relief a priority in the province.

However, there must be a balance struck between our economic development ambitions and environmental protections for long-term benefit. To that end, there's one element contained in Bill 229 that the town of Ajax just cannot support, and that's schedule 6, changes to the Conservation Authorities Act.

In addition to the town of Ajax and a broad sample of conservation authorities and not-for-profits, including Conservation Ontario, Ontario Nature and Environmental Defence, there are several other notable individuals and groups who have also voiced their concern with these changes and their inclusion in the budget bill: for example, Ontario's Big City Mayors, who together represent 70% of Ontario's population; more than 20 local and single-tier municipalities, including the region of Durham; at least four regional governments; David Crombie, chair of the Greenbelt Council; David Lindsay, vice-chair of Ontario Parks; 96 environmentally focused not-for-profit groups; Indigenous leaders; at least 15 independent conservation authorities; over 150 media hits in support of conservation authorities; academic researchers and professors from across the province; and most recently, today, the Association of Municipalities of Ontario, AMO. All of these have recommended that schedule 6 be removed, and the list continues to grow.

In addition, I know there have been in excess of 20,000 emails sent to the Ministers of the Environment, Conservation and Parks; Municipal Affairs and Housing; Finance;

and Natural Resources and Forestry. It's clear that residents also have serious concerns.

It was clear from discussions stemming from Bill 108 last year that the ministers responsible for conservation authorities wanted to make some changes to the CA Act legislation. That's their right to do so, and consultative review might even be welcome by the CAs. I know their lack of enforcement capability is a concern that we share also as a municipality.

1710

Coming from the private sector, I support the need for adherence across the board to generally accepted accounting principles. But I'm a little concerned about the changes to the CA boards' fiduciary responsibilities. The fiduciary duty of a board member to the corporation and not any outside influence is critical to good governance and it contravenes the Business Corporations Act to do otherwise.

The vital role of CAs in mitigating flood risk hazards and protecting life and property was highlighted in Ontario's Flooding Strategy and the independent report from Ontario's Special Advisor on Flooding. These changes must not be taken lightly. To include provisions with such far-ranging impacts into a budget bill, in my opinion, is not the right way to go about making changes to a role this important. In fact, it was a surprise to municipalities and CAs when this came out. As an impacted stakeholder, I expect that changes to the Conservation Authorities Act should be a stand-alone bill, which should follow extensive consultation with the CAs, municipalities and the public they serve.

My message today is that we share your goals of efficient processes and economic development, but we want to be partners and we need to be consulted. I implore you for nothing less than the full removal of schedule 6 from Bill 229 so that any changes can be revisited at a later date.

I'll now turn it over to Councillor Dies to continue the presentation. Thank you very much.

**Ms. Joanne Dies:** Thank you. Good evening, members of the committee.

I want to start off by saying that this is not Ajax's first delegation about matters of the environment, and I expect it won't be our last. The town of Ajax has built a reputation on being environmentally minded, going back to our first-in-the-province environmentally focused Official Plan. I'm proud to be a part of successive councils who will stand up for the environment on local and provincial issues, including our request for a tertiary treatment of the Duffin Creek Water Pollution Control Plant or to save the Carruthers Creek headwaters. In my mind, this is no different.

I'm speaking today as both a member of Ajax council but also a Durham regional councillor and a Toronto and Region Conservation Authority board member. I personally received thousands of emails—over 7,000—from the public requesting that schedule 6 be removed from Bill 229 so that critical wetlands can remain protected. I can only imagine how many emails the government has received to date.

As a member of the TRCA board, I was surprised by the changes contained in Bill 229 since previously discussed regulations have never been released. For example, it would be a significant loss to the TRCA's board of directors to lose the citizen representation on the board, which is proposed. Many of these appointees are experts in environmental fields, and they bring a very broad perspective as non-elected officials.

As my colleague alluded to, the vital role that conservation authorities play cannot be overstated in our experience and the experience of many other municipalities.

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

**Ms. Joanne Dies:** Sorry?

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

**Ms. Joanne Dies:** Thank you.

Our CAs provide timely expert advice that municipalities don't have the resources or the capacity to do in-house, for a fraction of their actual cost. They also provide an additional layer of credibility in decisions that are made at the local level. When everything is running smoothly, it means the CA is effective. They do impactful work in the background to avoid and mitigate risk to life and property, including work to prevent flooding and erosion. This work is increasingly important as the impacts of climate change are felt across the province.

Locally, there is an example of a provincially significant wetland within the lower Duffins Creek watershed complex that is being threatened by development, should these changes go through. These precedent-setting acts of any reclassification on these lands will send a very strong message to the public and stakeholders about your commitment to the environment for Ontario's long-term success. Fifty-seven acres will be completely lost to developed distribution of warehousing if the TRCA loses the ability to deny a permit without fear of being taken to the notoriously developer-friendly Local Planning Appeals Tribunal, or LPAT. Anyone who has experience in municipal government—

**The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu):** Thank you. I apologize to cut you off. The time has come up.

We'll start with the questions now. I'll start the first round of questions with the government. MPP Smith.

**Mr. Dave Smith:** I'm going to start off with Ian from Skills Ontario. Prior to getting into politics, I was in the software development world. Actually, I was the lead developer on Ontario's most-used experiential learning software in secondary school. Co-operative education, such as the high skills major and the Ontario Youth Apprenticeship Program, are things I am very, very well-versed in. I spent almost 20 years dealing with co-op departments.

This is why I'm bringing it up. You mentioned the Ontario College of Trades and the fact that we are winding that one down. The feedback that I received from all of the journeymen and journeypersons in the trades was that this was simply a \$135-a-year tax on them and it made it more difficult for them to actually do some of the things that they wanted to do or that they could do as part of their trade.

It seems to me that the previous government—and it's not just one; it's been a number of years coming—devalued skilled trades. There was almost an emphasis in our education system over probably the last 35 years that said that smart people went to university and only the dummdums went into the skilled trades. I pay more per hour now for a plumber than I do for a lawyer. I think that we have a reset now, where we're talking about the value of skilled trades and we're talking about the career opportunity—not just a job, but the career opportunity—that there is for someone to be in skilled trades.

This budget has \$100 million in funding for Employment Ontario for skills training. Can you describe how you think that is going to help with skilled trades and technology careers?

**Mr. Ian Howcroft:** I think you've outlined very well some of the challenges that we face in this area. The whole image of the skilled tradesperson is still not where it needs to be, where it should be. We continued to promote skilled trades to young people but thought we need to change our tack as well and expand our audiences to better include businesses, to better include parents, to better create that network that can learn about what these opportunities are all about. We work very closely with the education system, with teachers and counselors and others, to make sure that young people are aware of that.

We're not saying that skilled trades are the best way to go; we're saying there is a whole variety of career opportunities out there. But if people aren't made aware of what they are, they're not necessarily going in a route that they may have a passion for, because they don't know about it. That's what the *raison d'être* of Skills Ontario is all about: It's promoting skilled trades and technology opportunities to young people.

I think we are at a point right now where timing is everything. We have an opportunity to leverage the positive image that skilled tradespeople are getting because of the pandemic. The average age of a person starting an apprenticeship in Ontario, I think, is 28 years old. We want to make sure that we get to them at an earlier age. We've been expanding our reach to get into schools at earlier grades and earlier ages and find different ways to reach out to them so that they're aware of what these career opportunities are, these lifestyle opportunities are.

There are 150 different trades and apprenticeships in Ontario, but we are also talking about some of the technology careers out there, mechatronics and some of the other things that people aren't talking about enough. That's what we're trying to do: make sure that we're working with our partners, our network, to get that promotion out there so that young people are aware of all the career paths and they can try some, explore some and find out before they make a decision or go down a path that doesn't take them where they could realize their full potential.

**Mr. Dave Smith:** Thank you very much for that. There's a real disconnect. I don't want to sound like I'm badmouthing somebody who might have been involved with skilled trades in the past, but there was one that

absolutely jumped out at me as a huge mistake, and it was done, in my opinion, by somebody who was academically inclined and didn't truly understand what skilled trades were about, and that's the trade of bricklaying. At one point, in order to apprentice to be a bricklayer, you needed a grade 8 education. That was it. But when it got added as an Ontario Youth Apprenticeship Program program, the requirement was if you were under the age of 25, you must have a minimum of grade 11 in order to sign up for the Ontario Youth Apprenticeship Program to be a bricklayer. You needed grade 8 education to actually be a bricklayer, but in order to get into the trade or find out whether or not that's a trade that you want to go down, you had to have at least a grade 11 education.

With construction that's going on now, most of the tradespeople are my age or older. We need to be doing things that incentivize people to get into those trades.

1720

**The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu):** Two minutes.

**Mr. Dave Smith:** I think that not just the trade itself, but some of the micro-credentials that you can get—you might be an expert in X, Y or Z, but if you can do that one thing, if you can do that thing that someone's looking for in your industry, the micro-credentials, from my perspective, are the brainwave that we need, and we're putting \$180 million over the next three years in it.

Can you touch on how that is going to benefit Ontario's economy when we're talking about simple things like micro-credentials?

**Mr. Ian Howcroft:** Well, we're in the business of promoting skilled trades and technologies, all aspects of that. We aren't into the curriculum development and some of those other aspects, but what we're trying to do is make sure that young people are aware of all opportunities.

Micro-credentialing can help someone perhaps start into a career trade and build on that as they want to move forward or get a leg in, a foot in, to try something as they're looking at what they might want to explore. Bricklaying is a big part of our annual skills competition, and we're working right now to deliver that virtually and remotely, which is posing us some skills challenge right now: How do we deliver these things through a remote vehicle?

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

**Mr. Ian Howcroft:** But bricklaying is one of those trades, and we're trying to make sure that young people are aware of all aspects of the skills dynamics that they can take advantage of.

**Mr. Dave Smith:** How much time is there, Mr. Chair?

**The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu):** Forty seconds.

**Mr. Dave Smith:** There's not enough time for me to get another question in [*inaudible*]. We really appreciate everything. Thank you very much for being here.

**Mr. Ian Howcroft:** Thank you very much.

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

**Ms. Sandy Shaw:** I want to start by just thanking everyone for your presentation today: Skills Ontario—ETFO, I just want to thank you so much for all you're

doing to advocate on behalf of teachers and our students and families in the province.

But I'm going to start my questioning today with the town of Ajax. You read the list of all of the people who have been speaking out against this schedule 6 that is in a budget bill. I honestly have to say, whoever asked for this to be slipped into a budget bill is awfully quiet, because we haven't heard in committee or anywhere from people that say that they advocated for this. So the question remains, who asked for this?

I also can't help but remark that the Minister of Finance is the MPP for Ajax, so I thought maybe you might have exceptional input into the budget, but maybe it doesn't work that way. But what I would like to say is that we see this schedule 6 that no one seems to have asked for, that really seems to do everything to pull us backwards. In many ways, not only does it circumvent citizens' input and democratic processes, it short-circuits good, integrated planning. I'm going to ask you in a minute about the ministerial zoning orders, but these things are happening in communities that have robust official plans. They have bylaw zoning plans that have taken a lot of work and a lot of input.

So my question to you: As elected municipal officials who work hard to ensure that your jurisdictions are governed by good, effective planning, does schedule 6 seem to you to come out of left field and really hinder your ability to move forward in a consistent, clear manner when you are looking at development and also protecting your sensitive lands?

**Mr. Shaun Collier:** Thank you, MPP Shaw. I won't argue with anything you've said, because you're absolutely right on every count. I'd just ask that perhaps Councillor Dies can fill in any blanks I may leave.

I think it's safe to say that schedule 6 caught everybody by surprise, including the CAs—especially the CAs. As far as MZOs, MZOs, I think, have a use. Unfortunately, I think in this current time, many have taken the opportunity to use them inappropriately to bypass the planning process, and that's what's been happening, especially given the number that have been put through. It's just been an incredible number. In this case especially, we already had a site that we've had significant issues and significant concerns about for three years prior that have never been addressed. Then all of a sudden, there's an MZO for up to four million square feet of commercial space on a 57-acre provincially significant wetland, and I think it's 1,650 residential units, which is four 25-storey towers. So from a planning perspective and a [inaudible] perspective, this is an enormous gong show and completely bypassed the system.

The other strange thing is there are so many other sites in this area, in Pickering, Ajax and Durham region, where this facility could go, within a kilometre of those sites. This is not needed. They are not short of land. Pickering has 57 acres in other areas. They bought several hundred acres from the province after the 407 was built. They have all kinds of space where this could go. To go here and then bypass the planning process is just ridiculous.

Finally, the list that I read you was a very small piece of the actual list of everybody who has pushed back on this. You're absolutely right: Other than the city of Pickering and the developer, I have not heard one other person who has said they want to see this go ahead.

**The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu):** Two minutes.

**Mr. Shaun Collier:** At the Ontario Big City Mayors' Caucus on Friday, I introduced the motion to ask—like I said, we represent 70%—to remove section 6. It was supported—not quite unanimously, of course; Pickering voted against it—almost unanimously. There has been no pushback at all from any of the groups, but we haven't heard a peep from the province, and I have not from MPP Phillips either. I do have a meeting with him on Wednesday and I will be asking some very pointed questions about this. I've written almost a half dozen letters, I think, to a bunch of ministers on this, and not a peep.

So they're not blinking. I don't know why, because this is incredibly unpopular and, again, that list that I gave you is very small. I don't know if Councillor Dies can fill in anything I missed.

**Ms. Joanne Dies:** I agree with you. I think the conservation authorities, TRCA in particular, were astounded. After 18 months of discussion with the province and the different ministries, they thought things were going very well. The discussions were going very well, but we kept waiting for something definite to come out—we're still waiting for something definite to come out in regulations—and then this happened. It was really contrary to how the negotiations were going in a very positive way.

They really needed more power to enforce their authority for people who, for example, dump illegal fill in environmental lands. They just need those enforcement powers. They need those permitting powers, as well, in order to protect our lands. These lands in Ajax—there are three significant watersheds, and so it's very, very important, because as you develop on these lands, you're creating problems for the future with respect to flooding and with lives.

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

**Ms. Joanne Dies:** You need to protect lives, so it was a very big surprise.

**Ms. Sandy Shaw:** Absolutely. Thank you, Mayor Collier, and thank you, Councillor Dies. I would just like to pick up on where you left off, which is that this is such short-sighted thinking, and the impact of the work of the CAs does help with flooding.

As municipal representatives, you must have infrastructure deficits, as all the municipalities, including Hamilton, have. We're struggling to keep our infrastructure in good repair and in a state of repair. It's a challenge. Eventually, the impact of flooding, which is what CAs were prepared to address—the costs of that are borne by residential municipal taxpayers. In Hamilton we have a combined sewer—

**The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu):** Sorry to cut you off. The time has come up.

We'll go to the independent members now. MPP Hunter?

**Ms. Mitzie Hunter:** Thanks so much to everyone; it's a really important conversation. In my riding of Scarborough–Guildwood, it is like a jewel. I have Lake Ontario, which borders to the south, and of course, the beautiful Scarborough Bluffs are there. Morningside Park is right in the centre. We have the fast-moving Highland Creek that runs right through the riding, and many other ravine areas like Cedar Brook Park. We have, just outside of the riding, the Rouge National Urban Park. You can just imagine that this is a watershed community, and people happen to live there. So the role of the conservation authority is extremely important in managing these natural spaces.

1730

I cannot imagine what is motivating this government to move forward with schedule 6. To your comments, I will just say that it is under the cover of COVID-19. People are in the midst of a health pandemic and don't expect this of their government. I do believe that there will be consequences if the government moves forward with schedule 6, and the consequences are detrimental to our environment.

One of the things that came up in today's hearings is that the role of conservation authorities—it's not transactional. It's not just about issuing a permit or making a decision. There is proactive management. I certainly experienced that with the TRCA. They look at high-risk areas like the Scarborough Bluffs, like Highland Creek, and they come up with mitigation plans to prevent flooding, to prevent erosion and to protect the community. It needs ongoing management, and it needs that ongoing management and regulation to sustain it.

One of the questions that I would have for our folks from Ajax: It seems as if the legislation in schedule 6 is really designed to ascribe power to the minister, very similar to what is in MZOs, and therefore at risk of bypassing more planning decisions moving forward. What risks do you see that that poses to our communities moving forward?

**Mr. Shaun Collier:** Thank you, MPP Hunter, for that question. I think it begs the question of, why bother having municipal planning departments and conservation authorities at all if you're just going to pass MZOs and take the decision-making power away from those? We've got things like the provincial policy statement, which is law. These changes to the Conservation Authorities Act, if this is enacted and some of these things are followed through on, actually break that law.

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

**Mr. Shaun Collier:** It's kind of like—I've used this as far as COVID—we're building the plane as we fly it. That's kind of what they're doing here. They're making up these things as they go: "Oh, we want to do this, but we've come up against some problems, so we're going to change it. And now we're coming against another problem, and we're going to change it."

It makes no sense to me. It just boggles my mind. But in this case, it's especially ridiculous because this particular 57-acre, provincially significant wetland—according

to the scoring that they do, anything over a 200 is considered a provincially significant wetland. This particular one in Pickering scored a perfect 250. A perfect 250: There's no higher number. Yet they want to rezone this to build a warehouse. It's crazy. There are over—

**The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu):** Thank you. I apologize to cut you off. The time has come up.

We'll go to the opposition side now for their second round. MPP Shaw.

**Ms. Sandy Shaw:** Again, I just would like to say thank you to Mayor Collier and Councillor Dies. I'm going to move on to ask some questions about education, but, honestly, now we have a lawsuit being launched that is calling their MZO in this environmentally protected area unconstitutional. This government is in court all the time around environmental issues. I don't know when they will understand that people care about the environment and they care about due process.

I have a lot to say about that, obviously. I got cut off the last time. But I'm going to actually ask ETFO some questions about the work that you're doing with your members to advocate for safe schools. I think that what we have seen in the budget, where currently we understand that there's \$9.3 billion of COVID relief money unspent—money that could have been spent to keep our kids safe, to have a cap on class sizes of 15 in our schools. We all hear stories, including my own grandkids' stories, of class sizes that are getting bigger, not smaller.

Really, the message from this budget, we think, is that we're all on our own here. Despite months and months and months of advocating for what would be the best way for us to keep kids safe, families safe and communities safe, this government still hasn't seemed to learn the lesson, because they're not spending the money.

I'm going to let you respond to this in the way that you see fit, but I think maybe the one thing I would appreciate if you touched on is that the testing regime has been such a failure in all the communities. But now we are seeing asymptomatic cases in schools. We're asking for that to be expanded because these hard-hit neighbourhoods with asymptomatic testing are just exactly the beginning of a brush fire that we should have been containing in the first place. If you could comment on that, it would be great; I would appreciate that.

**Mr. Sam Hammond:** Thank you, MPP Shaw. If I can just start by saying that as we called for the removal of schedule 33 from this bill, I have to say I support the call from the town of Ajax and their representatives on schedule 6 as well to be removed.

But in terms of testing and finances, what we had hoped would have happened was that this government would have implemented asymptomatic testing and rapid testing in schools back in September to keep a handle on this. They chose not to do that.

We asked for smaller class sizes of 15 to maximize physical distancing in classrooms to two metres. We asked for increases to ventilation or HEPA filters in classrooms. We asked for the capacity of school buses—for the

number of students to be reduced. The government chose a very different path.

It's very interesting, because in June, the government put forward a plan that included class sizes of 15, the distancing of two metres etc. and they completely turned their back on students and parents in this province. There is still time for this government to make those changes; as I've said and as you've said, MPP Shaw, to access some of that \$9.3 billion and actually implement those measures in schools. It's not too late.

**Ms. Sandy Shaw:** Thank you, Mr. Hammond. Really, it's never too late to do the right thing; we would like to remind the government of that.

The other thing that maybe you could comment on, because you know better than we—we hear from all of our MPPs who speak to us in Ontario's official opposition NDP. We receive all kinds of calls from parents, family members and education workers about the concerns they have.

But particularly, we have communities like Brampton, for example, that are just hot spots. The spread of COVID-19 throughout the region is frightening. If we can't keep schools contained, if people don't feel confident to send their kids to school, that impacts on an economic recovery. Maybe you could talk a little bit about what extraordinary measures you see that your members are doing in these hot spots like Brampton and Peel, and what this government can do to restore the confidence that people have that what they're doing makes sense despite, as you said earlier, the Auditor General report that says that they're not listening to public health guidelines.

**Mr. Sam Hammond:** Thank you. You know, our members are, as always, doing everything they can to make the plan that was put in place, if you want to call it that—to make it work in schools across this province.

**The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu):** Two minutes.

**Mr. Sam Hammond:** They are absolutely stretched to the limit trying to do that, whether it's in-class or virtual learning. They are going out of their way to make up for the failures of this government in terms of what the government has not implemented.

It is really concerning when you see those hot spots, you see the government shutting down all of these businesses etc., and no new pieces for the health and safety of students, educators and staff in schools across this province, and calling on them to take further steps.

1740

**Ms. Sandy Shaw:** Thank you for that. We have been calling on them. As you know, we put forward an opposition day motion to cap class sizes at 15, because it just makes common sense that schools—as you say, they're in such a poor state of repair, the repair backlog continues to grow under this government, and there's no ventilation. Common sense would say that there's no ability for social distancing inside some of these schools.

Is there one particular measure, if the government would actually listen in terms of allocating that \$9.3 billion, that you would like to see, which would help keep our teachers, our education workers and our students safe?

Because I hear we've had a death of an education worker that was entirely preventable.

**Mr. Sam Hammond:** Thank you for putting forward that motion. Thanks to everyone in the Legislature who voted in favour of reducing class sizes to 15. That would be the number one item that this government should and needs to act on. If they implement smaller class sizes—for example, 15 per class—that will almost automatically increase the physical distancing in classrooms and make it that much safer for our members and students across this province. But rather than doing that, they're spending all of this money on consultants—

**The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu):** Thank you. Sorry to cut you off. The time has come up.

We'll go back to the independent members for their second round. MPP Hunter.

**Ms. Mitzie Hunter:** Thank you, Chair. I do want to turn my attention to skills and education. There is so much that is not in the budget in terms of investment in these areas.

Sam, I would like to start with you. The first question I want to ask, because it is a question of the day with the results coming from Thorncliffe Park on the surveillance testing—I wrote to the Minister of Health on August 19 saying, before we go back to school, invest in surveillance testing, particularly for hot-spot communities. As you know, Scarborough in my riding is one of those communities. It's constantly in outbreak. I think some of your 670 schools—almost 10% of those would be in Scarborough, or even more.

I'm wondering what would have been different had the government done proactive surveillance testing and proper pandemic preparedness, as well as implemented a class-size cap of 15 in the elementary panel. What would the school year have been like? Would it have been as tumultuous as it is now, particularly in those hot-spot areas? That's for Sam Hammond from ETFO.

**Mr. Sam Hammond:** Thanks, MPP Hunter. Thank you for putting that call forward to have that testing done sooner, like so many of us in this province did. Quite frankly, if they had, in fact, implemented testing as of September, asymptomatic testing or testing before we could come back into classrooms, I would suggest to you that we wouldn't be seeing the numbers that we're seeing now across the province, because the virus would have been much more contained. We'd have a better idea. Rather than ignoring what was happening in schools and the fact that the COVID-19 virus was in schools, if we had been testing from September, we wouldn't be seeing the chaos; we wouldn't have seen so many parents move their children to virtual or online learning because they were so nervous about what was happening early on.

It's good the government has put it in place now, but we need to push that forward. If that had been in place, and class sizes of 15, and a mandated two metres of distancing, along with school buses not running at capacity, I think we'd be in a very different place. In fact, I think that the minister could actually stand up and say, if all that had been in place since September, that schools are the safest

place. I don't believe that for a minute now, nor do many, many health experts.

**Ms. Mitzie Hunter:** I think the way this government sees education is, it's an expense. They don't see it as an investment to be making. When you look at the fact that education funding—when you back out the federal \$763 million, when you back out the \$493 million that came out of boards' own reserves and child care, what really is left? It's actually a declining line.

I want to thank you and your members—

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

**Ms. Mitzie Hunter:**—for all that you do on behalf of students in their learning, and coping under such difficult circumstances under COVID. I know it has been very challenging.

With my last few seconds, I do want to say hello to Ian. We've certainly known each other for a number of years. I have been to the conference that you hold. I know things are different under the pandemic, but in terms of investments in skills, that's going to be a very important aspect moving forward. Can you talk a little bit about that, particularly for those groups you mentioned: disabilities, women and for newcomers?

**Mr. Ian Howcroft:** Sure. Thank you, MPP Hunter. We are trying to make sure we're getting the message out as broadly as possible. We know that those groups are very underrepresented in skilled trades and technology careers. We've created a new person, a manager of diversity, to increase outreach to make sure we're putting everything—

**The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu):** Thank you. I apologize to cut you off. The time has come up.

We'll go back to the government side. MPP Cho.

**Mr. Stan Cho:** Thank you to all presenters. I know it's late in the afternoon, but I certainly was listening intently to your comments today. I appreciate you spending your time with us this evening.

I appreciated your presentation in particular, Mr. Howcroft, because you focused on a lot of figures. Those are current figures and those are figures from the budget about our investments into the skilled trades. That hasn't, unfortunately, been the case all throughout the afternoon. We've heard some figures that are not current, not based on the budget.

One of those figures that we've heard is that this government is sitting on \$9.3 billion. I do want to just reference to that in a second, because some of the members and some of the presenters have referenced the FAO report as the source of that figure, the \$9.3 billion. They are correct: That is indeed the source of the \$9.3-billion figure. But I also want to remind the members that that FAO report—we value greatly the work of the Financial Accountability Officer—is a report from the first quarter.

When we announced the \$9.3 billion in contingency on March 25, that's certainly accurate from the FAO. That was a current figure on March 25. We are now about in December here. Without those contingency funds available, in May when the feds asked us to partner on the rent relief program, we wouldn't have had the \$241 million to

invest. When we entered the revised red zone in September, we wouldn't have had the \$300 million to support small businesses. Most recently, when we entered the lockdown stage for Peel and Toronto, if we didn't have that contingency, we wouldn't have the \$300 million to assist further with difficulties that small businesses are going through.

I do want to remind everyone that that contingency fund is now down to \$2.3 billion since updated from the budget tabled on November 4 with our latest investments. I hope one day that, just as you have, Mr. Howcroft, everyone can deal with the latest statistics and the latest figures.

But I do want to turn the attention to those figures you spoke about: the investments in the micro-credentials, the \$180.5 million being invested to narrow the skills gap. You spoke about this a little bit earlier, and I'm hoping you can go into more of the details around why you think micro-credentialing is going to help narrow the skills gap. Very specifically, what will that look like on the ground? I've had some constituents email me and say, "What exactly is micro-credentialing?" Not everybody is as familiar with the terms. I'm hoping you can expand on that a little bit, please.

**Mr. Ian Howcroft:** Thank you for the question. I'm not an expert on micro-credentialing. We focus on the promotion of skilled trades and technology careers, and we're looking at different ways of addressing that. We know that the skills shortage issue has been around for decades. As I said earlier, I think we are at a point right now where we have an opportunity to better address this. People are talking about it more. We've seen some investments made in this area. Micro-credentialing is one area to do that.

What we see at Skills Ontario as our role in this is to bring our network together and to bring the various groups together, the business community, the labour community, the education community, working to come up with the best way to promote solutions and develop solutions. We have seen huge shortages in the skilled trades over decades, so what we're trying to do is make sure that young people and, as I said earlier too, their parents and other influences are aware of what these realities are.

What are the steps that we can do that? Micro-credentialing can be one way to start on a career path. It can open some doors and open some eyes and open some minds to help people move forward on a path that they might not have otherwise been aware of. Again, we see ourselves as a broker of information and a hub-and-spoke wheel that we try and make sure we're connecting people to other groups that have some expertise, that have some information, that have an opportunity to help shine a light on some of these opportunities to help move things forward.

**1750**

That's what Skills Ontario has been doing for quite a while now, but we think our work can be enhanced and expanded, particularly with the wind-down of the college of trades. Skills Ontario's raison d'être was the promotion of skilled trades and technology opportunities, so we think we have an opportunity to have an enhanced and expanded

role to bring the parties together to make sure that young people are aware of what these opportunities are and how we can help link them to a career experience and employment experience down the road. We're very excited about that.

We've learned a lot with the COVID issues that we're all dealing with. We have always put the health and safety of the students and of our staff in the forefront, but we're looking at how do we continue to deliver our programming and the things that we do remotely, but also plan for the medium and longer term as well, because this is not an issue that's going to be solved in six months or 12 months; we're here for the long run, to promote the skilled trades opportunities to young people.

**Mr. Stan Cho:** Thank you very much, Mr. Howcroft. I'm very curious to hear you continue your talk about diversity. Immigrant family, my parents came from South Korea; the skilled trades, unfortunately, were not an option for me at the time. Boy, I wish I'd—some of my friends in those industries are making a lot more money than I ever did. So I was wondering if you could talk about your plans to increase that diversity, as you were speaking about to the independent member.

**Mr. Ian Howcroft:** Again, we've been able to expand our staff to include a diversity manager who is overseeing our outreach and our engagement. We're also putting everything that we do through a diversity lens to make sure that the programming that we offer is as inclusive as we can. We're reaching out to other groups that represent these other communities so that we can get input into that. We're working on a variety of things to make sure that we are inclusive for our racialized minorities, for persons with disabilities, for the FNMI community.

We've long offered First Nations programming and we've had great success with that, but how do we offer that to other groups as well? We've got our diversity manager looking at that. We also have some folks working for us that are in what we're calling our outreach and engagement. How do we get around to dealing with some of the regional issues, and tap into solutions for First Nations communities in northern Ontario and southwestern Ontario and the other groups around the province? Our focus is to work with as many partners as we can.

I talk about the three Cs: collaboration, co-operation and coordination. There are a lot of groups doing great things out there and sometimes they're not leveraged to their full advantage. What can we do to help make sure

that we are leveraging the investments that are being made—

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

**Mr. Ian Howcroft:** —and making sure that we're aware of these other opportunities dealing with diversity and inclusivity, but also dealing with the other programming that we're offering? As I said, we're really excited about this opportunity and look forward to working with as many people and partners that have the passion that we have.

**Mr. Stan Cho:** Thank you, Mr. Howcroft. Certainly, narrowing the skills gap will be huge in Ontario's recovery, and we look forward to working with you as well.

**Mr. Ian Howcroft:** Thank you very much.

**Mr. Stan Cho:** With my final few seconds, I'd like to ask Mayor Collier—I know that we've had other jurisdictions—Mayor Tory, for example—ask for assistance with the revisions to the small business tax class. This is going to help a lot of small businesses as we move into that recovery stage when life returns to normal. Just very quickly in the few seconds left, will Ajax be participating in that measure?

**Mr. Shaun Collier:** I didn't catch the very first part of your question. You were asking—

**Mr. Stan Cho:** The small business tax class; being able to provide the tools for municipalities to make a special tax class to alleviate some of the pressures that small businesses are facing. I know Toronto has signalled that they are interested in participating. Will Ajax?

**Mr. Shaun Collier:** Well, we are going to look at everything possible. We've been working very hard to support our businesses throughout this. Unfortunately, our problem is, with the municipal property tax base, we just don't have the resources to be supporting business from a—

**The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu):** Thank you. I apologize to cut you off. That concludes our time for today. I want to thank all the presenters for their presentation.

As a reminder, the deadline for written submissions is 7 p.m. on Wednesday, December 2, 2020. The deadline to file amendments to the bill with the Clerk of the Committee is 12 noon on Thursday, December 3. The committee is now adjourned until 9 a.m. tomorrow, when we'll continue with public hearings on Bill 229. Thank you so much.

*The committee adjourned at 1754.*



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